

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Prospects College**

**25 March 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

Prospects College is the trading name of Sentra Training Services Ltd, a Group Training Association. Prospects College provides training and assessment for young people in South Essex. The company has modern apprentices and national vocational qualification (NVQ) learners in engineering, construction, retailing and customer services. Prospects College also has a foundation programme for Life Skills learners. There are 277 young people in training. All advanced modern apprentices are employed by local companies. Foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners are either employed, on a work placement or working at Prospects College. There are five foundation subcontractors and one engineering subcontractor.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the training in engineering is good. The training in construction and retailing is satisfactory, as is that on foundation programmes. The leadership and management of Prospects College and its arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory. Prospects College's approach to equality of opportunity is good.

### GRADES

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

Construction	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

## PROSPECTS COLLEGE

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

<b>Foundation programmes</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- thorough and effective strategic planning
- very good communications
- thorough and effective self-assessment process
- particularly inclusive learning programmes
- good teaching
- good development of learners' skills and confidence

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate monitoring of subcontractors
- insufficient use of data
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of feedback from employers
- better understanding of NVQs by employers
- more formal monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace

## THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 22 days with Prospects College during March 2003. They interviewed 73 learners and 20 workplace supervisors, managers and employers. Inspectors interviewed 22 members of staff, six trainers from subcontracted companies and a group of 10 external partners. Inspectors observed and graded 17 training and assessment sessions. Additionally, five reviews, one assessment and a recruitment event were observed, but ungraded as no learning was expected to take place. Inspectors examined a range of documents including 43 portfolios of evidence, 61 learners' records, employers' files, minutes of meetings, staff curriculum vitae, plans, policies and procedures, quality assurance records, assessment and internal verification records and reports from awarding bodies. They studied Prospect College's self-assessment report, which had been updated in December 2002 in preparation for inspection.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	4	4	0	0	0	8
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Foundation programmes	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. Sentra Training Services Ltd (Sentra) was established in 1969 as a group training association for the engineering industry. The organisation was renamed Prospects College in January 2002. The company is a registered charity with a non-executive board of director trustees. There are two training centres, in Southend-on-Sea and Basildon. Engineering training is delivered at the Basildon training centre, while all other training is through the Southend-on-Sea training centre. The company has set up learning guidance and learning support services which are available to all learners. Prospects College currently trains 179 modern apprentices, 34 learners on NVQ training programmes and 64 on the Learning Gateway Life Skills programme. All advanced modern apprentices are employed by local companies. Foundation modern apprentices are either employed, on work placement or work at Prospects College. Training and assessment is provided in construction, engineering, retailing and customer services and foundation programmes. A local college is subcontracted to train a small number of the engineering learners who work for one company. On the foundation programme, five local subcontractors provide the training element of the programme. Prospects College employs 65 staff.

3. Prospects College holds a contract with Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide work-based learning for young people. Unemployment in the Essex LSC area is low, at 1.9 per cent in March 2003, compared with 2.7 per cent for England. However, in many of the areas where Prospects College have learners, this rate is higher. In Southend on Sea, unemployment is 3.1 per cent and in Basildon it is 2.2 per cent. In Southend on Sea, 2.5 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups, compared with 6.2 per cent for England. In 2001, 52 per cent of school leavers in Essex achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above, compared with the average for England of 47.9 per cent.



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

4. Work-based learning for young people is satisfactory in construction, and in retailing and customer services programmes. The engineering training is good. There are good retention and achievement rates in engineering. In construction, retention and achievement rates are generally satisfactory. In retailing and customer services, achievement has traditionally been low, however, retention rates are improving and there are signs that achievement rates are also increasing. The quality of learners' work is good in all areas of learning. Learners develop skills, confidence and competence at Prospects College and at work. They make satisfactory progress towards achieving their qualifications.

5. All learning sessions observed during inspection were satisfactory or better, and 71 per cent were good or very good. Off-the-job learning is well planned and a variety of learning methods are used by trainers. Trainers are enthusiastic and supportive of learners and encourage their development. There are good employers in engineering, and many learners benefit from additional qualifications and progression in the workplace. Some employers have insufficient understanding of learners' progress and the requirements of the NVQ. None of the areas of learning make effective use of individual learning plans. Initial assessment is weak in engineering and little use is made of initial assessment in devising individual learning plans. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactory in most areas, although there is insufficient work-based assessment in construction. Internal verification in engineering is not sufficiently well planned. In construction programmes arrangements for finding work placements for learners are inadequate.

## **Life Skills**

6. Life Skills training as part of the foundation programmes is satisfactory. Learners gain a range of additional accredited qualifications. Neither learners nor trainers are clear about what constitutes successful achievement of the programme. Forty-five per cent of learners gain a job within three months of completing the training programme. Retention rates are generally satisfactory.

7. All learning sessions observed during inspection were satisfactory or better, and four of the five observed sessions were good or very good. Training is imaginative, well planned and relevant to the learners' needs. The training programmes are successful in developing learners' confidence and self-esteem. Jobsearch is particularly effective. Individual learning plans are not used effectively, and many learners have identical learning plans. Arrangements for finding work placements for learners are inadequate. The programme has many interesting and innovative short courses that provide a broad range of learning experiences and appeal to the learners' interests and needs.

**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT****Grade 3**

8. Prospects College is a not-for-profit organisation, governed by the non-executive board of Sentra, with seven trustees. The board oversees the strategic planning and financial management of the company. Prospects College has two full-time directors. The chief executive is responsible for the strategic management, business development, finance and sales of the organisation. The operations director is responsible for the general running of the organisation, the management of training resources and quality assurance. An operations manager co-ordinates and manages the government-funded learning. Prospects College has managers for recruitment and marketing, finances, learning support and each area of learning. The board meets every two months and there are monthly meetings for the two directors. Teams of managers, assessors, trainers and internal verifiers meet each week to review learners' progress and to discuss training programmes and assessment practice. Prospects College employs 62 full-time and three part-time staff. Additionally, six subcontractors give learners training in engineering and foundation programmes. There is a separate business training group, with six staff, which looks after training for businesses. Prospects College also offers learndirect courses, work-based learning and qualifications for adults and is part of a partnership that trains New Deal clients. The organisation has an equality and diversity plan, equal opportunities policy and a complaints and appeals procedure. In 1996, the organisation achieved the Investor in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its staff, and was re-accredited, most recently in 2001. There is an effective annual appraisal process where training and development is identified for staff. Since 1999, Prospects College has held external recognition for being positive about disabled people.

9. A learning support unit is responsible for the literacy and numeracy support for all learners. Currently, 24 learners, 9 per cent of the total learners, are receiving this support. Learners complete a basic skills agency test to identify their additional support needs. Learners who attend Prospects College receive appropriate and regular support. There is very little evidence of learners in the workplace receiving similar support. One of the three support tutors has an adult literacy core curriculum certificate and the other has a certificate in learning support. None of the support tutors holds teaching or appropriate certificates for teaching learners with additional literacy and numeracy support needs.

10. Prospects College produced its first self-assessment report in May 1999. Reports are produced every year and the most recent self-assessment report was updated in December 2002 in preparation for inspection.

## **STRENGTHS**

- thorough and effective strategic planning
- very good communications
- thorough and effective self-assessment process
- good use of feedback from learners to improve training
- extensive links with external organisations
- particularly inclusive learning programmes

## **WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate monitoring of subcontractors
- insufficient use of data
- ineffective quality assurance of some aspects of training

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better use of feedback from employers
- more formal monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace

11. Prospects College has a good strategic plan with clear aims and realistic targets. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff are fully involved in the strategic planning process. They have a good understanding of the organisation's mission, aims and objectives. There is good analysis of local industry and educational data for long-term planning. Managers have key performance indicators that are well linked to the strategic plan. Copies of the strategic plan are effectively shared with external organisations and agencies.

12. Internal and external communications are good. All staff are well informed through a wide range of meetings. Specific meetings dealing with quality assurance and equality of opportunity are particularly effective in identifying issues and improvements. Staff attend a number of awaydays to work on operational and strategic issues, including self-assessment. A well-written in-house newspaper is published every three months. There is excellent communication and sharing of good practice with other training providers and external stakeholders. External communication with employers and partners is regular and effective.

13. Prospects College works hard to develop its links with external organisations. There is excellent collaboration with local schools, the local education authority and pupil referral units in further developing the programme for excluded year 10 and 11 pupils and the community plan for Southend-on-Sea. Connexions supplies the college with base line data for research and reports to help the college monitor the quality of its service for learners with additional learning and support needs. In engineering, an employers' network has been developed effectively and its membership has increased

from zero to 68 companies in the 18 months it has been running.

14. The management information system is inadequate and target-setting at programme level is ineffective. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. There is some monitoring of performance against LSC targets, including learners starting, leaving and completing programmes each month. Retention and achievement rates are not routinely used by managers or discussed at team or managers' meetings. Few staff are aware of individual or team targets. It is unclear how occupational areas and the team responsible for recruitment contribute to the overall organisational targets.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 2**

15. Prospects College has an innovative equality and diversity plan which sets out its targets and action plans for equality of opportunity. This plan identifies the challenges facing Prospects College in improving participation by learners from under-represented groups in careers such as construction and engineering. There are clear ethnicity and gender recruitment targets. However, staff have a poor understanding of these targets and of their performance in achieving them. There are very few women on construction courses and none on engineering courses. Historical data are recorded, but current participation statistics are not available or routinely used. Marketing materials and promotional activities are effective and Prospects College is trying to improve participation of under-represented groups. Prospects College has used the women on construction programmes as positive role models. Prospects College has started to audit its premises and some of its learning materials. Neither of the two training centres are accessible for learners in wheelchairs, however, work has started to improve access and facilities. There are plans to check that all learning materials, assessment and employers' recruitment and training are free from bias. Prospects College has established productive and successful links with a wide range of external organisations. Disability specialists have been contacted to arrange appropriate support for learners. There is active promotion to learners from disadvantaged groups, including excluded year 10 and 11 pupils, ex-offenders, homeless people and learners with additional learning and social needs. Learners who might not have participated in learning have been attracted to training through the innovative Life Skills programme with a range of interesting options that appeal to learners. A wide range of courses is available for learners from levels 1 to 3. Prospects College has ensured that potential applicants are not faced with any barriers to learning. Many learners have few or no formal qualifications and have not been in training or education for some years. The recruitment process is fair and open, and is carried out over two weeks. Prospective learners attend guidance sessions, have an interview and initial assessment and a two-day training trial in the occupational area. Some trainers and managers are former learners and are excellent role models for learners.

16. All staff have received up-to-date training in equality and diversity during the past year. Learners are given training in equality of opportunity as part of their induction. Learners who attend the training centre in Southend-on-Sea and half of the engineering learners have attended follow-up workshops. There is no similar training for learners in the workplace. Generally, learners' understanding of their rights, responsibilities and equal opportunities is satisfactory. There is insufficient formal monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices. There is insufficient checking of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity through the progress review process. Some of the staff who carry out progress reviews use closed and very brief questions to check the learners' understanding. Prospects College has a well-maintained and recorded complaints and anti-harassment system. Complaints are dealt with effectively and swiftly.

## Quality assurance

## Contributory grade 3

17. Prospects College has clear operating procedures. Well-written quality assurance procedures cover most aspects of the learners' experience. Staff have a good understanding of existing procedures and are involved in developing and introducing new procedures. Quality assurance activities are well planned throughout the year. The internal audit system effectively checks that paper records are kept up to date. A team of staff from across the organisation meet each week to discuss how training and resources can be developed and improved. Good practice is shared effectively in Prospects College among training staff and with external organisations and training providers. A lesson observation system, introduced six months ago, has been particularly effective and is well documented. The organisation carries out frequent surveys of learners' views at many stages of the programme, including at recruitment, induction, informal group discussions, formal reviews and through learners' questionnaires. The findings are analysed by programme area and for all learners. Prospects College has effective action plans to deal with problems raised through learners' feedback, which are available to learners. There have been many improvements to construction workshops, registration, and health and safety during induction. Follow-up questionnaires show that learners feel that many aspects of their programme are better. There has recently been an evaluation of employers' feedback. However, the sample size was small in retailing and customer service, where only two employers responded. Some changes have been made to the employers' information pack. The employers' feedback system is not yet sufficiently developed to demonstrate significant changes or developments. Prospects College has a strategy to improve retention and achievement rates and has recently appointed a member of staff to monitor learners' progress and attendance. Several areas of learning are starting to show signs of improvement in achievement and retention rates for current learners. There is insufficient formal quality assurance or monitoring of many aspects of the learners' experience in the workplace, including on-the-job learning and support. Initial assessment, induction, individual learning plans and learners' progress reviews are not effectively quality assured. Individual learning plans are used ineffectively in many areas of learning.

18. The organisation has clear and detailed contracts with its subcontractors. One of the foundation programme subcontractors is monitored effectively, however, this monitoring has not been applied to all of the subcontractors. Prospects College managers have poor access to information on subcontracted learners and their achievements and progress. A few engineering learners with one employer have their training subcontracted to a local college. The employer is mainly responsible for monitoring the college. Prospects College has obtained some of the college's quality assurance information, including copies of progress reviews, achievement and pass rates and summaries of teaching and learning observations.

19. Assessment is satisfactory in most programme areas. In construction, there is insufficient workplace assessment. Internal verification is generally effective, with well-maintained records, sampling plans and useful feedback for assessors. In engineering, internal verification, including sampling strategies, interim verification and observations of

assessors carrying out workplace assessment are not well planned.

20. Staff are involved in the self-assessment process. Many of the weaknesses and some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are the same as those found by inspectors. Prospects College has an effective development plan, which is frequently monitored and updated at the quality improvement team meetings.

#### Good Practice

*Prospects College has published a well-written and innovative equality and diversity plan that is endorsed by the chief executive and the chairman. The plan has been circulated to all employers, staff and external consultants. It sets out the challenges and targets for Prospects College and the action plan for achieving success. It also includes examples of good practice. The plan makes good use of local data.*

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Construction

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	37	3

21. There are 82 learners in construction training. Eleven advanced and 37 foundation modern apprentices are taking NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in trowel occupations, carpentry and joinery, wood occupations, and decorative occupations. There are 23 NVQ learners working towards NVQs at level 2 in trowel, wood and decorative occupations. The remaining 11 learners are working towards NVQs at level 1 in trowel and wood occupations. Most learners are recruited by Prospects College. Learners find out about their programmes through current learners, Connexions, schools and local publicity. Potential learners attend a two-week recruitment event that includes an interview, introduction to the course and training centre, initial assessment and a two-day vocational taster in their chosen subject. All the learners working towards NVQs at level 1 have identified additional learning or support needs. All advanced modern apprentices and 16 per cent of the foundation modern apprentices are employed. Learners are matched with employers offering work placements by a link officer. Employers make the final selection at interview. Learners on the NVQ Training programme who gain a work placement or are employed are generally transferred to a foundation modern apprenticeship. Learners who are not employed or on work placements attend the training centre full time, others attend one day each week for practical, theoretical and, where appropriate, key skills training. Learners can start training with Prospects College at any time of the year. All learners have an induction in the training centre. Prospects College provides a programme for 14-16 year olds in construction. These learners work towards basic craft skills qualifications and a number have progressed onto the main programmes. There are six qualified trainers who also carry out assessments, mainly in the training centre. Four of the assessors are qualified internal verifiers and the other two are working towards this qualification. Trainers carry out progress reviews every four weeks, either in the workplace or at the training centre. Trainers additionally monitor learners' progress each week, and pass the information to the operations manager. Prospects College was unable to provide accurate data for 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)																
	2002-03		2001-02		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		11		22											
Retained*	0		9		5	23										
Successfully completed	0		0		5	23										
Still in learning	1		9		1	5										

\*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		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		14		1											
Retained*	0		6	43	1	100										
Successfully completed	0		6	43	1	100										
Still in learning	1		0	100	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

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	30		16													
Retained*	0		8	50												
Successfully completed	0		8	50												
Still in learning	26		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

- particularly good on-the-job training
- good off-the-job training
- very good standard of practical work produced by learners

## **WEAKNESSES**

- insufficient work placements
- insufficient assessment in the workplace
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better understanding by employers of NVQs and modern apprenticeship frameworks

22. Learners receive particularly good and varied on-the-job training. Their employers and workplace supervisors spend time helping learners and supporting their development. Employers are enthusiastic and keen to help the learners to make progress. Learners are often moved around to different sites to give them a variety of activities and tasks. Learners develop knowledge, skills and competence that match the NVQ requirements. There are good opportunities for learners to produce evidence of their competences from the workplace. Learners enjoy their work and training and make good progress. Prospects College trainers have developed good working relationships with learners, employers and work-placement providers.

23. Off-the-job training is good. This was recognised in the self-assessment report. Trainers are enthusiastic and have good occupational skills and knowledge. They use a good variety of teaching styles and techniques according to learners' needs. The communications key skills training is well integrated with the learners' programme by occupational trainers. Appropriate attention is paid to health and safety. Learners are encouraged to work at their own pace. Trainers give learners a good level of individual attention and support. The structure of the off-the-job training is very flexible, and learners can attend training to suit their needs or the requirements of their employers or work placement. Learners have access to good computing facilities where they can practise for their health and safety test, prepare curriculum vitae and work on the presentation of their portfolios of evidence. They use the Internet to collect information to support their knowledge development and to find job opportunities. Numeracy and literacy support is adequate and appropriate to the construction area.

24. Learners produce good practical work of an industry standard. For example, within six months of starting the programme, one painting and decorating foundation modern apprentice was redecorating a church to a particularly high standard and was able to apply the finishing coats to walls, ceilings, doors and skirting boards. On another job, a bricklaying learner was carrying out facing brickwork on a small, good-quality housing development site. Employers, work-placement providers and trainers set demanding and challenging standards and targets. The learners work hard to achieve these standards.

25. Retention rates on the modern apprenticeship programme have improved from 26 per cent in 1999-2000, to 43 per cent in 2001-02 and 82 per cent in 2001-02. All learners who reach the end of their programme achieve their full qualification. Achievement rates are satisfactory. There are many learners still in training for 2001-02 and 2002-03. Retention and achievement rates on the NVQ training programmes are satisfactory, at 50 per cent in 2001-02.

26. A number of learners have completed their practical and background knowledge training and are waiting for a work placement. Without appropriate work placements learners cannot generate the required work-based evidence for their qualification. Prospects College had identified this weakness and a new link officer was appointed in the four months before inspection. The link officer, who has extensive construction industry experience, has set up an additional 21 good work placements during this short period of time.

27. There is insufficient workplace assessment. Trainers visit learners in the workplace every four weeks to carry out progress reviews and to help learners to identify the evidence they can provide from work. Occasionally assessors carry out observations confirming the work carried out by learners. Assessments rely on job write-ups, diaries, log books, photographs and witness statements. Some employers do not understand the NVQs and modern apprenticeship frameworks sufficiently. They are not able to fully support learners in identifying work-based evidence for the NVQ and key skills.

28. Individual learning plans are filled in at the start of training and few are updated, reviewed or modified throughout training. Some individual learning plans are incomplete and inaccurate. There are no target completion dates on some individual learning plans. Individual learning plans are not used at progress reviews and learners do not understand their importance.

#### **Good Practice**

*Before learners carry out practical training exercises at the training centre they have to carry out a risk assessment. This reinforces their understanding of the health and safety training.*

**Engineering, technology & manufacturing****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	85	2

29. There are 85 learners on work-based engineering programmes, of whom 78 are advanced modern apprentices and seven are foundation modern apprentices. Learners are working towards NVQs at level 2 and 3 in mechanical engineering, fabrication and welding and electrical installation. Prospects College has a contract with a local college to provide further education training to national certificate standard for learners with one employer. Learners find out about their programmes through direct contact from Prospects College, Connexions and referral from employers. Learners generally start the training programme in September. All learners complete a basic skills and key skills test when they join the programme. Some employers also have their own additional selection criteria. Prospects College trainers carry out induction at the training centre in Basildon. Off-the-job training, including key skills training and assessment, is carried out on block-release at the training centre. The block-release course is normally 26 weeks and leads to a level 2 NVQ in performing engineering operations. Prospects College trainers, who are all occupationally qualified and experienced, carry out workplace assessments. Learners receive a review of their progress at six-weekly intervals during their block release and subsequently in the workplace. Trainers are responsible for pastoral care, health and safety, and assessing employers' suitability. There are six trainers and all have assessment qualifications. One has an internal verification qualification and one is working towards this qualification. The operations manager co-ordinates and manages the internal verification activities.

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		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	26		15		25		26		25		28		25			
Retained*	0		0		0		3		17	68	18	64	17	68		
Successfully completed	0		0		0		3		17	68	18	64	17	68		
Still in learning	26		14		21		17		0	0	0	0	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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	7															
Retained*	0															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in learning	7															

\*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 retention and achievement rates
- good on- and off-the-job training
- thorough and effective induction process
- some good employers

## WEAKNESSES

- weak initial assessment process
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better knowledge of learners' NVQ progress by employers
- better planning of internal verification

30. Retention and achievement rates are good. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Data show that all retained learners achieve their full modern apprenticeship. The average retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices starting programmes between 1996 and 1999 is 66 per cent. Retention rates have improved since 1998-99 from 68 per cent to 93 per cent in 2001-02.

31. On- and off-the-job training is good. There is good, well-planned and well-structured practical training. Key skills training is introduced within the first year. Industrially experienced trainers provide good support for learners, as well as good off-the-job training. Employers are encouraged to visit the training centre during the learners' first

year block-release course to discuss and review their progress. The standard of work in learners' portfolios of evidence is good. There is an effective system to record and update learners' NVQ progress for off-the-job training in their first year. Learners are instructed to carry out risk assessments on machines before they are allowed to operate them. Most employers have dedicated training programmes that are linked to the NVQ requirements.

32. The induction process is effective and thorough. Learners can remember the key elements of their four-day induction. Learners have a clear understanding of their responsibilities, the requirements of the NVQ, related grievance or appeals procedures and they understand equal opportunities well. Induction is very effective in preparing the learners to start their programme. Prospects College has developed a good training session for employment rights and responsibilities, specifically for this occupational area.

33. Some employers provide particularly good on-the-job training to help learners to meet their workplace requirements. Employers make the training as flexible as possible and meet the learners' individual requirements. Learners work on a variety of modern equipment, which gives them a wide range of additional learning opportunities. Learners progress well in these organisations and many learners gain additional qualifications.

34. Prospects College achieved external recognition for its modern manufacturing systems in November 2002 achieving COVE status. Prospects College is now developing activities to improve the learning environment and increase specialist resources so that learners can be trained in computer-aided design. A consultant is also developing links with engineering employers to look at skills shortages in the area and to promote education and training.

35. The initial assessment process is weak. Basic skills and key skills assessments are carried out after learners have started their training programme. The results of the tests are not reviewed or acted on. Learners who are taking the electrical installation course do not take a colour perception test. Trainers are not always involved in learners' initial interviews. Additional learning support requirements are not always identified during initial assessment, however, trainers sometimes identify that learners have additional learning needs during initial training. Once trainers identify these learning needs, appropriate support is given.

36. Individual learning plans are used ineffectively. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. Some individual learning plans are not updated after progress reviews and some do not have a deadline for NVQ completion. Some individual learning plans do not show which NVQ units the learners are studying. Employers rely on Prospects College trainers to keep them informed. Employers do not know enough about their learners' NVQ progress to help them plan the on-the-job training effectively.

37. Internal verification planning is not structured to ensure that sufficient work is sampled. There is insufficient interim internal verification and observation of assessors

conducting assessment in the workplace. Internal verification is generally carried out at the end of learning. There is no effective recording of, or feedback on, assessments. Most learners do not understand the internal verifier's role and do not know who is their nominated internal verifier.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	46	3

38. Prospects College has 46 learners in retailing and customer service. All learners are employed. There are 12 foundation modern apprentices in retailing and eight advanced modern apprentices. Fourteen learners are working toward foundation modern apprenticeships in customer service and 12 learners are working towards advanced modern apprenticeships. Learners are mainly recruited directly from employers. Learners complete an application and are interviewed before they start their programme. Learners do not routinely take a basic skills test, unless their assessor considers this to be necessary. None of the learners has been identified as having additional learning or social needs. Learners are given a one- to two-hour induction at the start of the leaning programme. This is carried out by Prospects College trainers in the workplace. Employers carry out most training in the workplace. Prospects College carry out some off-the-job training on a range of topics including consumer legislation, key skills and background knowledge. There are two retailing and customer service trainers, who are responsible for assessment and internal verification. Assessment takes place in the workplace. Learners are visited approximately every two weeks for assessment and reviews of their progress. Prospects College was unable to provide accurate data for 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)																
	2002-03		2001-02													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	9		5													
Retained*	0		0													
Successfully completed	0		0													
Still in learning	8		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																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	25		45		21											
Retained*	0		15	33	11	52										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	11	52										
Still in learning	18		14	31	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

- good development of learners' skills and confidence
- good work in portfolios of evidence
- good use of initiatives to improve training programmes

## WEAKNESSES

- foundation modern apprentices' poor achievement rates
- insufficient involvement by employers in learners' progress reviews
- inadequate use of individual learning plans

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of vocational competence for trainers
- more effective use of initial assessment

39. Learners' confidence and self-esteem increase as they work towards their qualification. Learners gain a range of skills that are necessary for careers in retailing and customer service. Learners gain sound knowledge about their occupational area, especially about consumer legislation, health and safety, and customer service. Learners deal with customers competently and are well motivated. This strength was partially recognised in the self-assessment report. Trainers are enthusiastic and visit learners every fortnight, or more often if necessary.

40. Learners' portfolios of evidence include a wide range of good evidence, including product evidence, such as delivery notes and letters from customers; witness statements,

reports of observed activities and written questions and answers. Learners have detailed and up-to-date records of their progress toward their NVQs and key skills. Portfolios of evidence are well structured and learners have a good understanding of how their evidence relates to the national standards of their qualification. Both trainers have an appropriate vocational background. They have updated their vocational competence to keep it current, although this has not been recorded.

41. There is a good use of initiatives to improve learners' performance. Trainers have been very critical of the weaknesses of the programme and have introduced improvements to assessment and internal verification. Trainers have introduced relevant key skills projects which help learners with their information technology (IT) and application of number key skills. Prospects College has also begun to work with a local college to improve key skills training. Retention rates have shown improvements, particularly in the current year, where 72 per cent of learners are still in learning.

42. While retention rates are satisfactory, there have been some poor historical achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices. In 2000-01 the achievement rate was 52 per cent. There have not been any foundation modern apprentices achieving in 2001-02, however 31 per cent of learners are still in learning. In the current year, there are still high numbers of learners still in learning. On the advanced modern apprenticeship, 11 of the 14 learners who have started programmes are still in learning. Learners on both programmes are making satisfactory progress.

43. Employers are not sufficiently involved in learners' progress reviews. Learners are asked to make a comment on their progress to date. Employers are also asked to record a comment on the progress review document. Each stage is done in isolation and there are no significant actions to accompany the comments. Employers are not given a copy of the progress review at the end of the meeting. Employers often do not understand which units the learner is working towards. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

44. Individual learning plans include details of the mandatory NVQ units and the key skills. They sometimes include details of the optional units. The target date for achievement is the same for all learners. The individual learning plans do not specify the on-the-job learning or the employer's involvement. Learners keep a copy of their individual learning plan in their portfolios of evidence and Prospects College keeps a copy. The two are not updated simultaneously and often show different information.

#### Good Practice

*Trainers ensure that learners have an in-depth understanding of consumer legislation such as the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and the Sale of Goods Act 1979. This level of detail is not required by the national occupational standards of their qualification but is helpful to the development of employment.*

**Foundation programmes****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	64	3

45. Prospects College runs Life Skills programmes at its training centre in Southend and through five subcontractors. There are 64 learners on the Life Skills programme. Learners are referred by Connexions. Many learners progress to Life Skills programmes from the Prospects College programme for 14-16 year olds. There are four learners on the 'driving ambition' programme, which lasts for 16 weeks and is run by subcontractors at Colchester and Southend. There are 34 learners on the Prince's Trust volunteers (PTV) programme, a 12-week personal development programme that is run at Basildon, Chelmsford, Colchester and Southend. There are nine learners on 'it's my life', a 16-week personal development programme in Chelmsford. There are nine learners on 'cue music', a 16-week programme that develops learners' music skills at Southend. There are eight learners on a training programme carried out by Prospects College at its training centre, which develops learners' construction skills. Learners at Prospects College take a two-day taster course before deciding whether to join the Life Skills programme. All training programmes, except the PTV, can be extended if appropriate. Learners attend for 18 hours each week except for the PTV which runs for 30 hours each week. Learners receive an induction and complete an initial assessment and an individual learning plan during their first week. They work on a number of different projects that are designed to increase their confidence and to develop skills to prepare them for more training, further education or employment. Learners on the PTV training programme work towards a profile of achievement certificate. All learners have the opportunity to gain qualifications in literacy, numeracy, first aid, health and safety, and food hygiene. The Life Skills programme is managed by the Prospects College learning support unit which is run by a manager and five trainers. Subcontractors employ 10 staff to provide their training programmes. Not all staff have the appropriate qualifications. Specialist staff are available at some training centres. Prospects College was unable to provide accurate data for this area of learning.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Life Skills																
	2002-03		2001-02													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	155		192													
Retained*	68		98	51												
Successfully completed	68		98	51												
Still in learning	57		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

- innovative courses to engage learners
- good teaching
- good development of learners' confidence and self-esteem
- good outcomes for some learners

## WEAKNESSES

- unclear targets for measuring success
- poor individual learning plans
- inadequate arrangements for work placements

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better access to specialist support in literacy and numeracy

46. There is a broad range of courses designed to appeal to learners with particular vocational or leisure interests. The training programme provides a range of learning experiences which help learners to make progress. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. One training programme is for learners who are particularly interested in music. Learners are taught to play instruments and produce their own CD. The 'driving ambition' programme is for learners who want to take their driving test and includes driving lessons as well as preparation for the theory test. The training

programme at Prospects College's training centre is practical and developmental. It concentrates on vocational training in construction. Guest speakers from specialist organisations give talks on sexual health and drug awareness to learners on all training programmes. Jobsearch is particularly effective.

47. Teaching is good, imaginative, well planned and relevant to the learners' needs. Objectives and intended outcomes are clearly defined. Trainers are enthusiastic and keen for learners to succeed. The training is interesting and is designed to challenge learners. Much of the training is related to relevant personal development skills, such as confidence-building and working as a team. For example, learners telephone local businesses to ask for donations for a community challenge project. On the most effective training programmes, literacy and numeracy skills are appropriate to their training programme.

48. Learners develop confidence and self-esteem on the training programmes. Many learners who join the training programmes have a history of poor educational achievement. Some have been excluded from school, others are ex-offenders or have misused alcohol or drugs. Learners appreciate the personal support that they receive from staff. For many learners who achieve a qualification, it is the first certificate they have received. Learners on the PTV programmes are proud of their achievements on community challenges, when they organise and set up a local community project. These projects have included providing a garden for people with mental health problems and a play area for toddlers. There are personal development workshops for learners who have little self-confidence. This training programme provides a range of activities in small groups, which includes anger management and team-building. One group of particularly motivated learners attend outside hours to produce a fanzine. They use desktop publishing software to produce a good magazine. About 51 per cent of learners go on to further training, further education or employment.

49. There are good outcomes for some learners. Most training programmes have no contractual requirement for learners to achieve a qualification. However, learners do gain literacy, numeracy, first aid, personal development, profile of achievement and health and safety qualifications. In-house certificates are given to those learners who cannot achieve the qualifications. In the current year, 82 learners have achieved 176 qualifications. Forty-five per cent of learners find a job within three months of completing the training programme.

50. The targets for measuring success are unclear. Neither learners nor trainers are clear about what constitutes successful achievement of the programme. Some learners are unsure about when their programme finishes or whether they are working towards accreditation. Learners' achievement of qualifications is not always recorded. Prospects College does not set targets for retention and achievement rates for its subcontractors. There is insufficient use of data to judge whether training programmes are effective. Trainers have no targets to improve learners' attendance, punctuality, completion of courses or gaining of qualifications. The self-assessment report identified that there was insufficient monitoring of learners' progress with subcontractors. In recent months,

some progress has been made in setting specific and measurable targets.

51. There is poor use of individual learning plans. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. On some training programmes all individual learning plans are identical. In other training programmes there are no useful targets, for example one target is 'complete all work'. There is no indication of what the work is, nor which skills learners need to complete tasks. The individual learning plans do not give a comprehensive indication of learners' individual learning needs, nor do they include proposed learning strategies. Individual learning plans do not include targets for qualifications and some individual learning plans do not record learners' previous achievement. Progress reviews include lists of what learners have done, but do not record what skills learners need to complete the project. Learners are unsure what skills they are developing and cannot judge if they have acquired them.

52. Not all training programmes include work placements and not all learners who are entitled to a work placement find one. On one training programme, work experience is not an integral part of the Life Skills programme and learners have to wait until the end of the programme before they go out on a work placement. There is insufficient opportunity to learn important work-related disciplines early in the programme. Many learners are not visited while they are on work placements, but are just telephoned. Insufficient use is made of work placements to develop life skills.

53. On some programmes, the trainers who provide literacy and numeracy support for learners are enthusiastic, but do not have sufficient expertise to develop learners' literacy or numeracy skills. They identify learners' general literacy needs, such as to improve reading, but they do not analyse learners' problems or what learners need to do to improve.

#### Good Practice

*A group of learners on one training programme, who started with an interest in music, but none of whom could play an instrument, improved so much that they formed a band, rehearsed with their trainer and at the end of the programme will play a concert at a local music club.*