

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Alliance Learning Ltd**

**17 February 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 and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

## Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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



## SUMMARY

### The provider

Alliance Learning Limited is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It has three training centres in the Northwest and provides work-based learning for young people in the occupational areas of engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation, and health, social care and public services. Learners work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships.

### Overall judgement

The overall quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in retailing, customer service and transportation is satisfactory, but training in the other three occupational areas is unsatisfactory. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

### GRADES

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

<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Health, social care & public services	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

### KEY STRENGTHS

- good workplaces
- effective assessment
- good initiatives to widen participation in training

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- weak management of training
- slow progress by many learners
- low rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- inadequate key skills training and assessment

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better progress reviews
- better promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace

## THE INSPECTION

1. Sixteen inspectors spent a total of 63 days at Alliance Learning Ltd (Alliance Learning) in February 2003. They interviewed 139 learners, carried out 85 interviews with staff, and visited 60 workplaces. Inspectors observed and graded 19 training and assessment sessions and examined 91 portfolios of evidence. They also examined learners' records, reports from external organisations, and the company's plans, policies and procedures. Inspectors studied the most recent self-assessment report, which had been produced in October 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	2	7	1	0	0	10
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	2	2	0	1	0	6
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Health, social care & public services	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. Alliance Learning is a not-for-profit organisation managed by a group of member companies. It was formed in April 2001 from the merger of two training providers. The company has three training centres, in Bolton, Bury and Wigan, and a head office in Horwich. It employs 68 staff and provides work-based learning for 638 young people. Learners work towards foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships and NVQs in the occupational areas of engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation and health, social care and public services. This training is funded through contracts with Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Councils (LSC).

3. In May 2002, the unemployment rate was 3.5 per cent in Bolton, compared with 3.6 per cent in the Northwest as a whole and 3 per cent nationally. According to the 1991 census, the proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups was 8.3 per cent in Bolton, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 45.4 per cent in Bolton, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally.



## **Work-based learning for young people**

4. In all occupational areas, learners make unsatisfactory progress towards their qualifications. The rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is low in business administration, management and professional, health, social care and public services, and retailing, customer service and transportation. The rate of achievement of key skills awards is low in all occupational areas.

5. Most learning sessions are satisfactory or good. The best learning sessions are well planned, use good resources and enable learners to take a full role. However, some learning sessions do not take adequate account of learners' differing abilities and needs and use poorly prepared learning materials.

6. In health, social care and public services, and retailing, customer service and transportation, learners benefit from a good environment for training, effective learning resources and qualified staff. In business administration, management and professional, and engineering, technology and manufacturing, resources are satisfactory.

7. Most assessment is good. Learners are involved in planning assessments. They understand the standards they must meet and receive useful comments from their assessors.

8. Work placements are good in all occupational areas. Learners are matched to suitable jobs and have a good range of opportunities for learning.

9. In engineering, technology and manufacturing, progress reviews are poor. However, progress reviews are satisfactory in all other areas of learning. Training and assessment in key skills are inadequate. Help with basic skills is weak for a large proportion of learners.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

10. Alliance Learning has a chief executive, four executive managers, five heads of department, five team leaders, 32 tutors, and 21 administrative and support staff. The company has policies on equal opportunities and quality assurance. It produced its second and most recent self-assessment report in October 2002.

### STRENGTHS

- extensive and useful links with other organisations
- effective communications within the company
- good staff development
- good initiatives to widen participation in training
- effective use of feedback

### WEAKNESSES

- inadequate use of management information to monitor performance
- weak management of training
- inadequate arrangements for teaching basic skills
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements
- weak monitoring of subcontractors

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- measurable strategic targets
- better promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace

11. Alliance Learning participates in effective training partnerships and has useful links with other agencies. These activities benefit learners. The company has good links with many other companies and training providers in north Manchester. It also works constructively with most local schools. For example, it is involved in giving school children opportunities to use modern computers and engineering equipment.

12. There is good communication between managers, assessors, tutors and administrative staff. The company uses effective methods to inform learners, employers, staff and managers about developments. Staff are well informed about all aspects of the organisation and understand their roles and responsibilities well. They have regular meetings that cover all the most important activities of the business. There is a meeting of all staff every two months, which is attended by the chief executive. Staff find managers easy to approach.

13. Staff development is good. The company has recently allocated a large budget for

staff training. Staff have yearly appraisals and six-monthly progress reviews, which are used to set training priorities. Staff development is designed to meet the needs of both the company and its individual staff. Staff are encouraged to attend in-house and external training. Staff development is clearly linked to the company's strategic plans.

14. Alliance Learning monitors the recruitment of learners comprehensively and keeps computerised records of their personal details. However, it does not carry out sufficient analysis of trends in each area to assist managers. Managers do not make sufficient use of management information. The current system does not allow them adequately to monitor learners' progress towards their NVQs. Alliance Learning is working to overcome these problems, but it is too soon to judge the effect of its efforts.

15. The day-to-day management of training is weak. Managers are aware of this but have not taken adequate steps to improve important areas of activity. Some improvements have been made but managers have failed to raise standards overall. Twenty-two months after the formation of the company, many important aspects of training are inadequately managed. In several occupational areas, learners are making slow progress towards their qualifications. The company's handling of learners who have transferred from previous training providers has been poor. The management of key skills training is weak but the company has started to improve it. Many learners do not make any real progress with their key skills until after they have achieved their NVQs. Staff confuse basic and key skills. Some employers do not allow learners to attend key skills training. Some staff lack confidence in teaching key skills.

16. The company's strategic plan sets out its main aims clearly. However, some targets are not measurable or clear.

17. Arrangements for additional learning support are inadequate. Initial assessment, including initial assessment of basic skills, is adequate in all areas except for business administration, management and professional. However, some initial assessments do not take sufficient account of previous learning and achievements. Learners who need help with basic skills are given workbooks and additional support. The workbooks are unsuitable for some learners and the additional support focuses on learners' NVQ assessments rather than their basic skills. The company lacks procedures to ensure that learners receive suitable training. Some staff do not understand the aims of basic skills training.

## **Equality of opportunity**

## **Contributory grade 3**

18. The company's equal opportunities policy includes a statement on equal opportunities and procedures for dealing with grievances, complaints and harassment. Equal opportunities is the responsibility of one of the executive managers. Learners are told about the equal opportunities policy and their rights and responsibilities during their induction and progress reviews. All staff have had training in equal opportunities.

19. Most learners know how to use the complaints procedure and have a good understanding of their rights. Alliance Learning has introduced several initiatives to overcome obstacles to training. For example, staff have set up effective links with local schools, youth clubs and community leaders with the aim of recruiting learners from under-represented groups. The marketing team has set targets for recruiting learners from under-represented groups. The company has recruited several women into engineering training and a good number of men into training in care. The recruitment department designs events and publicity to attract learners from a wide range of groups. The company's publications, displays and promotional material contain positive images of learners from under-represented groups.

20. There is satisfactory access for learners with mobility difficulties. Although some premises are unsuitable for learners with mobility difficulties, the company has satisfactory procedures for making alternative arrangements. Alliance Learning tries to ensure that all work-placement providers have an equal opportunities policy. If employers do not have an equal opportunities policy, Alliance Learning suggests that they adopt its own policy. However, it does not monitor equal opportunities in all workplaces. Some employers were displaying material that could be considered offensive.

**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 4**

21. Alliance Learning gathers feedback from learners, employers and staff and uses it to make improvements. It has a clear and effective procedure for collecting, analysing and reporting feedback from learners, employers and staff. Learners answer detailed surveys after induction, midway through their training, and at the end of their learning programmes. Staff use specially designed computer programmes to analyse the results and report the results regularly to the senior management team. Alliance Learning uses the results to improve the quality of its training and tells learners what it is doing about their concerns. It also sends detailed questionnaires to employers and carries out regular telephone surveys.

22. Alliance Learning has procedures to assure the quality of recruitment, initial assessment, training, assessment, progress reviews, resources, and induction for staff and learners. The procedures meet the standards of external validation. Staff have a good understanding of the quality assurance system and have access to all the policies and procedures through the company's intranet. Quality assurance administrators conduct spot checks, internal audits and telephone surveys and report any non-compliance to senior managers. However, the quality assurance arrangements have not raised achievement rates or ensured that all learners receive adequate support. The quality assurance procedures do not focus sufficiently on important measures of performance, such as achievement and retention rates, and learners' progress. Alliance Learning carries out regular internal audits and there are clear directives from senior managers to action improvements, but there is little evidence of continuous improvement. Until recently, there were inadequate procedures for ensuring the consistency of interviews with learners. There is also a planned programme for observing training. Trainers receive written and verbal feedback. However, the feedback lacks critical analysis.

23. The company's monitoring of subcontractors is weak. This affects many learners in engineering and some learners in other areas. Alliance Learning does not carry out sufficient analysis of its subcontractors' performance and is therefore unable to judge the quality of their training. It has recently started to carry out reviews of each learning programme but these are inadequate. They are not effective in monitoring training or learners' achievements and progress. Alliance Learning does not use feedback from learners or employers to analyse subcontractors' performance. Meetings with subcontractors are not adequately minuted. Alliance Learning relies too much on subcontractors' own monitoring arrangements.

Good Practice
<p><i>Alliance Learning hosts a yearly award evening to recognise learners' achievements. Parents and employers are invited and there is good coverage in the local press.</i></p>

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	337	4

24. Alliance Learning provides training in general engineering, motor vehicle engineering and manufacturing. There are 207 advanced modern apprentices, 108 foundation modern apprentices and 22 learners taking NVQs. Learners are recruited through advertising and through Connexions and their employers. Most of the learners are employed. The company tests learners' basic skills and if necessary their key skills during recruitment. Most learners attend the training centre on day release or on a 16-week block release to work towards a level 2 NVQ in engineering. Foundation and advanced modern apprentices also use their time at the training centre to work towards key skills units. However, some learners receive all their training in the workplace and learners in motor vehicle engineering are trained and assessed by a subcontractor. After completing their level 2 NVQs, advanced modern apprentices receive practical training for the level 3 NVQ in the workplace and attend the training centre on day or block release. During these visits, they also receive help with key skills and basic skills. Work-based assessors visit learners at work every six weeks to review their progress. Alliance Learning has 14 engineering staff, all of whom are qualified and occupationally competent. All are qualified work-based assessors for NVQs and five are qualified internal verifiers.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	46		79		238											
Retained*	0		0	0	128	54										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	52	22										
Still in learning	44		62	78	101	42										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	50		67		134											
Retained*	0		2	3	32	24										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	3	2										
Still in learning	39		35	52	34	25										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	21		15		36											
Retained*	0		7	47	24	67										
Successfully completed	0		7	47	15	42										
Still in learning	15		3	20	4	11										

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

## STRENGTHS

- good workplaces
- good assessment in the training centre
- good support for learners

## WEAKNESSES

- slow progress
- poor management of on-the-job training
- poor training in key skills
- poor progress reviews

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more participation by learners at induction
- better resources for basic skills training

25. Learners work in a wide variety of workplaces. Employers support learners in their training. They also take part in various partnerships with training providers that benefit learners. They encourage learners to develop their skills in a wide range of engineering disciplines. Learners are guided by qualified and experienced workplace supervisors. Employers often adjust learners' work schedules so they can carry out more complex tasks. Learners have the opportunity to collect a wide range of evidence in the workplace. Most learners carry out extra activities, in addition to those required for the NVQ. Some employers encourage learners to achieve extra qualifications. This helps learners to progress in their careers. All learners appreciate the training and support they receive in the workplace.

26. At the training centre, assessment is good and training is well planned. Assessment is well planned and fully explained to learners. Before each assessment, learners are told what standards they must achieve. Staff use effective questioning to assess learners' understanding of engineering techniques. Learners receive detailed comments on their performance. After each assessment, assessors and learners agree on any learning that is needed. Activities in the workshops become steadily more complex. This allows learners to develop their practical skills.

27. Learners receive good support. Assessors visit learners frequently in the workplace. Staff respond promptly if learners raise concerns about their workplace or about their training. If learners are made redundant, staff try to find them suitable jobs elsewhere. Staff deal sympathetically with learners who wish to change their learning programme. Learning programmes are often altered to suit learners' new aspirations and circumstances. Alliance Learning has provided subsidised transport to the training centre for learners living some distance from it. Inductions are adequate, although they do little to motivate learners. Learners are not encouraged to take an active role in their induction.

28. Learners make slow progress towards their NVQs and in basic and key skills. Although Alliance Learning's staff visit learners in the workplace frequently, learners' activities at work are rarely used as evidence towards their NVQs. Many learners have low rates of attendance at off-the-job training in basic skills and key skills. Of the foundation modern apprentices who have been in training for 18 months, 44 per cent have not yet produced any work-based evidence for their portfolios. Among advanced modern apprentices, the proportion is 16 per cent. The management information systems for monitoring learners' progress are ineffective. Although Alliance Learning has planned various new initiatives to rectify this weakness, it has not introduced them fully.



29. On-the-job training is poorly managed. Alliance Learning does not carry out enough observations of the training given in the workplace by its own staff. There is little integration of on- and off-the job training. Training in the training centre does not help learners to understand and develop the techniques they are learning at work. Alliance Learning rarely uses observations and witness testimony to identify opportunities for assessment. Learners and employers are not made fully aware of the requirements of the NVQ. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

30. Training in key skills is poor. Learners do not start to work on key skills until late in their training. Training in key skills is rarely integrated with learners' activities at work. Many learners work towards their key skills awards as additional qualifications after achieving their NVQs. Employers and learners are not made fully aware of how to obtain evidence of key skills. Little evidence is gathered from learners' workplaces.

31. Reviews of learners' progress are poor. The targets set for learners are not demanding or measurable. Employers have little involvement in progress reviews. Comments on learners' progress are not routinely sought from employers. Progress reviews are rarely used to reinforce equal opportunities or to discuss correct working practices. Alliance Learning's staff can refer to a set of questions on health and safety and equal opportunities. However, these are not used effectively.

32. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners take a basic skills test and a test of their occupational skills at induction. The results are entered onto a chart, which clearly identifies the support that each learner requires. Alliance Learning tests learners' ability in numeracy, reading, spelling and punctuation and identifies any additional needs. Learners receive a basic skills pack that is tailored to their individual needs. The training centre allocates half a day each week to basic skills training. However, some training sessions are poorly attended. Resources for basic skills training are inadequate. For example, over 60 learners need basic skills support, but the number of staff who teach basic skills has fallen from four to one over the past 12 months.

#### Good Practice

*Learners with one employer produce excellent NVQ portfolios. All the evidence in the portfolios is produced using computers. This improves the presentation of the work and helps learners to develop their information technology (IT) skills. Learners include digital photographs of their work and detailed explanations of the work shown in the photographs. Evidence is clearly referenced to the NVQ standards. The employer gives the learners time to work on their portfolios while they are at work.*

**Business administration, management & professional****Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	82	4

33. Alliance Learning provides training in business administration for 82 learners at three training centres. Two are advanced modern apprentices, 69 are foundation modern apprentices and 11 are working towards NVQs. All the learners are employed. Learners can start their training at any time of the year. They can be referred to Alliance Learning by Connexions or they can apply for training directly. Applicants for training attend an interview and sit initial tests in basic and key skills. All learners attend an induction with Alliance Learning and are given an induction pack. Most learners attend half a day's training at the training centre for four weeks out of every five. Training officers assess learners in the workplace every three to six weeks and review their progress every six weeks. There are four assessors and three internal verifiers in this area of learning.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4		17													
Retained*	0		12	71												
Successfully completed	0		4	24												
Still in learning	1		1	6												

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	40		55		68											
Retained*	1		13	24	34	50										
Successfully completed	0		2	4	7	10										
Still in learning	32		24	44	13	19										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	7		11		5											
Retained*	2		3		2	40										
Successfully completed	1		2		2	40										
Still in learning	4		7		0	0										

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

## STRENGTHS

- wide range of work placements matched to individual learners' needs
- good assessment

## WEAKNESSES

- low rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- slow progress
- poor key skills training
- insufficient basic skills support for some learners

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more involvement of employers in progress reviews

34. Employers are well matched to learners' individual needs. After filling in an application form, applicants attend an in-depth interview and initial assessment. The results are entered onto a database and a curriculum vitae is produced that lists all the learners' educational achievements and needs for occupational training. This information is matched carefully to details of suitable vacancies. Alliance Learning keeps in regular contact with applicants and employers and directs applicants to suitable employers for job interviews. Learners have a wide choice of employers. These range from magistrates' courts, solicitors' firms, small and large manufacturers and service organisations to small businesses. Learners also have a wide choice of areas in which to work. This means that there are opportunities for applicants from the areas around all three training centres in Greater Manchester. Alliance Learning gives all learners an

induction. This takes place at one of the training centres or at the employer's premises. The induction covers health and safety, equal opportunities, and rules and regulations and introduces learners to the NVQ. A progress review is carried out two weeks after the learner starts work, to make sure the learner has settled in and to identify any needs for support. Further progress reviews are carried out every six weeks.

35. Alliance Learning uses a wide range of assessment methods. This enables learners to show their competence. Assessments in the workplace are well planned and make good use of learners' everyday activities. Portfolios contain a good mix of records of observations, witness testimonies, evidence produced in the workplace, and records of professional discussions. Workplace supervisors testify that learners' work is their own. Alliance Learning uses a comprehensive range of written and verbal questions to check learners' knowledge and understanding. Learners are encouraged to attend half a day's off-the-job training each week. Learners receive details of the training sessions well in advance. Tutors cover each subject thoroughly, although they do not always take sufficient account of learners' existing understanding and work experience. Learners who cannot attend the off-the-job training sessions receive individual support in the workplace. All the assessors have suitable assessors' qualifications. Of the four assessors, two have teaching qualifications and two are qualified internal verifiers. Internal verification is adequate and satisfies the awarding body's requirements.

36. The rate of achievement of the apprenticeship framework is low. Since April 2001, only a quarter of advanced modern apprentices have achieved the full apprenticeship framework. Of the 68 foundation modern apprentices who have started training during the same period, only 13 remain in learning. Of those who left, only 13 per cent achieved the full apprenticeship framework.

37. Many foundation modern apprentices have not achieved their NVQs after 21 months in training. Some learners who have been in training for 17 months have not yet completed half of their NVQ units. Three foundation modern apprentices had to wait three months before starting their NVQs because of poor administrative procedures. Alliance Learning lacks effective arrangements to ensure that learners continue to receive support during staff changes. Sometimes employers are not made aware of learners' slow progress. Alliance Learning has taken various steps recently to rectify this weakness and learners are beginning to make swifter progress. It has also recently started to set appropriate tasks and targets during progress reviews. Learners and employers receive the records of the progress reviews. However, some workplace supervisors do not play a full part in progress reviews.

38. Learners do not have enough opportunities to acquire key skills through their occupational work. Some learners do not use evidence towards their NVQs as evidence of their key skills. One learner was repeating work that had already been done for the NVQ. Key skills training is available at the training centres but some learners do not attend it and the training is not always related to learners' NVQs. The three training centres lack a coherent approach to key skills training and there is little sharing of good practice among tutors and assessors. Although some key skills training is integrated with

occupational training, many learners do not start to work towards their key skills awards until they have completed their NVQs.

39. Basic skills support is unsatisfactory. All learners take a basic skills test at induction. However, the results are not used appropriately. Learners who need extra help with basic skills do not receive adequate support. They are given workbooks without suitable support from tutors. The completed workbooks are rarely checked by assessors and learners do not always receive sufficient feedback on their work. The workbooks are unsuitable for some learners.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	56	3

40. Alliance Learning provides training for 56 learners in retailing, customer service and distribution and warehousing. Eight are advanced modern apprentices, nine are foundation modern apprentices and 39 are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Most learners are recruited by referral from Connexions or apply as a result of personal recommendations or direct advertising. All the learners are employed. Employers range from large retailers to small offices and warehouses. All applicants are interviewed and sit an initial test of basic and key skills if necessary. All learners attend an induction. Learners in lift truck driving attend off-the-job training at Alliance Learning's head office. One of Alliance Learning's training centres provides a range of off-the-job training in background knowledge. Learners who cannot attend the training centre receive training in the workplace. Learners' progress is reviewed every six weeks. There are five staff for this area of learning. All are qualified assessors and two are internal verifiers. All the staff have relevant and up-to-date occupational experience and two staff will soon be attending further training to update their occupational skills.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		9		11											
Retained*	0		0	0	6	55										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	3	27										
Still in learning	1		6	67	1	9										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		25		32											
Retained*	0		2	8	16	50										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	2	6										
Still in learning	2		6	24	1	3										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	22		33		23											
Retained*	1		6	18	18	78										
Successfully completed	0		3	9	13	57										
Still in learning	20		16	48	3	13										

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

## STRENGTHS

- good range of workplaces
- good resources for off-the-job training
- effective assessment
- high rate of achievement of extra qualifications

## WEAKNESSES

- low rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- poor key skills training

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more structured basic skills training

41. Learners have a wide choice of workplaces, which include large retailers, local and

international warehouses and small offices. Employers approach Alliance Learning for suitable training. Employers' needs are carefully matched to those of learners. Learners, employers and assessors take part in assessing learners' occupational skills in the workplace. Learners then start on a suitable training programme that has the full support of their employers. Alliance Learning's staff have good relationships with employers. Employers receive details of learners' off-the job training, which includes portfolio-building and background knowledge sessions. Close liaison between workplace supervisors and assessors ensures that learners have good opportunities to develop their skills. Employers understand and value learners' qualifications.

42. Alliance Learning has good resources for off-the job training. All off-the-job training takes place in a good learning environment. Learners use a wide range of equipment. This includes personal protective equipment, training aids, display forms for visual merchandising, and cash registers. The head office has a well-equipped training centre for lift truck driving. Learners in customer service work from a range of packs that cover the relevant legislation. Staff update these regularly, using information from the Internet. Staff draw on their own knowledge and occupational experience to enhance learners' understanding.

43. Alliance Learning makes effective use of observations to assess learners' competence. Learners' make innovative use of digital recording to enhance the range of evidence in their portfolios. This helps them make faster progress towards their qualifications. Assessments are planned in consultation with learners and employers. This makes assessment effective and minimises disruption for the employer. Employers often change work schedules so that learners can meet the requirements of their assessments. Learners are set suitable tasks and short-term targets, which help them to collect evidence. Training sessions are well attended. Individual learners' activities in the training sessions are planned to tie in with the tasks they will be assessed on. The records of progress reviews show learners' progress towards specific units. However, employers are not always invited to attend the progress reviews.

44. A high proportion of learners achieve extra qualifications. These include qualifications in first aid, basic food hygiene, manual handling and lift truck driving. Over 50 per cent of learners have already worked towards extra qualifications and further learners plan to do so.

45. The rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is low. Of the 57 foundation modern apprentices who started their training between April 2001 and August 2002, only two achieved their apprenticeship frameworks. Of the 32 foundation modern apprentices who left training during the same period, only 47 per cent achieved their NVQs. During this period, the average rate of retention was 32 per cent. Of the 20 advanced modern apprentices who started their training between April 2001 and August 2002, only two have achieved their apprenticeship framework. Thirty-five per cent are still in training but their progress has been slow. Learners who are working towards NVQs have satisfactory rates of achievement. Between April 2001 and August 2002, 65 per cent of learners achieved their NVQs, while 13 per cent remained in



training.

46. Key skills training and assessment are poor for many learners. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Key skills training and assessment are not integrated with occupational training. Alliance Learning has made some attempts to integrate key skills training with occupational training and to raise learners' awareness of key skills. However, it lacks a coherent strategy for key skills training and assessment. For example, all the assessors in this area of learning have been working towards a key skills qualification but this is currently on hold.

47. Basic skills training is satisfactory. Learners' basic skills are tested at induction using suitable diagnostic methods. Needs for additional support are recorded on learners' individual learning plans. Learners have workbooks to help them with punctuation and spelling. Learners then resit the initial test to measure their progress. Learners who still need extra support are then referred to a basic skills tutor. Learners can also receive individual support. However, some staff do not understand this process.

#### Good Practice

*Learners taking level 3 NVQs produce a project that involves setting out an improvement they would make to their workplace. They give a presentation of their findings in the training centre. The presentation is recorded on video and the employer is invited to attend.*

*One employer encourages learners to complete their NVQs by offering wage rises of 10p an hour for every unit completed.*

*Every fifth week, the assessors have a free week. Few meetings are planned for this week, which allows assessors to plan assessments and lessons and to catch up with paperwork.*

**Health, social care & public services****Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	163	4

48. Alliance Learning provides training in care and early years care and education for 163 learners. There are 38 advanced modern apprentices in care and early years care and education. There are 41 foundation modern apprentices in care and early years care and education. All modern apprentices work towards key skills at level 2. Thirty-two learners are working towards level 3 NVQs in care and early years care and education. Fifty-two learners are working towards level 2 NVQs in care and early years care and education.

49. Most of the learners are employed. Learners work in various settings, including nursing and residential homes, day centres, nurseries, playgroups, and primary schools. Learners can start their training at any time. All applicants for training are interviewed by a member of the care team. New learners have inductions to their learning programmes and to their workplaces. During the inductions, Alliance Learning tests learners' basic and key skills and identifies the skills learners need to use at work. All assessment for the NVQs takes place in the workplace. Most learners are assessed by Alliance Learning's staff. Six staff are involved in training and assessment. Three of these, including the head of department, act as internal verifiers. Learners attend training and portfolio-building sessions at three training centres. Their progress is reviewed every six to eight weeks.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	7		57													
Retained*	0		2	4												
Successfully completed	0		0	0												
Still in learning	7		31	54												

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	10		90		44											
Retained*	0		16	18	17	39										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	1	2										
Still in learning	8		32	36	1	2										

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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	58		66		4											
Retained*	0		13	20	4	100										
Successfully completed	0		11	17	2	50										
Still in learning	54		30	45	0	0										

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

## STRENGTHS

- well-structured and effective induction
- good resources for NVQ learning

## WEAKNESSES

- low rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- insufficient integration of key skills and occupational training
- inadequate basic skills training

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- wider range of learning materials for level 3 NVQs
- better progress reviews
- better individual learning plans

50. The induction is well structured and is effective in motivating learners. It provides a good introduction to the learning programmes. Learners have a good understanding of the requirements of their learning programme and are able to work independently. A detailed booklet covers all the main topics dealt with at induction, including equal opportunities, and the appeals and complaints procedures. The information in the booklet is reinforced by effective questioning to check that learners understand it. During the induction, learners analyse their roles at work. This analysis, together with additional information from learners and employers, is used to match learners' work to their qualifications.

51. At the training centres, learners work in designated training rooms, where the atmosphere encourages learning. There are good-quality materials for practical simulations and teaching. Learners can refer to books, journals, handouts and leaflets and can work on computers. Staff use a good range of learning materials for level 2 NVQs but some of the materials used for level 3 NVQs are not suitable. Most workplaces are of a good quality and provide good resources for learners. Learners find their assessors easy to contact and responsive to their needs. For example, some learners are taught individually or in small groups in the workplace. Alliance Learning provides a good handbook for employers. Employers are supportive and understand the requirements of learners' NVQs. They provide good supervision to help learners develop their practical skills. Employers also provide extra training to help learners develop their knowledge and the skills they use in their jobs. There have recently been some staff changes. Alliance Learning has managed the changes well and has kept learners informed of any temporary arrangements for providing support.

52. The rate of achievement of apprenticeship frameworks is very low. Since April 2001, only 6 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 2 per cent of foundation modern apprentices have achieved their full apprenticeship frameworks. However, 59 per cent of advanced and foundation modern apprentices have achieved their NVQs. Since April 2001, the rate of retention has been low. However, a high proportion of the learners who have started training during 2002-03 have remained in training. Although some learners are making good progress, nearly 60 per cent are not on target to achieve their qualifications within the allocated time. Learners have regular progress reviews but the progress reviews are not used to set clear and demanding targets.

53. Training in key skills is not integrated with occupational training and work towards learners' NVQs. Learners' assignments are not designed to generate evidence of key skills. Some learners are not using their everyday activities at work to provide evidence of key skills. Learners and employers lack awareness of the key skills requirements. Training sessions in key skills are poorly attended. However, some staff have taken steps to improve the training in key skills. For example, one member of staff has started to integrate key skills training with other learning and has drawn links between key skills and NVQ units.

54. Training in basic skills is inadequate. Alliance Learning has identified 45 learners as needing basic skills support. It gives learners a basic skills workbook, but this is

inappropriate for their needs and abilities. Learners who need help with basic skills are visited more frequently in the workplace by their assessors. Although they receive extra help with completing their NVQs, they do not receive extra help with acquiring the skills they need to progress in the workplace. Some learners are not aware of the help that is available. Most learning plans do not record any additional learning needs or include an action plan.