

# REINSPECTION REPORT

## **St Helens Chamber Limited Reinspection**

30 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.

# REINSPECTION REPORT

## St Helens Chamber Limited Reinspection

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## REINSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. St Helens Chamber Limited (the Chamber) is a private not-for-profit organisation which has its headquarters in St Helens, Merseyside. It was formed in 1996 as St Helens Chamber of Commerce Training and Enterprise by the merger of the local chamber of commerce, training and enterprise council, business link and enterprise agency, and became the Chamber in 2001. It provides training for young people and adults in the Merseyside area in land-based occupations, construction, engineering, business administration, accounts, management, information and communication technology (ICT), retailing, customer service, warehousing, hairdressing and beauty, childcare and care for the elderly, and visual and performing arts. Learners work towards foundation modern apprenticeships, advanced modern apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). New Deal clients work in the voluntary option, or a construction project in the environment task force option. At the time of the reinspection, there were too few New Deal clients to give separate contributory grades to these areas of learning.

2. The Chamber's training services manager has overall responsibility for the training provision and is supported by a contracts manager, a quality development adviser and a manager who oversee the management information and administration of the training department. The Chamber employs 10 training advisers, and two members of staff to carry out mentoring duties with learners. The Chamber subcontracts all of its training to nine private training providers, with 77 per cent being delivered by one local further education college.

3. The Chamber funds its training provision through Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Jobcentre Plus and European Social Fund (ESF) initiatives. The unemployment rate in St Helens in August 2003 was 3.2 per cent, compared with 2.5 per cent for England as a whole. According to the 2001 census, St Helens has a low minority ethnic representation of 1.2 per cent, compared with 9.1 per cent for England as a whole. The proportion of school leavers in St Helens who achieved five or more general certificates of education at grade C or above in 2002 was 48.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 51.6 per cent.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Construction

4. Seventy-six advanced modern apprentices, 27 foundation modern apprentices and two NVQ learners are following construction programmes. There are four New Deal 18-24 clients working on construction projects. Learners work towards NVQs in bricklaying, electrical installation, gas service installation, general construction, painting and decorating, plant maintenance, plastering, plumbing, glass supporting fabrications and wood occupations. All learners are in full-time employment and attend off-the-job training at a local subcontractor, which is a college of further education. The Chamber provides

an induction session for learners. The assessments, internal verification and progress reviews are carried out by the college. The college's learning support units carry out initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity, and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

### **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

5. Nineteen foundation modern apprentices and 125 advanced modern apprentices are following engineering programmes. Learners can specialise in electrical, machining, fitting, maintenance, production, motor vehicle and technician occupations. Additional selected vocational qualifications and a level 2 NVQ in performing engineering occupations are also offered. Programmes take between one and four years to complete. Opportunities are available for learners to study for higher qualifications and some continue to degree level. All learners are in full-time employment and attend off-the-job training at a local subcontractor, which is a college of further education. Most advanced modern apprentices spend between 26 and 44 weeks with the college to carry out their initial off-the-job training. The Chamber provides an induction session for learners. The assessments, internal verification and progress reviews are carried out by the college. The college's learning support units carry out initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Work-based mentors and supervisors provide on-the-job training. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

### **Business administration, management & professional**

6. Thirty-eight advanced modern apprentices and 24 foundation modern apprentices are on business administration programmes. A further seven learners are working solely towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3. Learners can specialise in administration or supervisory management. All learners are in full-time employment and attend off-the-job training at one large and two small local subcontractors. The largest subcontractor is a local college of further education. The Chamber provides an induction session for learners. The assessments, internal verification and progress reviews are carried out by the subcontractors. The subcontractors' learning support units carry out initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity, and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

### **Information & communications technology**

7. Seven advanced modern apprentices and one foundation modern apprentice are following ICT programmes. Learners work towards an NVQ at level 2 in using information technology (IT) or at level 3 in operating IT systems, use and support of IT, or using IT. Five clients are on New Deal 18-24 programmes in IT, most of whom are on work placements with local voluntary organisations. All work-based learners are in full-time employment and attend off-the-job training at local subcontractors. Most learners attend a local subcontractor which is a college of further education. The Chamber provides an induction session for learners, with assessments, internal verification and progress reviews carried out by the subcontractors. The subcontractors' learning support units provide initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

### **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

8. Six foundation modern apprentices are following retailing programmes and five New Deal 18-24 clients are on the voluntary option. Learners work towards NVQs in customer service and distribution and warehousing. All learners are in full-time employment and attend off-the-job training at one of three local subcontractors. The Chamber provides an induction session for learners. The assessments, internal verification and progress reviews are carried out by the subcontractors, including a local college of further education. The subcontractors' learning support units carry out initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

### **Hairdressing & beauty therapy**

9. Thirteen learners are working towards an advanced modern apprenticeship in hairdressing and four towards one in beauty therapy. Six foundation modern apprentices are following programmes in hairdressing. All learners are in full-time employment and attend off-the-job training at a local subcontractor, which is a college of further education. The Chamber provides an induction session for learners, with assessments, internal verification and progress reviews carried out by the college. The college's learning support units carry out initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers. Practical training and assessment are provided by a local salon, and background knowledge and key skills training by the subcontractor.

## Health, social care & public services

10. Twenty-six advanced modern apprentices, three foundation modern apprentices and one NVQ learner are following programmes in health and social care. Most learners are working towards NVQs in early years care and education, but care, dental nursing and pharmacy options are also available. All learners are employed in a wide range of nursing, residential or residential care homes, or a variety of nurseries and children's establishments and attend off-the-job training at a local subcontractor which is a college of further education. The Chamber provides an induction session for learners and the college provides assessments, internal verification and progress reviews. Work-based assessors also carry out some assessments in the workplace. The college's learning support units provide initial assessment for all learners and offer any additional learning support needed. Further pastoral, equality of opportunity and health and safety reviews are carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

## ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	29
Number of learner interviews	68
Number of staff interviews	14
Number of employer interviews	24
Number of subcontractor interviews	12
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

11. The ALI's inspection in December 2001 found that the quality of St Helens Chamber's training in ICT, retailing, customer service and transportation, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and health, social care and public services was unsatisfactory. The Chamber's leadership and management and quality assurance were also unsatisfactory. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity was satisfactory. The quality of its training in construction, engineering and business administration was satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, training in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and engineering and construction was found to be satisfactory. Training in retailing, customer service and transportation; business administration; and health, social care and public services is good. However, ICT training remains unsatisfactory. Leadership and management are good and the arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality assurance are satisfactory.



## GRADES

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

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

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Construction</b>	3	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>	3	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	2

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Information &amp; communications technology</b>	4	4
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	4

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	2

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Hairdressing &amp; beauty therapy</b>	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

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	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Health, social care &amp; public services</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	2

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

12. **Achievement rates have improved** and are now satisfactory or better in most areas of learning. Progress **often remains slow**, although recent action to rectify this is beginning to take effect. **Retention rates have also improved** and are generally satisfactory. Retention rates are excellent on retailing and customer service programmes, but remain poor for engineering foundation modern apprentices.

13. Overall standards of training are satisfactory or better. Learners work well, to industry standards, and produce very good portfolios of evidence. Attainment is generally satisfactory, but is particularly good for learners on retailing, and health and social care programmes.

### 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	1	1	0	0	0	2
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Health, social care & public services	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>13</b>

14. Learners are employed in a range of good quality workplaces and have good opportunities to collect evidence towards their NVQ. Most workplace supervisors are aware of the requirements of the NVQ and give their learners good support. Much of the on-the-job training is good. Some engineering employers have their own on-the-job

training plans. Often learners are encouraged to take responsibility in the workplace as soon as they are able. This applies particularly to health and social care programmes.

**15. Most off-the-job training is good, particularly in construction, engineering, business administration and hairdressing programmes.** Eighty-six per cent of the training sessions observed by inspectors were graded good or better. One training session for equality of opportunity was observed and graded as unsatisfactory. Sessions are planned well and focus on meeting the learners' needs. Tutors use a good range of training materials and learners are actively involved in the sessions. Tutors check learners' understanding frequently using good question and answer techniques. Employers and learners recognise the value of the off-the-job training. In hairdressing programmes, particularly good use is made of learners' commercial experience.

**16. Most subcontractors have good resources for training.** Realistic working environments are created for off-the-job practical training and equipment meets current industry standards. Practical materials are readily available and are of good quality. For example, new bricks are available for construction workers to practise bricklaying. Training salons in hairdressing programmes have a good range of hair care products. Business administration learners carry out administration tasks for staff at the subcontractor's working office. Engineering learners carry out repairs to vehicles in a commercial environment.

**17. Most progress reviews remain weak.** Good progress reviews take place in business administration, but in most other areas of learning they are ineffective. Supervisors are not sufficiently involved in reviews. The documents used to record reviews are often illegible and supervisors sometimes do not receive copies of them. The reviews are not effectively used to review learners' progress with their individual learning plans and they do not set challenging but realistic mid-term targets for achievement. Equality of opportunity is covered only superficially. Progress reviews carried out by subcontractors' staff are not linked enough to the pastoral reviews carried out by the Chamber's training advisers.

**18.** Assessment practices are now satisfactory or better in most areas of learning. In health and social care programmes, assessment is planned particularly well and a good variety of assessment methods is used. Most learners now receive constructive feedback after assessment to improve their performance.

**19. Training in ICT remains unsatisfactory.** The action taken to rectify the weaknesses found at the previous inspection has not been effective. Although learners work in good quality workplaces and develop satisfactory ICT skills, assessment practice is poor and achievement is delayed.

**20. Training advisers provide effective support for learners.** They schedule their visits to meet learners' needs and visit more often than every 12 weeks if needed. They are able to refer learners to external support agencies if appropriate. Two members of staff act as dedicated mentors and support learners who are having difficulty or considering leaving their training programme.

21. Arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and any additional support needed is provided by the subcontractors' learning support units. However, the Chamber has not sufficiently evaluated the effectiveness of the support provided.

### Leadership and management

22. **Effective action has been taken to improve the quality of training.** Comprehensive and detailed service level agreements have been made with all subcontractors. Since the previous inspection the Chamber has reduced the number of providers it contracts with. It uses a system of quality assurance audit questions and non-conformance reports effectively to ensure compliance with the service level agreement. On- and off-the-job training are co-ordinated and matched to the requirements of the NVQ. Feedback is collected from learners, employers and staff and used to improve the training programmes.

23. **Strategies to further improve achievement and retention rates have not been sufficiently implemented.** The Chamber carries out detailed monitoring of all learners who leave their training without achieving. Mentors are used effectively to support these learners and encourage them to return to their training programmes. However, although the strategy to improve retention and achievement rates is comprehensive and thorough, it has not yet been fully implemented.

24. Resources are managed satisfactorily. Staff are appropriately experienced and qualified to support learners in their practical and background knowledge work. Health and safety checks are made on employers' workplaces at least once a year, and more frequently for higher risk sites such as engineering companies. The Chamber's financial management is satisfactory, comprehensive and detailed, and its strategic and business plans include a good analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for the training programmes.

25. **Monitoring of subcontractors remains weak.** Monthly collaboration meetings are used to monitor the subcontractors, but recording and discussion of key issues are often superficial. Meetings are too brief and do not include enough monitoring of the progress of learners or action-planning for improvement.

26. Monitoring of employers' arrangements for equality of opportunity is satisfactory. It is carried out every six months using a pre-set questionnaire. However, this has not effectively raised the awareness of employers in the engineering sector. Learners have a satisfactory awareness of equality of opportunity and receive training during their induction. All staff have had recent training in equality of opportunity issues.

27. **Staff development is good.** The Chamber is committed to developing its staff and meets most of their training requests. Staff are encouraged to gain higher qualifications and to update those they already hold. Appraisal is effective and includes a detailed review of the previous year's targets. All training advisers are set monthly targets which

are monitored weekly.

28. **The Chamber makes particularly good use of external links.** Senior managers are committee and board members of many influential local partnerships and forums. Good use is made of ESF funding to run projects which support the local community. The Chamber has been influential in building capacity within the local business sector.

29. **Internal verification is particularly good in health and social care.** However, this good practice is not shared with other areas of learning. **In engineering, retailing and customer service, and ICT programmes some internal verification practices are weak,** with weak planning and poor organisation. Sharing of good practice and setting of standards for assessors are insufficient.

30. The Chamber's self-assessment report is based on the previous inspection report but does not include revised strengths and weaknesses in areas where significant action has been taken. Not enough use has been made of data on achievement and retention rates to support some of the report's judgements.

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

### **Leadership and management**

#### **Strengths**

- good staff development and appraisal arrangements
- very effective communication and use of external links
- particularly effective action to improve the quality of training

#### **Weaknesses**

- weak monitoring of subcontractors
- insufficient implementation of strategies to improve retention and achievement rates

### **Construction**

#### **Strengths**

- good off-the-job training
- particularly good resources at subcontractor
- good-quality workplaces

#### **Weaknesses**

- slow progress for some learners
- weak progress reviews

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### **Strengths**

- good off-the-job training
- very good training resources
- good-quality workplaces
- good achievement of a range of relevant additional qualifications

### **Weaknesses**

- poor retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- some weak planning of internal verification
- weak progress reviews
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace

## **Business administration, management & professional**

### **Strengths**

- good progress reviews
- particularly thorough induction
- good resources for learning
- good off-the-job training

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient use of work-based evidence for some learners
- no initial assessment of ICT skills

## **Information & communications technology**

### **Strengths**

- good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications
- good-quality workplaces
- good learner support from training advisers

### **Weaknesses**

- poor achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices
- slow completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- inadequate planning of assessment
- poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- poorly organised internal verification

## **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

### **Strengths**

- excellent retention rates
- good NVQ achievement rates
- particularly effective development of learners' skills
- very good use of short-term targets

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient recent occupational experience of staff in distribution and warehousing
- weak progress reviews
- some poor internal verification processes

## **Hairdressing & beauty therapy**

### **Strengths**

- good off-the-job training
- good resources to support learning
- good progress reviews and pastoral support for learners
- effective links between job roles and key skills training

### **Weaknesses**

- slow progress towards completion for advanced modern apprentices
- insufficient work-based assessment for many learners

## **Health, social care & public services**

### **Strengths**

- excellent standard of attainment
- good resources to support learning
- very good workplaces
- exceptionally thorough internal verification

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient integration of key skills training with some learners' NVQ programmes
- inadequate progress reviews



## DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 2**

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

#### **Strengths**

- good staff development and appraisal arrangements
- very effective communication and use of external links
- particularly effective action to improve the quality of training

#### **Weaknesses**

- weak monitoring of subcontractors
- insufficient implementation of strategies to improve retention and achievement rates

31. The Chamber's arrangements for staff development and appraisals are good. This strength has been maintained and developed from the previous inspection. Each member of staff has two appraisals each year. Their performance is closely monitored against agreed targets which are linked to the business requirements of the Chamber and the personal development needs of the individual. Each appraisal includes a thorough and detailed review of the previous year's targets. The Chamber has a comprehensive, three-year staff development plan. Sufficient resources are allocated for staff development and most individual requests are met. The Chamber has a well-planned approach to meeting the development needs of its staff and broader training needs and is carrying out a series of staff development activities including providing key skills and equality of opportunity training. Staff are encouraged to gain higher level qualifications, for example in management, and to update qualifications they already hold. The quality development adviser is currently working towards a nationally recognised teaching qualification and is implementing a strategy for observing learning sessions at the Chamber and at the subcontractors. All training advisers are set monthly targets for performance, their progress towards which is monitored at a weekly meeting with the quality development adviser. Action plans are effectively used to plan training for any member of staff who is having difficulty meeting their targets.

32. The Chamber has effective communications and the staff have a clear understanding of the aims of the organisation. This strength has been maintained from the previous inspection. Arrangements for regular staff meetings and communication within the Chamber are well established. After the board meetings, which are held every two months, key items are discussed further by the operational teams. The Chamber's staff contribute, through the action plans from their own meetings, to strategic- and business-planning. Regular meetings between the Chamber's managers, co-ordinators and operational teams help to encourage good communications. Staff can also express

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views and concerns through the Chamber's staff council. Strong links between the Chamber and its members have helped to increase the number of companies that employ modern apprentices. Each year all staff complete a questionnaire and the Chamber uses this feedback to plan for improvements in the following year's strategic and business plan. The Chamber has excellent links with many local organisations including local learning partnerships, chambers of commerce and business links. It engages effectively with local employers and provides a business support agency. The Chamber's training advisers offer employers a range of support including advice on recruitment policies, writing job descriptions, compiling contracts of employment, health and safety, equal opportunities and induction procedures. Senior managers sit as directors or members on the boards and committees of a range of external organisations including local colleges, local strategic partnerships, St Helens Inward Investment Group, steering groups and best practice forums. Great attention is paid to building the capacity of the local business community to provide opportunities for work-based learners.

33. The financial management of the Chamber is satisfactory. Procedures are in place for monitoring and forecasting and managing any fluctuation in income. The strategic and business plans are comprehensive and detailed and include a thorough examination of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities for the Chamber. The Chamber uses regeneration budgets and ESF funding effectively to increase the range of training it offers, and supports and manages initiatives such as the free initial guidance and advice unit in St Helens.

34. The subcontractors provide learning support for literacy, numeracy, language and key skills, and the Chamber manages this through service level agreements and its monthly collaboration meetings. However, the Chamber does not sufficiently evaluate the effectiveness of the support provided.

35. Strategies to improve retention and achievement rates have not been sufficiently implemented. The Chamber has recognised the need to improve retention and achievement rates across all areas of learning. It carries out detailed and thorough monitoring of all early leavers, analyses their reasons for leaving and uses mentors to support them to return to their training programmes. It has a detailed and thorough strategy to improve retention and achievement rates. However, as yet it has not fully implemented this strategy. Monthly management meetings monitor the Chamber's performance against its contract with the local LSC, but retention and achievement rates in the different areas of learning are not sufficiently monitored. The Chamber relies too much on its subcontractors to monitor learners' progress. Although individual learners' files contain detailed information about their progress, the Chamber is not easily able to compare different intakes of learners in each area of learning.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

36. The Chamber has an equal opportunities statement, policies and an implementation strategy which was last updated in April 2003. All staff have received recent training in equality of opportunity.

37. The Chamber has taken action to improve the promotion of equality of opportunity in its training programmes and this is now satisfactory. All learners now receive equality training as part of their induction to the Chamber. Excellent training resources include a video and a comprehensive and informative workbook. However, this part of the induction process has not yet been quality assured. Since this change to the induction process, learners have a satisfactory awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity. They also receive information about grievance and disciplinary procedures as well as how to make a complaint or appeal against an assessment decision. However, the induction pack given to New Deal clients is not written in a way which is easy to understand or that is appropriate for clients with literacy, numeracy or language support needs. The Chamber has offered equality of opportunity awareness training to all of its employers but so far none has taken up this offer. All subcontractors and employers now sign a service level agreement which includes a commitment to promoting equality and meeting the requirements of legislation. Monitoring of equality of opportunity at subcontractors has been introduced as part of the new quality assurance arrangements. The Chamber has introduced a new process and paperwork for recording pastoral reviews carried out by training advisers. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this new procedure. Equality of opportunity at the employers is monitored every six months, but some engineering employers' awareness of equality issues has not improved.

38. The Chamber's equality of opportunity strategy effectively identifies a number of groups who are either under-represented on its training programmes or may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination. The strategy expresses a strong commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity, but has not yet been fully implemented. No accompanying action plan exists and progress made has not been reviewed. The Chamber recognises that many of its training programmes have an imbalance of men and women. However, it has not set targets to attempt to rectify this and has not directly targeted its advertising or marketing material. The Chamber has not made enough use of data to monitor trends in recruitment, achievement or retention rates. At the time of the reinspection, the Chamber was in the process of producing new marketing material and it has used images which attempt to counter traditional stereotypes. The Chamber also has a successful women into management programme, which includes workshops on such topics as confidence-building, personal protection techniques, business image and assertiveness, alongside an NVQ in management at level 3 or 4. It has recently introduced a young people into management club which is aimed at equipping young people in management roles with the skills they need. The club also provides social activities and opportunities to make new contacts and share good practice.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Contributory grade 3**

39. The quality development adviser has overall responsibility for quality assurance. The Chamber has a comprehensive set of quality assurance policies, procedures, work instructions and handbooks which cover most aspects of its business. Since the previous inspection it has taken effective action to improve the quality assurance arrangements for the training programmes. It has introduced comprehensive and detailed service level

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agreements with its subcontractors that clearly state the responsibilities of each party. It has reduced the number of subcontractors from 21 to nine and now only contracts with training providers that share its commitment to improving the quality of training. Service level agreements are supported by a supplier questionnaire designed to check each subcontractor's compliance with the agreement. The Chamber has recognised that the first version of this questionnaire, which was completed for 2002-03, did not focus enough on evaluating the quality of training and monitoring of programmes was superficial. The questions asked have been re-evaluated and a new questionnaire has been drafted. A new system to monitor the questionnaires has been introduced and a non-conformance report is issued if a subcontractor cannot produce adequate evidence that it is meeting the requirements of the agreement. Subcontractors are required to produce an action plan within two weeks of receiving a non-conformance report and this is monitored until the actions have been successfully completed.

40. At the time of the reinspection, the Chamber had produced a draft set of programme evaluation procedures. These set clear criteria to evaluate each of the key stages of the training programmes including induction, initial assessment, training, assessment and internal verification. However, the procedures are not yet in use, and their effectiveness cannot yet be judged. The Chamber has also introduced a new system to ensure that on- and off-the-job training are better co-ordinated, largely remedying the weakness found at the previous inspection. The new system uses a chart to plot the on- and off-the-job training against the units of the NVQ to identify any areas where extra training is needed. This system is not yet fully established in all areas of learning. The Chamber collects feedback from its learners three times during their learning programme and from employers annually. This information is evaluated and reports are circulated to staff and managers. After a thorough audit of pastoral reviews carried out by training advisers, the Chamber identified serious issues with the quality of many reviews. It has provided training and detailed and clear guidance for all training advisers on the standards required, and introduced mechanisms for the sharing of good practice. Since the introduction of these measures, the quality of pastoral reviews has improved markedly. The Chamber plans to extend this monitoring to include the reviews carried out by subcontractors' staff.

41. Internal verification is satisfactory or better in most areas of learning. However, it is often poorly planned or organised, particularly in engineering, customer service and ICT programmes. Internal verification practice in the early years care training programmes is excellent, but this good practice is not sufficiently shared.

42. Subcontracted training and assessment are not effectively monitored. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. Monthly collaborative meetings are relied on too much to monitor the subcontractors' provision of training and assessment. These meetings include only superficial discussion and recording of key issues. Although non-conformance reports are issued if breaches of the subcontractors' agreement are identified, important issues with specific learners are often not followed up. The agenda for the meetings is brief and does not include the results of training observations, minutes of internal verifier meetings, minutes of assessor meetings, key skills training and assessment or evaluation of learning support provided. Learners' progress is often not

reviewed thoroughly enough. Monitoring of retention rates is only very superficial and no targets are set for achievement or retention rates. Insufficient use has been made of data to compare the performance of different subcontractors or different training programmes. The collaboration meetings did not identify the key weaknesses found at reinspection.

43. The Chamber's self-assessment report was based on the previous inspection report. However, the Chamber had not revised the strengths and weaknesses identified even where it believed significant action had been taken to develop strengths or remedy weaknesses. The report does not make enough use of data on achievement and retention rates to support some of its judgements. The action plan, although detailed and comprehensive, is rather repetitive and it is not always clear if targets have been met.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Construction

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	105	3

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

#### Strengths

- good off-the-job training
- particularly good resources at subcontractor
- good-quality workplaces

#### Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- weak progress reviews

### Achievement and standards

44. The Chamber works with a variety of good construction employers whose premises offer safe working environments where learners can produce a good standard of work. Learners and New Deal clients work on a wide range of construction projects to good industrial standards. They have a good understanding of their tasks and how they fit in to the overall work plan. Learners are able to plan and carry out a variety of practical tasks, enabling them to demonstrate a good range of skills. Employers support the vocational and personal needs of the learners. Learners are supervised well and employers value the contribution they make.

45. Progression towards the achievement of qualifications is slow for many learners, particularly those working towards craft qualifications. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. Of those learners who started an advanced modern apprenticeship in 2000-01, only 4 per cent have successfully completed it and 55 per cent remain in learning. These learners are making slow progress. Off-the-job training is planned well, but planning of assessment is insufficient. Nearly half of all learners come to the end of the planned duration of their training programme without completing their modern apprenticeship in full. For those learners who started a foundation modern apprenticeship in 2000-01 over half reached the end of their planned programme duration without completing the framework. Over one-third of these learners are still in training and are now very late in completing their apprenticeship. Learners on NVQ programmes are also making poor progress. Of those who started working towards an NVQ at level 2 in 2000-01, two-thirds have not yet achieved their qualification.

Retention rates are satisfactory across all programmes.

### **Quality of education and training**

46. Off-the-job training in construction is good. Sessions are planned and organised well and are focused on meeting learners' needs. Session aims and objectives are clear and understood well by learners. Tutors provide good individual support for learners and frequently check their understanding with good questioning techniques. Learners respond constructively to questioning and contribute effectively during group discussions. Tutors use their recent and current industrial experience to good effect by clearly relating background knowledge to practice. Learners are engaged and motivated particularly well.

47. Training resources at the college are particularly good. Workshops and classrooms are spacious, well maintained and offer a good learning and assessment environment. Three of the workshops for carpentry and joinery have separate assessment and machine areas. Machinery in the workshops is of a good standard. The plumbing workshops have well-equipped assessment bays which can be locked to protect the learners' work. A workshop has been designed to accommodate the gas safety requirements of the plumbing NVQ. Assessment bays in the electrical installation workshops offer the wide range of surface finishes which are needed to fulfil the assessment requirements. Painting and decorating workshops have realistic work settings which meet the requirements of the NVQ. Practical materials are readily available and are of good quality. For example, learners working towards an NVQ at level 3 in bricklaying have access to new bricks when constructing training models. Learning materials are good and a range of well-written workbooks greatly assists learners to gain background knowledge, as well as being used to monitor learners' progress.

48. The college's use of work-based evidence has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. Tutors now visit learners in the workplace to carry out observations of their performance, although this practice is still not applied consistently in all craft occupations. Learners enjoy their experiences in the workplace and are enthusiastic about the support they receive from employers. Employers' understanding of the training programme is now satisfactory.

49. Project work for New Deal clients is good. Clients carry out relevant and varied work including painting and decorating, flagging and kerbing. Clients are working towards two units of a construction maintenance NVQ at level 2 and routinely collect work-based evidence for these units.

50. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the college's learning support units provide key skills, literacy, numeracy and language support as needed. Since the previous inspection, the arrangements for key skills training and assessment have improved and are now satisfactory. Key skills tutors work with vocational tutors to ensure key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the NVQ

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programme and learning materials are relevant. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key skills training and assessment.

51. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactorily carried out by college staff. Internal verification is carried out regularly throughout the training programme and includes the observation of assessors as well as the verification of portfolios and other sources of evidence. Sampling plans cover an adequate range of learners and NVQ units. Regular standardisation meetings are held.

52. Separate progress reviews are carried out by the training advisers and college tutors every 12 weeks. The reviews carried out by the training advisers are mainly concerned with general support and review of progress. In most cases the reviews which are carried out by college staff are carried out on college premises and are intended to give feedback on progress. However, they focus on work that has been completed and fail to set short-term targets with specific deadlines. Some learners display higher levels of competence than their qualification requires, but it is not recognised through the progress review and assessment process. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. Employers are not involved enough in reviews. They are only invited to contribute towards the end of the review, in some cases after learners have signed the review record. Employers' comments are superficial and are not based on the learners' progress towards the achievement of targets. No effective links exist between the pastoral review carried out by the Chamber's staff and the progress review carried out by the college's staff to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Health and safety and equality of opportunity are poorly covered in reviews. Since the previous inspection, the Chamber has introduced a health and safety and equality awareness review, but this does not adequately reinforce or extend learners' knowledge and understanding. Individual learning plans are not referred to during reviews. Many plans are poorly completed and contain insufficient information. Often sections on initial assessment, attendance, assessment and on- and off-the-job training are not completed.

### **Leadership and management**

53. The leadership and management of construction programmes are satisfactory. The Chamber's staff work well with college staff. Monthly collaborative meetings are used to monitor learner's progress. Some effective action has taken place since the previous inspection to rectify the weaknesses identified. The use of work-based evidence and employers' understanding of the programme is now satisfactory. However, action-planning to support those learners making slow progress towards achievement has been inadequate.



**Engineering, technology & manufacturing****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	144	3

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

**Strengths**

- good off-the-job training
- very good training resources
- good-quality workplaces
- good achievement of a range of relevant additional qualifications

**Weaknesses**

- poor retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- some weak planning of internal verification
- weak progress reviews
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace

**Achievement and standards**

54. Learners produce satisfactory work to current industrial standards. Retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices are satisfactory, with overall achievement rates since programmes started in 1996-97 of 55 per cent. Of those learners who started an advanced modern apprenticeship since 2000-01, 53 per cent are still in training.

55. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices has improved since the previous inspection but remains poor. For those learners who started in 2000-01 only one-third remained on their programme for its planned duration. For those learners who started in 2001-02, only 36 per cent remain in training and only 4 per cent have completed the framework. Fewer than half of the learners who began programmes in 2002-03 are still in training. Some of these learners are also making slow progress.

56. Most learners achieve additional units of the NVO to meet their own or their employer's needs. Many learners also achieve additional qualifications in areas such as fabrication and welding, programmable logic controllers, risk assessment and abrasive wheels. Learners in maintenance who need to operate a lift truck receive formal training towards a lift truck licence. Some employers encourage learners to achieve higher level qualifications, such as higher national certificates and degrees.

### **Quality of education and training**

57. Off-the-job training at level 2 of the NVQ is good and offers a well-planned introduction into engineering. Diverse assessment methods are used involving a wide range of equipment. Training sessions are prepared well and effectively linked to the development of the learners' practical skills and experience. Tutors communicate well with learners and encourage them to take part in class discussions. Achievement rates are better during this introductory stage of the training than for any other qualification stage. Learners indicate in their feedback that the experience gained on this part of the programme is a significant contribution to their modern apprenticeship. Employers confirm the value of this introductory training. Learners' progress is recorded every week using a good monitoring system. Tutors are qualified, enthusiastic and have good industrial experience. They offer good personal support and motivation to learners. Inspectors observed two learning sessions and both were graded as good.

58. Resources for the off-the-job training are very good. Training workshops are spacious and planned to promote a safe working environment. They have a wide range of up-to-date and well-maintained equipment and machinery. Learners can develop their skills in turning, milling, welding and computer numerical control systems on a range of specialised equipment. Most of the equipment meets current industry standards and contributes to the learners' good practical training. The motor vehicle training workshops are particularly good. They are designed to give a very realistic working environment and learners are able to carry out commercial repair and servicing work. The good college resources were identified as a strength by the Chamber in its self-assessment report and also at the previous inspection. Employers value the resources and training provided to develop learners' skills and prepare them for work.

59. Work placements offer good opportunities for the learners to collect evidence for their NVQ assessments. Learners receive effective on-the-job training from qualified technicians who assist them in developing their occupational skills and experience. Some employers have developed effective training plans that let learners work across a wide range of departments. Although other learners' on-the-job training is not as well structured and is dependent on the production requirements of the individual company, these learners still gain experience on a range of equipment. Some learners are trained on manufacturers' product courses. Employers give learners a thorough induction into the company which includes health and safety, and the maintenance of a safe working environment.

60. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the college's learning support units provide any literacy, numeracy, language or key skills support needed. Key skills tutors work with vocational tutors to ensure key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the NVQ programme and learning materials are relevant. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key skills training and assessment.

61. Internal verifiers sample a range of portfolios to monitor the assessors' performance.

However, the sampling record does not accurately reflect the internal verification that has taken place. This problem was identified at the Chamber's collaboration meeting with the college, but has not been resolved. The Chamber's monitoring of internal verification is poor. Internal verification is only brought up at the collaboration meeting when the college identifies a problem.

62. Both the Chamber and the college carry out progress reviews at least every 12 weeks. This process is not thorough and does not always guide learners towards the achievement of their main qualification. Review documents do not always set specific targets and recorded guidance is often insufficient. The written progress review documents available to the learner are of poor quality and some of the comments on them are not legible. Workplace supervisors are seldom involved in the progress review process, but are informed of the outcome at the end of the review. Progress reviews are not based on the individual learning plans, which in some cases are not updated or used to record changes in the learners' circumstances or employment details.

### **Leadership and management**

63. Staff from the Chamber and the college work well together. Monthly collaborative meetings are held to monitor learners' progress.

64. Equality of opportunity in the workplace is not monitored enough. Employers are not questioned about equality of opportunity during the Chamber's review process and their understanding of equality issues is not checked or developed. Although the Chamber has introduced a separate six-monthly review of equality of opportunity in the workplace, this initiative is not being effectively implemented. Some employers have a poor understanding of the key equality issues which might apply in the engineering industry. During the inspection, inspectors discovered displays of inappropriate material. Although the employer was aware of the material, no action had been taken to remove it permanently from the workshops.

**Business administration, management & professional****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	69	2

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

**Strengths**

- good progress reviews
- particularly thorough induction
- good resources for learning
- good off-the-job training

**Weaknesses**

- insufficient use of work-based evidence for some learners
- no initial assessment of ICT skills

**Achievement and standards**

65. Retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are now satisfactory. This remedies a weakness found at the previous inspection. Since 1998, retention rates have remained steady at around 65 per cent. Of those learners who began foundation modern apprenticeships in 2002-03, three-quarters are still in training and are making good progress. Just under two-thirds of learners complete their full apprenticeship. Retention rates for advanced modern apprentices have been poor but are now satisfactory and improving. All learners who began advanced modern apprenticeships in 2002-03 are still in training and are on target to complete their qualification. Over half of those learners who started in 2001-02 are still in training and are making excellent progress. The monitoring of learners' attendance and time-keeping is good. Portfolios are of a good standard and are presented and organised well.

66. Many learners progress to different NVQs at levels 3 and 4 and some progress to management NVQs at level 5. Learners who wish to transfer to another qualification are given guidance to ensure that a long-term plan is followed.

**Quality of education and training**

67. Progress review procedures are clear, comprehensive and understood by learners. This was identified as a strength in the previous inspection. Advisers from the Chamber visit learners every 12 weeks to monitor their progress. The college's assessors also make separate visits every eight weeks to monitor learners' progress, check their work and help them to prepare for their next assessment. Learners greatly value these visits.

Assessors and learners discuss the types of evidence required for their assessments and agree a plan of action for the next visit. During these visits previously set targets are reviewed and new targets are agreed for planned assessments. A training chart document is used effectively to link on- and off-the-job training, remedying a weakness found at the previous inspection. Employers are invited to the progress review meetings and are encouraged to contribute to the discussions. The assessors work well with the learners to identify areas where they are unable to obtain portfolio evidence. Assessors work well with employers, and learners and employers keep copies of the records of the progress reviews. One employer also carries out an individual monthly review with learners as well as a six-monthly appraisal.

68. The induction arrangements both on and off the job are comprehensive, consisting of sessions in the workplace and at college. This strength was identified at the previous inspection. The induction in the workplace explains the job role and responsibilities within the workplace. At college, learners are given time to familiarise themselves with the campus and the facilities using a health and safety exercise which explores the college layout, including the library and drop-in IT facilities. Learners receive good information on the financial support available to them. They have a good understanding of health and safety and equal opportunities policies and their own responsibilities in the workplace. Learners are given useful information about the services available to them including careers advice and progression routes to higher education. The induction includes an advice session to ensure that learners are gaining the best possible range of skills. Some learners are advised to take additional IT qualifications to support workplace and individual needs. Accounting learners receive an initial assessment of skills used on the job and this is used effectively as evidence when assessing personal effectiveness and time-management skills.

69. Resources for learning are good. Learners have access to very good IT facilities, both in workshop sessions and the drop-in facilities in the IT centre or library. The subcontractor's learning resource centre has sufficient up-to-date textbooks for accountancy, administration and management programmes. Learners can work either individually in designated quiet areas or in groups, and staff are available to offer help and support. Trainers and assessors have relevant and recent industrial experience, and some qualified assessors are taking the new assessor and vocational trainer units as part of their continuous professional development. Good-quality learning materials are used and all office equipment meets the best current industry standards. At college, learners can use a well-equipped and realistic training office where they carry out duties such as word processing, answering the telephone and photocopying for college staff.

70. Off-the-job training is good, a strength maintained from the previous inspection. The training sessions observed by inspectors were all graded as good. Sessions use a good mix of different training styles to appeal to all learners. The schemes of work and session plans are produced well and take account of different learners' needs. Each session builds on the existing skills of the learners and new skills are developed quickly. Workshops are effectively used to develop learners' key communication skills. In an administration session observed by inspectors, filing systems were explained and demonstrated in a way which maintained learners' interest and motivation. In accounts

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training, excellent use is made of learners' prior skills and good direction is given to help them identify evidence that can be collected in the workplace. This information is then used to form an action plan. Tutors give learners excellent individual support. The standard of written feedback on assignments was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection. It is now constructive and comprehensive and enables learners to improve their skills and the presentation of their work. Learners are often given demonstrations of tasks in the workplace and then asked to apply the skills learnt at college.

71. Internal verification is satisfactory. Standardisation and sampling meetings are regularly held and detailed minutes are kept. Assignments are internally verified before being returned to the learners and detailed schedules of sampling of learners' work are kept. The internal verification arrangements are explained to learners during induction. A range of sampling methods is used to ensure that all types of evidence are sampled and assessors' performance is effectively monitored.

72. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the college's learning support units provide literacy, numeracy, language and key skills support. Key skills tutors work with vocational tutors to ensure key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the NVO programme and learning materials are relevant. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key skills training and assessment. However, there is still no initial assessment of ICT skills. This was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection and has not been rectified. IT skills are informally assessed once learners start their programmes but additional support needs may not become apparent until a learner is having difficulty.

73. Not enough use is made of workplace evidence for some learners. This has been recognised by the college and the Chamber and effective action has been taken to help assessors to identify and make good use of evidence from the workplace. However, some learners still produce most of their evidence in the training office at the college.

### **Leadership and management**

74. Leadership and management of business administration programmes are good. Staff from the Chamber and the college work well together. Monthly collaborative meetings are effectively used to monitor learners' progress. Much effective action has been taken to rectify the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection.

75. A women into management programme has been introduced which specifically targets the needs of young women, under 25 years of age, who are entering management. Monthly workshops are held and topics covered include dealing with harassment and discrimination. One advanced modern apprentice from this group was nominated for regional apprentice of the year.

**Information & communications technology****Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	8	4

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

**Strengths**

- good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications
- good-quality workplaces
- good learner support from training advisers

**Weaknesses**

- poor achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices
- slow completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- inadequate planning of assessment
- poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- poorly organised internal verification

**Achievement and standards**

76. Learners have good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications. The Chamber, subcontractors and employers provide good support to learners who wish to achieve further education qualifications such as national certificates. Several have progressed to higher national qualifications or have taken additional technical IT qualifications recognised by the industry. Learners can also take advantage of training in other subjects such as health and safety, and manual handling.

77. Learners are employed in a wide range of very appropriate working environments. These range from small local computer support companies to large technical software and technical service providers. Some are involved in field maintenance roles while others are employed on ICT support desks. The workplaces provide the learners with access to up-to-date, industry-standard software and hardware. Most job roles allow the learners to be fully involved in the tasks necessary to collect their NVQ evidence. The learners gain good levels of competence and skills and accept a wide range of responsibilities.

78. Most learners are making very slow progress towards achieving their qualifications. Over one-fifth of the learners who started an advanced modern apprenticeship in 1999-00 have not yet completed their training. This also applies to 40 per cent of those advanced modern apprentices who started in 2000-01. These learners are continuing to make very poor progress towards completion. Of the eight advanced modern

apprentices who have started training since 2000-01, only one has completed their full qualification.

79. For foundation modern apprentices, achievement rates declined sharply from a satisfactory level for 1999-00 starters, to just 17 per cent for those learners who started in 2000-01. Of the 11 learners who have started the foundation modern apprenticeship since 2000-01, 91 per cent have left without completing it. Nearly all learners who do complete the framework take much longer than the original planned duration of their programme.

### **Quality of education and training**

80. Learners receive regular visits and good support from training advisers. The visits include an effective pastoral review which learners value. Training advisers offer prompt and effective support to learners with personal difficulties. They are sensitive to the issues involved and are able to offer very good guidance and advice or referral to specialist support where appropriate. Training and assessment issues are also discussed at the reviews and any problems identified are thoughtfully handled and effectively resolved.

81. Assessment-planning is inadequate. The subcontractors do not plan for workplace assessments, relying on the learners to request assessments when they feel they are ready. Learners are responsible for requesting workplace assessments but are not clear about the procedures for doing so. Assessment in the workplace is insufficient and some learners have large gaps between assessments. Assessment is often done informally depending on what tasks are being completed during the assessor's visits. Some assessment records are incomplete and learners are unaware of which units or elements they have completed. Employers are not given sufficient information about learners' progress. Learners receive only superficial feedback after assessment which does not help them to improve their performance or develop their skills. Assessment records focus too much on describing the task rather than the learner's performance. Many records are difficult to read and are descriptive rather than evaluative. Not all of the questions asked, or the answers given by learners during assessment, are recorded. Assessment plans lack both short- and medium-term targets and are not related to the individual learning plan.

82. Internal verification is still poorly organised. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. No internal verification of ICT programmes is planned for the coming year. A plan for sampling of learners and units as well as assessors existed for the past year but it was used ineffectively. Target dates were set but there was no evidence that they were met. Many verification observations were not carried out on the planned date and others were not carried out at all. Formal internal verification records contain inadequate feedback. Regular assessor meetings or any forum to share best practice among assessors were not apparent. Internal verification did not identify the poor planning and assessment practice found by inspectors.



83. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the college's learning support units provide any literacy, numeracy, language or key skills support needed. Key skills tutors work with vocational tutors to ensure key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the NVQ programme and learning materials are relevant. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key skills training and assessment.

### **Leadership and management**

84. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. Workplace supervisors are not involved in the training taking place at the subcontractor. Some learners do not recognise any links between on- and off-the-job training. Some workplace supervisors do participate in the progress review process but are not involved enough in planning the overall training programme. Many workplace supervisors do not know what learners are studying in their off-the-job training. Individual learning plans do not include details of training courses leading to certificates supplied by the employer's own in-house training. On- and off-the-job training are not matched to the requirements of the NVQ. In many cases, learners are producing adequate key skills evidence in the workplace, but not enough use is made of this evidence in the key skills portfolios. Learners did not know that they could use work-based evidence for their key skills assessment and were needlessly carrying out additional tasks during off-the-job training to satisfy the requirements of the qualification.

85. Monthly collaborative meetings are used to monitor learners' progress and the Chamber has identified many serious weaknesses with the ICT training. However, not enough action has been taken since the previous inspection to rectify these weaknesses. Some recent changes have been made but it is too early to judge the effect of these on the training programme.

**Retailing, customer service & transportation****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	6	2

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

**Strengths**

- excellent retention rates
- good NVQ achievement rates
- particularly effective development of learners' skills
- very good use of short-term targets

**Weaknesses**

- insufficient recent occupational experience of staff in distribution and warehousing
- weak progress reviews
- some poor internal verification processes

**Achievement and standards**

86. Retention rates are now excellent on all retailing, customer service and transportation programmes, rectifying a weakness identified at the previous inspection. Retention rates on NVQ programmes have averaged 83 per cent for the 1999-00 intake and achievement rates have been good at an average of 78 per cent. Retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices have improved rapidly since the 1998-99 intake, only 17 per cent of whom completed their qualification. Of the 2000-01 intake of advanced modern apprentices, the last that the Chamber has recruited, over two-thirds of learners remained on programme for its planned duration and over half completed their qualification. Retention rates for foundation modern apprentices have also improved steadily since the 1997-98 intake. Of those learners who started in 2001-02, three-quarters have already completed their qualification and four-fifths have been retained. Of the 2002-03 starters, 84 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are still in training and are making good progress towards completion. Retention of New Deal clients on programme is satisfactory, and progress into employment during 2002-03 was good.

87. The development of learners' skills during their time on the training programmes is particularly effective. On-the-job training is very good. Workplaces include local and national retailing businesses, customer service and sales outlets. Learners benefit from a wide range of learning opportunities in the workplace, including using office equipment, reconciling cash transactions and the daily opening and closing of employers' premises. Employers move learners between departments where necessary to allow them to

collect the full range of NVQ evidence. Planning of the on-the-job training is good, rectifying a weakness from the previous inspection. Much of this training builds on existing skills, and broadens learners' abilities in other work areas related to their jobs. Some employers have introduced a 'buddy' system to help to develop learners' skills. Many learners also have the opportunity to attend relevant in-house training courses such as customer service, telephone techniques or marketing skills workshops. In addition to acquiring and broadening their job skills, learners also improve their personal skills. They grow in confidence and develop a more mature approach to their work activities, particularly in their dealings with customers. Some learners deputise for supervisors in their absence and start to take responsibility for other tasks, such as stock-taking, in addition to their normal job roles. Learners have a good awareness of health and safety issues.

### **Quality of education and training**

88. Good use is made by assessors of short-term targets to aid progress and maintain learner's motivation. All learners are set tasks at each visit related to their NVQ or key skills qualification. Assessors visit learners at least monthly and sometimes every two weeks. They set good short-term targets and encourage learners to set some of their own targets. The targets are very specific and clear, such as the collection of a certain piece of evidence matched to an element or performance criteria of the NVQ. Learners are also set written questions or assignments which are matched to their key skills qualification. Many learners discuss their action plans with their workplace supervisors who give them extra support and guidance. Targets are always thoroughly reviewed at the next assessment visit and learners' progress is carefully monitored. Action-planning is used well following assessment to help learners achieve the next NVQ unit. Learners are very clear about their progress and are motivated and keen to succeed.

89. Resources for off-the-job training are satisfactory, and include workbooks containing mini-assignments and tests, mainly for key skills training. Learners can also use the internet at subcontractors' sites to access a wide range of information sources on customer service and distribution. Learners who attend the main subcontractor are able to access a well-stocked business studies library.

90. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the subcontractors' learning support units provide literacy, numeracy, language and key skills support. Since the previous inspection, the arrangements for key skills training and assessment have improved and are now satisfactory. Key skills tutors work with vocational tutors to ensure key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the NVQ programme and learning materials are relevant. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key skills training and assessment.

91. Although very few learners work towards NVQs in warehousing, the subcontractor staff who train and assess on distribution and warehousing programmes do not have recent occupational knowledge and experience. The internal verifier has experience in

the occupational area, but not directly in warehousing.

92. Progress reviews on retailing, customer service and transportation programmes are weak. Subcontractors' staff and the Chamber's training advisers carry out separate reviews every 12 weeks. Individual learning plans are not routinely used at reviews and learners are often not fully aware of their plan's content and purpose. Some progress review meetings do not include the learner's workplace supervisor, who is sometimes not invited to take part. Recorded comments and actions on progress review documents do not include the clear targets found in assessment action plans. Reviews are not used to set clear mid-term targets for learners. In many instances, comments on review forms in relation to health and safety and equality of opportunity are very superficial, and learners' awareness of these issues is insufficiently reinforced.

93. Some aspects of the internal verification arrangements are weak. Portfolio sampling is not sufficiently planned in advance to ensure that all units and assessors are fairly sampled. Area of learning team meetings do not include standardisation activities or regular discussion of assessment issues. This was noted at the most recent external verifier visit and the Chamber plans to remedy it shortly.

### **Leadership and management**

94. Leadership and management of the area of learning are good. Significant action has been taken to rectify the weaknesses identified by the previous inspection. Retention and achievement rates for work-based learners have improved noticeably, most particularly on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme, and retention rates for New Deal clients are satisfactory. Communication between the Chamber and its subcontractors is good, having improved during the past two years. Subcontractors' quality assurance arrangements are effectively monitored. However, discussions at monthly collaboration meetings between the subcontractors and the Chamber are still not thorough enough. Promotion of equality of opportunity to learners is satisfactory.

**Hairdressing & beauty therapy****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	23	3

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

**Strengths**

- good off-the-job training
- good resources to support learning
- good progress reviews and pastoral support for learners
- effective links between job roles and key skills training

**Weaknesses**

- slow progress towards completion for advanced modern apprentices
- insufficient work-based assessment for many learners

**Achievement and standards**

95. Achievement and retention rates for advanced modern apprentices have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. Of the learners who started in 2002-03, 82 per cent are still in training. However, many advanced modern apprentices currently in training are still making slow progress. The weakness of insufficient work-based assessment identified at the previous inspection has not yet been rectified. The Chamber is aware that the weakness still exists and plans to implement a strategy to improve learners' access to assessment.

96. Retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices have improved steadily since 1998 and are now satisfactory. Of the learners who started a foundation modern apprenticeship in 2000-01, two-thirds were retained and over half completed the full framework. Achievement rates for learners on NVQ programmes have remained steady at approximately 50 per cent since 1998, although numbers of leavers on these programmes are very small.

97. The practical skills and background knowledge of learners are satisfactory and suitable for the amount of time they have spent in training. The quality of learners' portfolios is good.

### **Quality of education and training**

98. Off-the-job training is good. It is offered over 44 weeks for learners who attend day-release courses and continues over the summer period. Employers can choose either to use the off-the-job training offered by the college or provide their own. All learners can attend a wide range of additional training programmes and specialised practical and product knowledge courses. The successful college competition team includes work-based learners, and some employers also encourage learners to take part in local, regional and national competitions. Learners can attend additional in-house training with employers which motivates them and further develops their skills. Seventy-five per cent of the learning sessions observed by inspectors were graded as good, and 25 per cent as very good. Learners are enthusiastic about their training and are able to talk confidently about their learning programme. Since the previous inspection, the college has introduced a number of new initiatives to train the modern apprentices together with other full-time learners. Learners are very happy with the new arrangements and are benefiting from mixing with others in the same area of learning, rather than being taught in a small discrete group. Tutors make good use of the modern apprentices' commercial knowledge during learning sessions which develops their personal skills and confidence and also benefits the full-time learners.

99. Resources to support learners are good. Learners are employed in a variety of modern well-equipped salons. The off-the-job training is carried out in realistic working environments of a good commercial standard. The college is well-equipped with a good range of spacious salons and demonstration facilities. Good-quality resources are used during the off-the-job learning including videos to support practical training. Good use is made of photography to record learners' work. Handouts, textbooks, booklets and guidance notes are well presented, up to date and accurate. Small items of hairdressing equipment such as scissors and brushes, as well as haircare products, are readily available to learners to adequately support all aspects of their training.

100. Learners have a progress review every 12 weeks that focuses on establishing their progress towards their qualification. For most learners this is carried out in the workplace by college staff. At each progress review session, specific targets are set and targets from the previous review are monitored. The Chamber also holds progress reviews every 12 weeks which involve the learner, employer and a training adviser. The learners and all of those involved in their training receive copies of the reviews. Pastoral support for learners is effective, and learners are enthusiastic about the support they receive from both the Chamber and the college. Recently the use of targets has been significantly improved and there is now a strong focus on the achievement of NVQ units and key skills qualifications.

101. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the college's learning support units provide literacy, numeracy, language and key skills support. The key skills training is effectively linked to learners' job roles. Key skills assignments have been developed for hairdressing and beauty therapy to make them relevant to the learner and

their job role. Learners understand key skills training and assessment and consider them to be a relevant part of their programme. A training chart that cross-references the key skills and the NVQ units is used to identify learners' training and assessment needs. Learners start their key skills training at the start of their programme. Evidence from the workplace, such as client questionnaires, is included in the key skills portfolio and learners are encouraged to develop key skills across their assignments. This makes the work easier for the learners to understand and has in some instances prevented the unnecessary duplication of effort as learners' NVQ elements have also been marked as key skills evidence. The college recognises that further work is needed to make key skills training an integral part of the programmes and has plans to implement further changes such as including the use of IT in all NVQ and key skill assignments.

102. Internal verification is now satisfactory, rectifying a weakness from the previous inspection. Work-based assessors are now internally verified. Internal verifiers provide adequate support for assessors.

### **Leadership and management**

103. Leadership and management of the hairdressing and beauty therapy programmes are good. Since the previous inspection the Chamber and the college have introduced a number of new initiatives to address the identified weaknesses. Commitment to staff development is good. For example, a number of the training advisers are working towards qualifications to increase their level of understanding of key skills training and assessment and enable them to better support the modern apprentices.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	30	2

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

**Strengths**

- excellent standard of attainment
- good resources to support learning
- very good workplaces
- exceptionally thorough internal verification

**Weaknesses**

- insufficient integration of key skills training with some learners' NVQ programmes
- inadequate progress reviews

**Achievement and standards**

104. Learners' standards of attainment are excellent. All learners are encouraged to recognise and achieve their full potential. As learners develop and gain new skills, employers ensure that they are given the opportunity to take on additional responsibility in the workplace. Learners are taught practical skills and related background knowledge to a particularly good standard. Employers recognise the great improvement that has taken place in learners' development and training since the previous inspection. A good range of work placements provides a variety of work-experience situations. For example, learners in childcare gain experience looking after children of different ages. Employers are enthusiastic about training. They motivate learners and offer additional training such as an externally certificated course on care practices and another on safe practice. Those training in care for the elderly attend courses on topics such as caring for incontinent clients, and visit a funeral director to discuss bereavement. These training sessions add to the learners' understanding and their ability to cope with a wide range of situations.

105. Portfolios are of a particularly good standard. They are presented well and significantly exceed awarding body requirements. They contain a good range of evidence, particularly for the unit related to child development which is an important aspect of all early years work. Assessments are detailed and planned well with particularly good involvement from learners. Learners complete a plan before each assessment which outlines the resources needed, including the time the assessment will take and the action required by the workplace staff. The plan is agreed and signed by the learner and their assessor. A variety of methods are used to assess learners'



competence. All relevant documents are carefully and thoroughly completed, and signed and dated for authenticity. Observations of assessments are recorded in detail and clearly linked to the NVQ standards. Learners receive prompt and constructive feedback on their performance at the earliest opportunity after assessment.

106. Achievement and retention rates are now satisfactory, rectifying a weakness from the previous inspection. Of those advanced modern apprentices who started in 2002-03, 95 per cent are still in training. The number of learners on foundation modern apprentice programmes is small and interpretation of their performance data is difficult. Historically, when numbers were higher, retention rates were good, averaging around 70 per cent. Of the five foundation modern apprentices who have started since 2001-02, three are still in training.

### **Quality of education and training**

107. Resources to support learning are good. Training rooms are conducive to learning, decorated well and used to display learners' work. All staff are professionally qualified and have appropriate and recent experience. Tutors use a good range of training materials and learners can use books, journals, handouts, leaflets, computers and the internet. Good-quality training materials are also available for practical training and simulations. Many workplaces provide good resources for learners who are unable to attend off-the-job training. Individual training sessions are also available for learners if required. Assessors are flexible and responsive to learners' needs. Induction is satisfactory, memorable and effective, and provides a good foundation for learners' NVQ programmes. Learners are given a detailed information pack and are made aware of equal opportunities policies and the appeals and complaints procedures. Learners appreciate their induction, which gives them confidence at the start of their programme and ensures that they have a full understanding of all aspects of their training.

108. Workplace on early years care and education programmes are good. Workplace supervisors have a good understanding of the NVQ requirements and are able to support learners effectively. Learners are able to work with all age groups within the nursery, ensuring full coverage of the NVQ requirements, and allowing them to extend their experience and to implement what they have learnt on their programme. Employers provide good-quality supervision to ensure the safety of both learners and children.

109. Internal verification is now particularly comprehensive, thorough and effective. This has rectified the weakness of poor assessment practice found at the previous inspection. All internal verifiers are occupationally qualified and confident in their roles and responsibilities. Monitoring documents clearly record internal verification. Regular sampling of assessment activity includes at least one observation of assessor practice for each learner, with more observations carried out if the assessor is inexperienced. NVQ portfolio sampling is regular and includes at least two units for each learner. Internal verifiers also observe meetings between assessors and learners to check assessment-planning practice. Interviews are carried out with learners and are recorded as additional

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evidence of assessors' performance. All internal verifiers complete detailed and comprehensive reports on their sampling of portfolios, observations and interviews. Spot checks are also carried out on assessors' performance. The college has also implemented an internal verifier panel to moderate internal verification and assessor practice on completed NVQ portfolios. Monthly assessor and internal verifier meetings are held to standardise practice. All assessors have induction and information packs, and receive excellent support from the internal verifiers.

110. Off-the-job training during the weekly training sessions is satisfactory. Attendance is good and learners enjoy the sessions. The sessions observed by inspectors were graded as satisfactory. Tutors have detailed session plans with clear aims and objectives that are linked to the NVQ. Learners' interest is sustained and engaged, and they are encouraged to contribute and participate in all activities. Appropriate training methods are used to promote and extend learning. The pace of sessions meets learners' needs. Key learning points are reinforced and adequate checks are made to ensure that learning has taken place. Tutors and learners have a good working relationship.

111. Support for learners is satisfactory throughout their programme. Assessors provide support for personal and social issues and develop close relationships with learners that help build their self-esteem and confidence. Learners value the support they receive very much and recognise that it helps them to stay on programme and achieve their qualification.

112. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language skills support are satisfactory. Learners receive an adequate initial assessment and the college's learning support units provide literacy, numeracy, language and key skills support if needed. Key skills tutors work with vocational tutors to ensure key skills training and assessment are effectively integrated with the NVQ programme and learning materials are relevant. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of key skills training and assessment.

113. Progress reviews are weak. They often do not set clear targets or measure learners' progress towards achievement. They do not identify what action the learner should take before the next progress review and are not effectively used to guide the planning of learners' training. Reviews do not clearly indicate whether any additional support learners receive, such as literacy or numeracy training, is effective or whether other support is needed. Many learners are not given a copy of their progress review form. Progress review records are often not sufficiently detailed, with some comments being vague and descriptive rather than evaluative. Reviews are often very informal and do not involve employers. The reviews carried out by the training advisers are not sufficiently co-ordinated with those carried out by college staff. Individual learning plans are not regularly updated.

114. Key skills training and assessment are not started until late in some learners' programmes and until very recently were not an integral part of most NVQ training sessions. Many learners who have nearly completed their NVQ still have significant numbers of key skills units to achieve. The Chamber has recognised this and emergency action-planning and individual sessions are being used to help learners catch up. From

September 2003, key skills training has been integrated more effectively with the NVQ and workplace evidence is being used to assess key skills. However, this improvement will not benefit those learners nearing the end of their modern apprenticeship.

### **Leadership and management**

115. Leadership and management of health and social care programmes are good. Significant improvements have been made to programmes since the previous inspection through the effective identification and use of best practice from other occupational areas. Formal and informal communications are good. A range of monthly meetings are held to discuss issues which relate to individual learners' performance targets and quality assurance. The Chamber's quality assurance arrangements cover all areas of activity within the health and social care programmes. A range of data are regularly collected, analysed and used to support improvements. All staff are dedicated, motivated and committed to achieving the best possible results for the learner.