

INSPECTION REPORT

Sheffield Futures

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

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

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.

INSPECTION REPORT

Sheffield Futures

Contents

Summary

| | |
|---|---|
| Description of the provider | 1 |
| Scope of provision | 1 |
| About the inspection | 2 |
| Overall judgement | 2 |
| Grades | 3 |
| Key findings | 3 |
| What learners like about Sheffield Futures | 7 |
| What learners think Sheffield Futures could improve | 7 |
| Key challenges for Sheffield Futures | 8 |

Detailed inspection findings

| | |
|--|----|
| Leadership and management | 9 |
| Equality of opportunity | 11 |
| Quality assurance | 12 |
| Business administration, management & professional | 14 |
| Foundation programmes | 18 |

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Sheffield Futures is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. It was formed by the combination of Sheffield Careers Guidance Services with Sheffield City Council's Youth Service, in 2002. Its training centre is situated in Sheffield city centre. Its main activity is the Connexions service and the provision of information, advice and guidance on education, training, careers and employment for young people and adults in Sheffield. Sheffield Futures is also a provider of training for adults and young people in Sheffield, a role which accounts for less than 5 per cent of its business. It offers national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in advice and guidance, Gateway to Work and a programme centre.
2. Sheffield Futures is managed by a chief executive and a board of 15 members. Training is the responsibility of the director of strategy and adult services and an assistant director for adult services. One manager has day-to-day responsibility for employability training, including Gateway to Work and the programme centre. Another manager is responsible for day-to-day management of the NVQ programme. Sheffield Futures has approximately 650 employees. Twenty-nine employees are involved in the delivery of the training programmes.
3. Gateway to Work and the programme centre are funded by Jobcentre Plus, and the NVQ in advice and guidance by South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The unemployment rate in Sheffield is 3.5 per cent, compared with 2.6 per cent in England as a whole. Sheffield contains communities with very high levels of social deprivation. Much of the traditional steel-making industry has closed. A large number of projects funded by the government and the European Union have been established in Sheffield to overcome the unemployment and deprivation. The proportion of people in Sheffield from minority ethnic groups is 8.8 per cent compared with 9.1 per cent in England. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 42 per cent in Sheffield, compared with 47.9 per cent in England.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. Sheffield Futures is funded by the local LSC to provide training to NVQ level 3 in advice and guidance. There are 48 NVQ learners, all of whom work for organisations in Sheffield's local Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) network, including Sheffield Futures itself. The programme is funded to build the area's capacity to offer access to good information, advice and guidance in local communities. Approximately half of the learners are employees of Sheffield Futures. The other half are employees of other organisations in the network. Many of the learners have been recruited from the local community, having previously worked for community organisations in a voluntary

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

capacity. There are also a further 70 employees of Sheffield Futures on the NVQ programme, who are internally funded. They fall outside the scope of the inspection, as do other learners on a level 4 NVQ programme in advice and guidance. The level 4 programme offers a progression route for learners funded by the LSC.

5. The level 3 NVQ consists of seven background knowledge training sessions at the beginning of the programme, followed by portfolio-building support on an individual basis. Learners are expected to complete the programme in 12 months. The standards for the NVQ in advice and guidance have been revised and some of the learners are working to the old standards, while others are working to the new ones. Sheffield Futures has used the opportunity to revise the programme, in the light of the new requirements and feedback from learners.

Foundation programmes

6. There are 10 clients on the Gateway to Work programme. All New Deal clients who have been in the New Deal Gateway for four weeks are referred to the programme by their New Deal personal advisers. They attend Sheffield Futures' training centre for 30 hours a week for two weeks. The programme is designed to help clients develop a varied range of skills which are useful to employers, and to provide them with an intensive period of jobsearch training. Each client has an action plan which includes details of jobsearch activities that will be carried out during the two weeks. At the end of each day the plans are informally reviewed. Formal reviews are held at the end of each week. Eighteen clients currently attend the programme centre. This provides long-term unemployed clients with a minimum of six hours' intensive jobsearch activity each week, for a maximum of 13 weeks. Many clients attend the centre for more than six hours a week. They are usually referred to the programme by Jobcentre Plus advisers although attendance is not mandatory. When a client begins the programme, an action plan is compiled to indicate the type of support needed and against which progress is measured. Clients' progress is formally reviewed three times during the programme. After clients leave the Gateway to Work and the programme centre programmes, their progress is monitored for a further 13 weeks and further advice is given if needed.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of inspectors | 4 |
| Number of inspection days | 16 |
| Number of learner interviews | 29 |
| Number of staff interviews | 30 |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 14 |
| Number of partner/external agency interviews | 8 |
| Number of visits | 14 |

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, Sheffield Futures' leadership and management are satisfactory. Its

approach to equality of opportunity is good, but its quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. The quality of training in foundation is good, and in business administration, management and professional, is satisfactory.

GRADES

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

| Leadership and management | 3 |
|---------------------------|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Equality of opportunity | 2 |
| Quality assurance | 4 |

| Business administration, management & professional | 3 |
|--|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Other government-funded provision | 3 |

| Foundation programmes | 2 |
|-----------------------|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Programme centres | 2 |
| New Deal 18-24 | 2 |

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. **Retention rates for learners on the NVQ level 3 programme in advice and guidance are good.** The achievement rate is satisfactory and the standard achieved by learners on this programme is satisfactory. The progress that learners make towards completion is slow.

9. **Retention rates are good on the Gateway to Work programme and satisfactory in the programme centre.** However, the rates of progression into employment are poor on both programmes.

Quality of education and training

10. **The resources to support learning on the NVQ programme are good.** Access to the training centre in Sheffield city centre is good. The training room is well decorated and equipped, and there are good library and information technology (IT) resources. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Mini-discs, tape recorders and video cameras are available to assessors which enable them to broaden their assessment methods and better meet learners' needs.

11. The accommodation for foundation programmes is pleasant and spacious and contains ample resources. Staff are available to support clients and help them to make best use of the resources.

12. The NVQ programme effectively increases access to good careers information and advice in the community. The learners on the programme all have relevant jobs and choose optional units which are appropriate to their role. Equality of opportunity is a theme throughout the programme. The training benefits organisations and individuals.

13. **Progress towards achievement is slow for many NVQ learners.** Evidence often becomes out-of-date and has to be replaced.

14. **The Gateway to Work programme is well structured to meet clients' needs.** Clients have good opportunities to develop skills which are useful to employers and to overcome some of the barriers that have prevented them from gaining employment.

15. **Tutors in both foundation programmes support their clients very well** and are aware of the problems many of them face. Staffing levels are sufficient to give a good level of individual support.

16. **Good links with a range of external agencies effectively help foundation clients to overcome their difficulties.** Clients value the guidance and support they receive from staff and from the organisations to which they are referred.

17. **NVQ learners have insufficient tutorial support for portfolio construction once the taught sessions have finished.** Many learners have not worked towards NVQs before and have difficulty with the language used, and with independent study. Sheffield Futures has taken some steps to improve the support for this.

18. **Too much assessment is carried out at the end of the NVQ programme.** There is no opportunity for unit accreditation during the programme. Some learners are not clear about how much of the qualification they have completed and how much they still have to complete. The information held centrally on learners' progress is not sufficiently detailed.

19. **Insufficient information is provided to Sheffield Futures on the existing competences and preferred occupations of clients starting foundation programmes.** This has an adverse effect on the early stages of the training.

20. **The provision of work experience for Gateway to Work clients is inadequate,** even though it is part of Sheffield Futures' contract. Too few clients develop workplace awareness or have the opportunity to try a preferred occupation.

Leadership and management

21. **Support for staff is very effective.** New staff receive a thorough induction. Gateway to Work staff work in pairs to offer mutual support. Very good communications are maintained using many mechanisms, including well-organised meetings. Staff training is good and readily available, although a new appraisal system to link staff training more closely to corporate objectives has not yet been introduced.

22. **Resources are well managed.** Regular management reviews and new initiatives help to ensure good learning environments and a good range of training aids and reference materials. Staff deployment is effectively managed to meet learners' needs.

23. **Self-assessment processes are thorough and detailed** and support a culture of continuous improvement in the areas of learning. The processes involve all staff and the resulting action plans are endorsed by managers. Informal systems, such as regular team meetings and discussions, help to review and improve provision.

24. **Feedback from learners is managed effectively.** Data and qualitative comments are promptly summarised and actions are identified. Management and staff routinely review proposals, and most changes are quickly implemented.

25. **Strategic planning is insufficient.** Since the merger, much effort has been put into implementing the detailed structural, management and administrative changes needed. The first corporate plan for the new organisation has recently been prepared but has not been translated into detailed business plans or targets. There has been little direct effect on learners as yet, but staff do not have clear targets or priorities.

26. **Quality assurance policies and procedures are out of date** and have not yet been replaced following the merger. There is now a confusing system with a range of references. There are procedures to support learners, but these are not managed in a structured way. The good or satisfactory standard of training in the areas of learning has been maintained despite the major organisational changes. However, the systems to ensure that quality is maintained have not yet been established. The weakness in strategic planning threatens to undermine the standard of training in the long term.

27. **Internal verification of the NVQ programme is inadequate.** There is a shortage of internal verifiers. The verification system is not comprehensive and relies too much on final verification of learners' portfolios. This weakness has been recognised and is being dealt with, but a new detailed system is not yet fully established.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very effective support for staff
- well-managed resources

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

- thorough self-assessment process
- effective management of feedback from learners
- close links with deprived communities through outreach work
- in-depth analysis of equal opportunities data in foundation programme

Weaknesses

- insufficient strategic planning
- poorly structured quality assurance system
- inadequate internal verification of the NVQ programme
- insufficient action to increase the amount of male and minority ethnic staff

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good resources to support learning
- programme well matched to learners' and the community's needs
- good integration of equality of opportunity with the NVQ programme

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards achievement
- insufficient support for portfolio-building
- insufficient interim assessment

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good retention rates on the Gateway to Work programme
- well-structured Gateway to Work programme
- good use of resources for clients
- very good support for clients
- effective use of a range of external agencies

Weaknesses

- insufficient information about clients' prior experience and attainment
- insufficient short work-experience placements
- poor rates of progression into employment

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SHEFFIELD FUTURES:

- the very helpful and supportive staff
- being able to work at their own pace
- the impact the training has on their performance at work
- the unexpected opportunities - 'talking to other people opens up a new world'
- the improvements brought about by changes to the NVQ programme
- the easily accessible facilities
- the emphasis on getting a job
- that it is a welcoming place to come to
- good support that removes barriers to employment

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SHEFFIELD FUTURES COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of work experience on foundation programmes
- the amount of tutorial time on the NVQ programme
- the number of training sessions on the NVQ programme
- fewer delays in conducting assessments and reviews
- the amount of support for portfolio development
- the promotion of programmes

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SHEFFIELD FUTURES:

- improve support for learners in building NVQ portfolios
- introduce more short work-experience placements in foundation programmes
- provide better preparation for employment for foundation clients
- improve the quality assurance system
- complete the internal verification improvements

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very effective support for staff
- well-managed resources
- thorough self-assessment process
- effective management of feedback from learners
- close links with deprived communities through outreach work
- in-depth analysis of equal opportunities data in foundation programme

Weaknesses

- insufficient strategic planning
- poorly structured quality assurance system
- inadequate internal verification of the NVQ programme
- insufficient action to increase the amount of male and minority ethnic staff

28. Support for staff in the foundation and NVQ training centres is good. In addition, a wide range of systems are particularly effective in helping staff to deliver services to learners. There is a thorough induction programme for new staff. Staff on the Gateway to Work programme work in pairs to offer mutual help and guidance. Staff members communicate particularly well between themselves and with their managers. As well as the widespread use of e-mail, internal and external newsletters and managers' briefings, there are regular meetings at team, departmental and directorate level. All the meetings are well structured, with minutes that have clearly identified actions. The meetings also allow time for staff to discuss good practice and matters of professional interest. Some meetings feature visiting speakers who update staff on relevant developments outside Sheffield Futures. A series of quality assurance workshops enable foundation staff to share good practice and identify possible improvements in 15 areas of their work. The NVQ staff use their regular meetings to discuss good practice and introduce improvements. A formal staff appraisal system has been developed since the formation of the new company, but is not yet established. All staff routinely, but informally, discuss their individual learning needs with line managers and some managers carry out informal reviews. Most staff have their learning needs met promptly. The existing corporate training programme was previously guided by the results of the formal appraisal system. It covered a wide range of topics, but over the past year has focused on IT and equal opportunities training. An extensive professional library, with some open learning facilities, is used by staff, colleagues from partner organisations, and particularly by NVQ learners. There are good lesson packs, carefully controlled and up-to-date handouts and a wide range of reference materials. Administrative support for the NVQ and foundation

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

programmes is very good. The programmes can also use resources and staff assistance from other parts of Sheffield Futures.

29. Sheffield Futures manages its resources well. Managers use data to match staff resources to expected training workloads. Provision is formally and regularly reviewed to ensure that staff and learners, and in particular those with disabilities, have access to good resources. Specific resource initiatives range from strategic, such as a review of premises, to the detailed, such as encouraging effective use of envelopes by clients. Provision of IT resources and internet access is extensive. The standard of IT equipment is satisfactory, but there are plans for upgrades to meet increasing expectations of learners. Learners who are not skilled in IT are given some individual support, as well as help such as the printing of job vacancies from the internet. Some office accommodation for staff is cramped, but the main training and learner areas are spacious and maintained to a high standard with a good range of training aids. Managers have responded to learners' views by improving resources, including rest and recreational facilities.

30. Sheffield Futures' trustees and directors give it appropriate direction, and its internal board performs high-level management functions. They all receive and review reports on the foundation and NVQ programmes. There are satisfactory partnerships at the strategic level, with contributions to city initiatives on learning, work, inclusion, safety, and advice and guidance. There are more specific links with bodies involved in social matters, such as drug awareness.

31. Adequate data are available to programme managers and are appropriately used to monitor aspects such as achievement and retention rates. Most reports to the senior management are financial or contract related.

32. Sheffield Futures' approach to supporting the development of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills is satisfactory. Formal assessment of clients' needs is not carried out on foundation programmes, as this is done before they are referred to Sheffield Futures. However, insufficient information on identified needs is given to staff, who generally rely on informal review and then increased tutorial support for those with additional needs. Staff with basic literacy, numeracy and language skills support certain individuals. Learners are given good advice and help with specific problems. Current NVQ learners have little apparent need for basic skills assistance.

33. Since the merger of two large organisations to form Sheffield Futures, and a subsequent expansion of provision, significant effort has been made to restructure the organisation, redefine jobs and roles, reorganise management and support systems, and co-ordinate financial and personnel aspects. Some issues have been subject to lengthy discussion, but much is now agreed or nearly agreed. However, there is currently insufficient strategic planning. The board is about to publish its first corporate plan, setting out the new priorities of Sheffield Futures. Its translation into more detailed business and management plans is not imminent. There are no details and targets, other than contract compliance and financial targets, which are set for staff. The company's new approach to staff appraisals, and individual targets and performance review, is

awaiting ratification. Although this is not having a significant effect on learners as yet, it is not clear to middle managers and training staff where their next priorities and challenges lie. Improvements stem from individual management initiatives and short-term work rather than a clear strategic-planning system.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

34. Sheffield Futures is strongly committed to equality of opportunity, diversity and social inclusion. Its ambitious equal opportunities and diversity policy sets out its role as a model for organisations in Sheffield. The NVQ programme in advice and guidance promotes social inclusion. Learners are employed by Sheffield Futures or partner organisations in the community. They are selected for their capability to work with people who live in the most deprived areas of Sheffield and who have serious barriers to employment. These outreach workers offer advice and guidance to clients about finding employment, training and support. They can refer their clients to Sheffield Futures' programme centre and Gateway to Work, or suitable training programmes at other providers. A staff member works from the premises of one partner organisation which specialises in support for people with a history of substance misuse. The clients can receive support for their personal problems and careers advice and guidance from a single team. Thirteen clients identified as most able to benefit from training have been referred to the Gateway to Work or the programme centre at Sheffield Futures. The success rate of clients in moving into employment from this source is high and the type of employment is more closely related to their capabilities than it would be if careers advice and guidance were not available. Training staff at Sheffield Futures avoid attaching a stigma to clients with a history of substance misuse and are prepared to give them the same opportunities as other clients.

35. Detailed equal opportunities procedures and development plans are not in place at Sheffield Futures. Some documents which were developed before the merger continue to be used. NVQ learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is good, going well beyond an awareness of their rights and responsibilities to others. The understanding of foundation clients is adequate. Staff are trained in equal opportunities and diversity. There are examples of staff members giving good individual support to learners to help them overcome severe barriers to learning and employment.

36. Despite problems with producing equal opportunities data from the computer-based management information system, data are collected and summarised for each of the programmes. Learners' gender, age, disability and ethnicity are established and the number of referrals to Sheffield Futures' training programmes, learners starting the training and learners successfully achieving their objectives, are all analysed for each group. This has identified, for example, the groups whose members are most or least successful in gaining a job from Gateway to Work. In-depth analysis is regularly performed on sample groups of learners to identify the effectiveness of the training for individuals and groups. This analysis is used as the basis for discussion among staff at Sheffield Futures and with partner organisations, including Jobcentre Plus, to improve training and policy.

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

37. None of the 29 staff involved in the training programmes are from a minority ethnic group. Only two of the 17 staff working on the NVQ programme are men and few of the learners are from minority ethnic groups. Although staff and learners are selected on merit, there is little action to encourage the recruitment of more people from minority ethnic communities or more men.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

38. Sheffield Futures' self-assessment system is thorough and supports continuous improvements in the areas inspected. The most recent of the organisation's four formal self-assessment reports, published in June 2003, is detailed and is based on sound evidence. Most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the report match those identified at inspection. The report was drawn up with good staff involvement, and in consultation with senior management. A detailed and appropriate action plan is being carried out with management and board level involvement. Frequent staff meetings, informal reviews, and use of feedback from learners all contribute to a process of continuous improvement.

39. Management of feedback from learners is effective. There is a high response rate to standard written forms on the Gateway to Work programme. The statistics and views are promptly analysed and actions plans are prepared. The analysis is considered by managers, and discussed at the regular team meetings, and changes are made if needed. A similar, but slightly less-detailed evaluation of NVQ training sessions takes place, but in this case assessors and trainers also represent their learners' views at team meetings, where changes are discussed and agreed.

40. The quality assurance system is poorly structured. The good or satisfactory standard of training in the areas of learning has been maintained despite the major organisational changes. However, the systems to ensure that quality is maintained have not yet been established. The weakness in strategic planning threatens to undermine the standard of training in the long term. New company-wide quality assurance policies and procedures are being introduced by managers and newly recruited specialist staff, but this process will not be complete for at least another seven months. The current system relies on the use of outdated material carried over from the previous organisations. Guidance appears in several versions, with no clear indication as to which procedures are the current ones. Some procedures are still followed closely, but others, such as a company-wide evaluation system, have been allowed to lapse. There is no formal system for the evaluation of the performance of training staff. Staff have maintained detailed procedures for the support of programmes, but most are managed and reviewed in an informal and unstructured way. For example, the self-assessment process and review of learners' feedback are carried out effectively, but these processes rely on staff effort and expertise rather than on clear company guidance.

41. Internal verification of the NVQ programme is inadequate. This weakness has been recognised by the provider and a new strategy has been published, but its detailed application is not yet clear. Verification is carried out in accordance with a structured plan, but the plan is not comprehensive. Most verification of learners' work is left until

the completion of their programme. Some assessors have had no internal verification support, and some learners, who have been training for a considerable period, have no verified work. There is an imbalance of resources, with a small number of qualified, readily available verifiers and a large number of assessors. Where verification does take place there are some good examples of constructive feedback to assessors and satisfactory review of learners' work. Communication between assessors, and between assessors and the few internal verifiers, is satisfactory.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Other government-funded provision | 48 | 3 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good resources to support learning
- programme well matched to learners' and the community's needs
- good integration of equality of opportunity with the NVQ programme

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards achievement
- insufficient support for portfolio-building
- insufficient interim assessment

Achievement and standards

42. The retention rates for learners on the NVQ programme are good. All of the 22 starters in 2002-03 have remained on the programme, as have 70 per cent of those who started two years earlier. Several of the learners have changed job roles during their time on the programme, but have continued to participate. Tutors have helped to maintain good retention rates in these circumstances by working with the learners to identify units which are appropriate to their new role.

43. Learners are slow to complete the programme. Many find it difficult to set aside time to work on their NVQ. Other work often takes a higher priority. Many are part-time staff with significant domestic pressures on their time. Most learners take longer than the expected 12-month period to complete the NVQ, some considerably longer. Two learners who started the qualification in 1999-2000 remain on the programme. Evidence suitable for the qualification remains current for only two years, so learners may have to replace out-of-date evidence.

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

| LSC funded work-based learning | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|-----------|---|---------|-----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| NVQ Training | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | 1999-2000 | | 1998-99 | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 22 | | 22 | | 27 | | 9 | | 1 | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 22 | | 19 | | 19 | | 7 | | 1 | 100 | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 1 | | 4 | | 9 | | 7 | | 1 | 100 | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 21 | | 15 | | 10 | | 2 | | 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

Quality of education and training

44. The resources to support learning on the programme are good. Taught sessions are based at Sheffield Futures' main training centre, which is located in central Sheffield and is readily accessible by public transport. The premises have good access arrangements for people with restricted mobility. The training room is well decorated and furnished, is an appropriate size and has a good range of equipment. Handouts comprehensively cover the topics considered in taught sessions. The programme staff are well qualified and experienced. There are an insufficient number of internal verifiers. The training centre provides good library facilities, including paper-based and electronic-based reference material. This is particularly useful to learners from community and outreach centres where such material is less common. Additional funding has recently enabled Sheffield Futures to purchase specialist equipment to broaden its range of assessment methods and therefore cater for different needs. Equipment includes mini-discs, tape recorders and video cameras.

45. The programme effectively meets the needs of learners and of the community. The local LSC funds the level 3 NVQ to increase capacity within the community to provide good information and advice to adults. The organisations benefiting from the funding are community and outreach organisations, many of which would find it difficult to access good training otherwise. Learners are aware that the funding has provided them with an opportunity that they would not have been able to afford for themselves. Learners' line managers are aware of the benefits to their employees of taking NVQs, and some are particularly supportive. Because the programme is an in-service qualification, learners are engaged in appropriate work roles to which the qualification is closely matched. Learners can take optional units to tailor the programme to their particular work needs, and also change these options if their job role changes during the course of the programme.

46. Taught sessions on the programme are of a satisfactory standard. The planning of the sessions is thorough and indicates a range of teaching approaches and methods.

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

Handouts and projector slides are clear and relevant, but some learners find the handouts difficult to understand and do not appreciate their relevance until later in the programme. The information provided to learners is comprehensive. There are opportunities for interaction between course participants. All members of the core team co-tutor on the taught sessions, which are responded to with enthusiasm by the learners. Learners gain valuable information from the sessions, which provide a structure to their understanding. The sessions also enable learners to talk to their fellow learners and benefit from the range of experiences they bring to the programme. The range of teaching styles provided by the tutors matches the different learning styles of the learners.

47. Guidance and support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are usually given initial information about the programme by their line manager. They complete an application form which gives Sheffield Futures information about their work role and educational background. They attend an interview where a tutor outlines the programme and explains the commitment needed. A learner's line manager is asked to complete an agreement that makes clear the time commitment involved, and also to confirm the learner's suitability for the programme. The quality of tutor support is good and is appreciated by learners. There is no formal investigation of whether learners need any additional learning support. If a need for additional support in language, literacy or numeracy is formally identified, Sheffield Futures has trained staff to refer learners to relevant organisations.

48. Support for learners in portfolio construction is insufficient. Once the taught sessions are completed, learners continue the programme by putting together individually a portfolio of evidence with the support of a tutor over the length of the programme. They receive five and a half hours of support for this activity. Learners based in community and outreach settings in particular find this insufficient. A further three hours are available for assessed observations of practice. Many of the learners on the programme have not previously taken an NVQ and are not used to independent study. They report feeling confused and daunted by the language of the NVQ and are uncertain as to whether they are doing what is required. They miss the structure provided by the taught sessions, and in particular those who are lone workers, miss the support of colleagues that they experienced at those sessions. Although the tutorial entitlement is made clear to all learners, they found it difficult to maintain the motivation and drive necessary to cope with independent study and to complete the programme on schedule. Although learners rated the tutorial support that they received as good, it is not sufficient or structured enough to allay learners' worries and maintain motivation during construction of portfolios. Sheffield Futures has recognised learners' concerns over their portfolios and has introduced a session on this for participants on the most recent programmes.

49. There is insufficient interim assessment. Learners are formally assessed at the end of the programme, fully in accordance with the requirements of the awarding body. However, there is no interim unit accreditation during the programme. This fits with the holistic approach taken towards the qualification, but does not enable learners to recognise their own progress. Some learners are unsure how much of the qualification they have completed and how much they have left to complete. They feel that having a

clearer idea of their progress would increase their motivation. This is especially true for learners based in community and outreach centres who have no previous experience of NVQs. Information about progress is insufficiently collated centrally, and this is recognised in the self-assessment report. While tutors are aware of the progress of their learners, and there is discussion about this at the monthly meetings, the central database for recording progress towards achievement is insufficiently detailed to give an adequate overview of progress.

Leadership and management

50. Equality of opportunity is an integral part of the NVQ programme. The whole aim of the programme is to resolve equality and diversity issues by improving access to information and advice in deprived communities. It enables organisations and individuals to access training which would otherwise be too expensive. One of the themed questions introduced to learners during the taught sessions concerns equality of opportunity and encourages substantial investigation of the topic. Equality of opportunity supports information, advice and guidance work and approaches, and it therefore figures in all of the taught sessions. It also supports the case studies produced by learners as part of their coursework.

51. Learners are given the opportunity to feed back their views on provision by completing a questionnaire to evaluate each session. They are also asked to give feedback on their assessor's performance after observations. Internal verification of the programme is unsatisfactory, and this was recognised in the self-assessment report. There are insufficient internal verifiers. An internal verification strategy has been devised, but it is not yet fully in place.

52. The inspection grade given to Sheffield Futures for its leadership and management matches that given in the self-assessment report. Many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors are also identified in the self-assessment report. However, the inspectors identified fewer strengths than were highlighted in the self-assessment report.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Programme centres | 18 | 2 |
| New Deal 18-24 | 10 | 2 |

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates on the Gateway to Work programme
- well-structured Gateway to Work programme
- good use of resources for clients
- very good support for clients
- effective use of a range of external agencies

Weaknesses

- insufficient information about clients' prior experience and attainment
- insufficient short work-experience placements
- poor rates of progression into employment

Achievement and standards

53. Retention rates on the Gateway to Work programme are good and exceed 80 per cent over a period of four years. Retention rates on the programme centre are satisfactory, being consistently 60 per cent or more. There is poor progression into employment for Gateway to Work and programme centre clients. For two years the proportion of clients entering employment was below the target set by Jobcentre Plus. Some clients do not respond to the company's request for information on jobs they find after leaving the programmes. The company has recently introduced a financial incentive to encourage clients to do so. Declining progression into employment is referred to as a weakness in the self-assessment report. There is poor take-up of programme centre provision despite a range of initiatives to publicise the programme and to encourage potential clients to join. Overall, the number of clients starting on the Gateway to Work programme meets the Jobcentre Plus targets, despite marked fluctuations in the number of clients joining the programme each week. The programme is delivered each week, irrespective of the number of clients who attend on the first day.

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

| Jobcentre Plus funded programmes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---|---------|----|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| New Deal 18-24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 480 | | 444 | | 437 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 414 | | 375 | 84 | 357 | 82 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Planned learning completed | 377 | | 342 | 77 | 357 | 82 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gained job | 118 | | 149 | 34 | 113 | 26 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in training | 10 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | |

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

| Jobcentre Plus funded programmes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---|---------|----|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|-----|---|
| Programme Centres | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2002-03 | | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 168 | | 239 | | 510 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 103 | | 148 | 62 | 308 | 60 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Planned learning completed | 70 | | 67 | 28 | 231 | 45 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gained job | 45 | | 91 | 38 | 111 | 22 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in training | 18 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | |

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

Quality of education and training

54. Teaching and learning on foundation programmes are satisfactory. Gateway to Work clients have a number of useful taught sessions on applying for employment and attending interviews. These are followed by helpful practical activities which enable them to apply their knowledge and skills. Sessions are not always carefully planned and teaching and learning does not always engage and stimulate all clients. Staff do not have sufficiently regular opportunities to update their industrial and commercial experience and to develop their teaching and class management competences. Clients practise communication, team-building and group work skills through a range of activities, one of which takes place in a local park under the supervision of an experienced outdoor pursuits leader. In the programme centre, clients have satisfactory group or individual tuition on aspects of job seeking and can select topics to study under the guidance of programme centre staff.

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

55. Clients make good use of resources on the foundation programmes. The Gateway to Work and programme centre bases are well equipped with a range of resources which are relevant to jobsearch activities. The training rooms are large and spacious and are in modern, city centre premises easily accessible by clients with restricted mobility. Clients are provided with a wide range of newspapers and can also use internet-equipped computers to search for job vacancies and to gain helpful information on the companies to which they are applying. A good range of reference books, and local and national telephone directories are available. Members of staff advise and help clients as they search for jobs, prepare letters of application, compile curriculum vitae (CV) and complete application forms. Clients are provided with stationery and postage stamps, and have free access to the telephone and fax machine and the use of a photocopier.

56. The Gateway to Work programme is well structured to meet clients' needs. Clients can develop skills useful to employers and overcome some of the barriers that have prevented them from gaining employment. There are relevant tutor-led sessions on preparing a CV, writing letters of application and completing application forms. Good advice is also given on preparing for and attending interviews. Clients are given guidance in finding and applying for appropriate job vacancies. All clients compile an action plan at the beginning of the programme in consultation with a tutor. These give clear targets to be met by the end of the two weeks. Progress is regularly reviewed, formally and informally. The programme also includes a weekly off-site visit which provides good opportunities for clients to develop their skills in communication, problem-solving and team-building. The programme is clearly structured around taught sessions and periods of jobsearch activity, but is sufficiently flexible to let clients begin to resolve problems such as drugs misuse or financial difficulties, and to obtain support for additional literacy and numeracy needs.

57. Foundation programme tutors support their clients very well and encourage them to make the most of their training opportunities. Tutors are well aware of the barriers that have prevented many clients from gaining employment. Good staffing levels ensure that clients are given a good level of individual support. Tutors work closely with clients to help them improve their self-esteem and increase their self-confidence. Clients value the opportunities they have for talking to tutors about personal issues and those related to gaining work. Tutors can refer clients to other agencies, such as Connexions personal advisers and youth workers who can offer additional support for clients who are trying to resolve personal and social issues. All clients are monitored for 13 weeks after they leave their programme, to ascertain the progress they have made in finding employment and to give advice. Sheffield Futures acknowledges its exceptionally caring tutors as a strength in its self-assessment report. Clients' progress is regularly monitored during the programmes. Gateway to Work and programme centre clients' action plans are regularly reviewed to ascertain if targets are being met and, when necessary, set modified or new targets.

58. A range of external agencies are effectively used to help clients overcome some of their difficulties. This is referred to as a strength in the self-assessment report. Staff are knowledgeable about local specialist agencies and inform clients of organisations they can consult when difficulties arise. When necessary, staff make contact with agencies on

behalf of clients. For instance, clients who have a hearing impairment are assisted by the signing and lip reading support provided by the local branch of a national organisation. Clients with financial difficulties are given good support by an advice worker who regularly attends the training centre. A member of the Jobcentre Plus action team visits the training centre for two half-days a week to help programme centre clients who qualify for additional benefits which help them return to work, such as clothes for interviews, or travel passes. The guidance and support that clients receive from staff and from the organisations to which they are referred, help them to stay on the programme when they might otherwise leave.

59. The information provided to Sheffield Futures by Jobcentre Plus about clients starting their Gateway to Work or programme centre training is insufficient. During the early stages of training, staff do not have any information about clients' existing competences or about their preferred occupations and career aims. All Gateway to Work clients take a basic skills assessment from which their current literacy and numeracy profiles are identified. Trainers are not aware of many clients' literacy, numeracy and language levels because the test results are not routinely sent to Sheffield Futures before clients start their training. Tutors observe clients during the induction programme to informally assess their reading and writing ability. This provides an indicator of basic skills competences, but is not an adequate substitute for the assessment results. New Deal action plans are not systematically sent to tutors, who are unaware of clients' skills, qualifications, employment history and job goals. Tutors spend a great deal of time gathering this information from clients. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report.

60. Inadequate provision is made for Gateway to Work clients to spend time on employers' premises sampling jobs and shadowing employees. Clients have insufficient first-hand contact with employers and insufficient real workplace experience during the programme. They also have insufficient opportunities to use their developing interpersonal skills in an employment situation, or to judge for themselves whether their preferred occupation is what they expected. Many programme centre clients do not have sufficient opportunities during the programme for work experience where they can demonstrate their existing work-related skills to employers. In its contract, Sheffield Futures has agreed to provide one-day work-shadowing as a means of improving clients' chances of gaining employment. This is not provided.

Leadership and management

61. The Gateway to Work and programme centre provision is well managed. Staff meetings to discuss the management and operation of the programmes are usually arranged every fortnight. Additionally, staff have an hour each week to do developmental activities, to share good practice, to listen to visiting speakers or to liaise with Jobcentre Plus personnel. Equality of opportunity is a part of all aspects of the team's work. Clients have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. There is good team-working among the staff and generous staffing levels on the Gateway to Work programme. In addition to the foundation programmes manager, nine members of staff are involved in the delivery of the programmes. Six full-time members of staff and one part-time member of staff deliver the Gateway to Work programme and one full-time

SHEFFIELD FUTURES

and one-part-time member of staff work in the programme centre. There are now fewer staff at the programme centre because of the declining numbers of clients. The quality of the foundation programmes is monitored through clients' exit questionnaires. These are systematically analysed and appropriate action is taken to rectify identified weaknesses. Additionally, there is quarterly programme monitoring by Jobcentre Plus. A senior jobsearch tutor informally observes the work of tutors. These observations are not recorded or graded and they do not yet form part of the staff appraisal process.