

INSPECTION REPORT

Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited

24 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

Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited is a limited company based at two sites in the centre of Liverpool. It was formed in December 2001 as a result of a management buyout of the original organisation, established in 1996. Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited has a contract with the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council to provide work-based learning programmes for young people in business administration, childcare, hairdressing, and retailing and customer service.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, training in business administration, management and professional, is satisfactory as is training in retailing, customer service and distribution, and health, social care and public services. Training in hairdressing and beauty therapy is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of the company is satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is good. Quality assurance is unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Hairdressing & beauty therapy	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective internal and external communications
- well-established and effective staff development and appraisal system
- effective integration of key skills training and assessment
- good learner support
- good equal opportunities policy and procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of individual learning plans

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of nine inspectors spent a total of 35 days at Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited in March 2003. They interviewed 100 learners, observed and graded eight learning sessions and visited 40 employers' sites. Sixty-four interviews were carried out with staff of Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited and 33 with workplace supervisors or employers. Twenty-six assessments and 13 reviews were observed. Inspectors examined 60 learners' portfolios, 59 individual learning plans and a wide range of documentary evidence. They also examined the self-assessment report, which was produced in 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Health, social care & public services	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	5
Total	0	2	3	2	1	0	0	8

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited has provided training and work placements for young people under its current organisation since December 2001. Before that, the company provided training since 1996 as Training Plus. Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited (Training Plus) is based in two adjacent main buildings in the centre of Liverpool. One of these houses the training academy and its practical and theory training areas. The other building contains staff offices and training rooms for information technology (IT) and childcare. The main reception area for the company is also based in this building. It currently provides training in business administration, retailing and customer service, hairdressing, and childcare. The learning programmes are funded by the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Most learners are employed with most of the training carried out on the job. Rolling programmes of training and a drop-in facility for learners are provided in each of these areas of learning at the company's two sites. Most hairdressing learners are employed at local salons but attend the training academy once a week for practical and training.

3. In April 2002 the unemployment rate in the Northwest was 3.8 per cent compared with 3.1 per cent nationally. In 2002, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in Liverpool was 35.1 per cent, compared with the Northwest as a whole at 46.2 per cent and the national average of 47.9 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the Northwest is 3.7 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Retention rates are poor in all occupational areas. In business administration, retention rates are currently improving. In retailing and customer service, the provider has recently introduced measures to improve retention and achievement rates. Key skills training and assessment are integrated well in business administration. Learner support is good and there is effective short-term action-planning. However, poor targets are set for learners for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) unit achievement and training is insufficiently planned. Assessment practice is good in retailing and customer service. There is good integration of key skills training and assessment and pastoral support for learners is also good. However, some progress reviews are ineffective and internal verification practice is poor. Progress reviews are good in hairdressing, and learners, assessors and employers have a good understanding of key skills. Induction is good in early years care and education. There is some very good training with effective integration of key skills training and assessment. Progress reviews and learner support are good and the internal verification process is thorough.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

5. Training Plus was formed as an independent company in December 2001 by the managing director, quality assurance director and human resource director. The company is based at two sites in the centre of Liverpool. The directors and the three associate managers are responsible for finance, recruitment and the quality assurance monitoring and compliance systems. There are four more operational managers, three of whom each lead an area of learning team. The fourth is responsible for managing the internal verification process. The associate managers meet every day to discuss operational matters. They meet with the operational managers once a week with at least one director. The full management team, including all the directors, meets once a month to review the company's performance against the local LSC's targets for learners' recruitment and achievement. All meetings use a standard agenda and format for recording the minutes and actions. A monthly full staff meeting is held on the following day to share the outcomes of the discussions from these monthly management meetings. Training Plus has an established appraisal system, a quality assurance policy and procedures and an equal opportunities policy and procedures. The company wrote its first self-assessment report in 2001 and a second report in 2002, which was used by inspectors. In 2002, it was accredited as an Investor in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

STRENGTHS

- effective internal and external communications
- established and effective staff development and appraisal system
- good equal opportunities policies and practices
- effective equal opportunities training
- good use of data in setting targets

WEAKNESSES

- poor access to main building for wheelchair users
- inadequate quality assurance arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- wider range of initial assessment tools
- better guidance for staff in preparing and using individual learning plans
- better target-setting in the promotion of equality of opportunity

6. Internal and external communications are effective. There are regular and frequent staff team meetings at all levels in the company. Directors and area of learning managers meet every month to review learners' retention and achievement rates and to

set targets for improvement. Staff meetings which follow these ensure that all staff are regularly informed about key issues. There are regular individual meetings between staff and managers to discuss their targets and learners' progress. Staff fully understand the company's aims and objectives. Good practice is shared at additional cross-team meetings. The staff handbook is good and ensures staff are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Contact with employers is frequent, both formally and informally, and most have a good understanding of their learners' progress. Many employers contact Training Plus when they have job vacancies. Telephone contacts to Training Plus are kept for six months, so that issues can be followed up as necessary. Good contacts are being developed by the recruitment team to match learners with job vacancies, or to refer them to other agencies for additional support or guidance. Good links are being developed with agencies working with relevant organisations to encourage participation in training by learners from under-represented groups. Meetings between directors and managers make good use of data to keep them fully informed about the learners' progress and retention and achievement. Area of learning managers make a presentation at these meetings on their team's monthly performance in learners' achievements. Learning teams and their individual staff are set targets at the end of these meetings, and their progress is monitored in subsequent individual meetings with their managers. All staff fully understand the importance of retention and achievement rates, the current performance of the company in comparison to funding body targets, and their individual roles in improving the performance.

7. The staff review and appraisal system was introduced when the company was formed. It is based on a six-monthly formal review during which managers make good use of feedback and target-setting. Progress is reviewed every month in meetings between individual managers and staff. Newly appointed staff have monthly reviews during their six-month probationary period and are given effective support. Staff judged to be under-performing are given more frequent reviews and specific short-term targets. The focus of all these activities is staff support for learners. Staff take part in a wide range of development activities both within the company and externally, including diversity training and counselling training. Most staff have assessment or verifying qualifications, training qualifications or basic skills awards. Some staff are completing key skills awards themselves. New procedures to delegate budgets to area of learning managers have been accompanied by good individual professional development.

8. All learners are assessed during their induction to establish their entry levels in literacy and numeracy, using a standard Basic Skills Agency test. The test does not identify learners' specific additional learning needs. The recruitment team relies on the experience of its members to identify early signs of additional needs and refer learners to outside agencies for further diagnostic testing. None of the team has a specific qualification or background to support them in this role. There are satisfactory arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language training for learners who are identified as needing additional support.

9. All learners have an individual learning plan prepared by their assessor during induction. The plans record target dates for individual units of the qualification, but

many of these dates are unrealistic, and most learners are unaware of them. Assessors do not routinely refer to the individual learning plan during progress reviews. Learners do not always know when they are due to complete an individual unit, particularly when they are being assessed on a number of units together. Staff do not have sufficient guidance on preparing these plans, especially in setting targets.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

10. There is an equal opportunities policy and related detailed procedures manual and effective complaints and harassment procedures that are understood well by learners. The equal opportunities policy of Training Plus is reviewed annually in consultation with the equal opportunities monitoring group. This group meets formally every three months and follows a formal agenda. Minutes of these meetings are recorded. The group acts as a consultative body for strategic planning and decision-making, and reviews the development of equal opportunities policy and practice.

11. There is good use of data to set targets. Monitoring of equal opportunities data is good and is used well to inform the equal opportunities development plan. Recent development work includes the provision of the learning programmes to specific community and under-represented groups. Data on applicants and current learners relating to gender, ethnicity and disability, are collected and analysed for each learning programme and for the provision as a whole. Data are up to date, are recorded clearly and are easily accessible by staff. These data are analysed and monitored effectively and are used to aid the development of the equal opportunities policy and related procedures and to set targets for recruitment.

12. Equal opportunities training is effective. Staff, learners and employers have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and their rights and responsibilities. All employers are required to sign a statement indicating that they have an equal opportunities policy. They are required to provide Training Plus with a copy of their policy. All learners complete an equal opportunities workbook. All staff also complete the workbook. This work is monitored and set questions are used at progress reviews to monitor learners' understanding of related issues. On completion of the workbook, staff and learners attend an equal opportunities training session led by the director of human resources. Some employers attend this training. A certificate is issued on completion of the workbook and training session. The areas of learning are regularly evaluated in relation to equal opportunities through the completion of evaluation forms to aid development of the provision. Additional equal opportunities training is provided to staff and learners.

13. Access to the two main sites is poor. There is currently no access to the hairdressing academy for wheelchair users. There is no lift access to the training room used for theory training on the first floor. At the other site, there is no lift access to the toilet facilities that are situated in the basement. Plans are in place to modernise both sites and improve access. There are currently eight learners with additional learning needs and/or mobility difficulties.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

14. Training Plus has a comprehensive quality assurance policy and related procedures to evaluate support provided by staff to learners in achieving their qualifications. The procedures were recently introduced with the formation of the new Training Plus company and are updated regularly. The quality assurance monitoring system is understood by all staff. Routine internal verification is carried out and all staff are observed twice a year interviewing, inducting, assessing and reviewing learners, and providing training. They are given helpful feedback on their performance. New staff are assessed more frequently during their six-month probationary period. The procedures outline the collection of feedback following assessment and the collection of feedback from employers. However, feedback is not routinely collected on the standard of the training.

15. Quality assurance monitoring arrangements are inadequate. There is frequent, detailed analysis of the retention and achievement rates. A range of initiatives has been introduced by managers to improve retention and achievement rates, including encouraging employers to release learners for off-the-job training, reviewing off-the-job training, increasing the number of assessors, and improving internal verification to help assessors make better use of the diverse range of evidence in learners' portfolios. Key skills training and assessment has been reviewed. There has been almost no change in the achievement rates over the past three years. Although management focus on staff targets and the financial implications of improving achievement, there is insufficient analysis of the low achievement rates or how the recent initiatives can lead to improvements.

16. Training Plus produced its first self-assessment report in 2001 and a second report in 2002. The latest self-assessment report is used for business planning. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process, and the report was written in consultation with area of learning managers. Although inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the report, it does not focus sufficiently on the low retention and achievement rates.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	93	3

17. There are 78 foundation modern apprentices, 19 advanced modern apprentices, and three NVQ learners on work-based learning programmes in business administration including those learners who started their learning programmes in 2002-03. The provider works with a range of established companies in Merseyside, including multinationals, public-sector organisations and smaller, family-owned businesses. There are four tutors/assessors for administration, one of whom is an internal verifier. Training Plus has a specialised recruitment team and potential learners are recruited directly from employers and also through a network of referral agencies. Where learners are recruited from these agencies, appropriate work placements are found, based on an initial assessment and interview. All learners have a comprehensive induction either in the workplace or on the provider's premises, and an individual learning plan is produced. This includes a basic skills assessment and an occupational skills assessment. Progress reviews take place every six weeks and assessors visit the workplace at least every fortnight. All assessment is in the workplace comprising observation and assessment of work evidence. Key skills training and assessment are introduced at the start of the learning programme.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	12		10		8											
Retained*	1		6		0	0										
Successfully completed	0		3		0	0										
Still in learning	5		1		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)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	87		102		46											
Retained*	18		40		6	13										
Successfully completed	16		31		3	7										
Still in learning	20		3		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

- very good integration of key skills training and assessment
- good learner support
- effective short-term action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- ineffective targets for NVQ unit achievement
- insufficient planned training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better employer involvement in progress reviews
- more regular, formal information to employers about learners' progress
- more use of professional discussion as an assessment tool

18. There is good integration of key skills training and assessment. The key skills requirements are introduced to learners at induction and form part of the initial assessment. Learners and employers have a good understanding of key skills. Learners begin to collect evidence for their key skills from the start of the learning programme and understand how evidence from the NVQ can be used to meet the key skills standards. Evidence from learners' everyday work is used to demonstrate key skills competence. Learners also complete supplementary key skills workbooks in communication and application of number. The communications key skills workbook includes the preparation and presentation of a short talk, which is delivered in the

workplace to colleagues and workplace supervisors. This helps to build learners' confidence and ensures the involvement and support of work colleagues. The provider offers mock tests in key skills to identify any problems. Off-the-job training sessions in key skills are available to learners, but are not well attended. Learners on the new framework are able to use the IT key skills qualification as an enhancement.

19. Assessors provide learners with a high level of pastoral and vocational support. Support is also provided by other staff from Training Plus, employers, and in some cases, other learners. Providers' staff are highly committed to learners' welfare. Assessors visit the workplace at least fortnightly and progress reviews are every six weeks. All visits are well planned. Learners can contact assessors between these visits. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the progress reviews. Other provider staff, such as the recruitment team, are involved in the induction process and maintain close contact with learners when there are problems with placements. These problems are rectified quickly and effectively. Where appropriate, new work placements are found. There are excellent working relationships between assessors, learners and employers. Employers provide a variety of activities in the workplace to ensure that learners have sufficient evidence to demonstrate competence against the NVQ and key skills standards. Workplaces provide good IT resources and general office equipment. Learners are accepted as part of the work team and colleagues provide good role models. In cases where learners have moved from a different provider, the transfer has been fast and effective with minimum disruption to the learners' learning programme.

20. Short-term action-planning is effective. At the end of each visit, assessors leave learners with detailed and clear actions to be taken before the next meeting. These include evidence to be collected, activities to be carried out and details of observations to take place at the next visit. At each meeting these actions are reviewed. Learners fully understand what they have to do before the next visit. Employers sign the action plans and help the learners to carry out the instructions. These action plans contribute significantly to learners' progress. Action plans are recorded on a standard form, but this is not fully understood by the learner and employer.

21. Retention and achievement rates over the past three years have been poor, though retention rates are improving. There were no achievements of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework in 1999-2000. Only 30 per cent achieved the framework in 2000-01. No learners achieved the advanced modern apprenticeship in 2001-02. However, there are currently 42 learners still on programme and these learners are making good progress in achieving their NVQ units. The achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices in 1999-2000, 2000-01, and 2001-02 were 7 per cent, 30 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. Training Plus has introduced measures to improve the achievement rates. Current foundation modern apprentices also have an improved achievement of NVQ units compared with previous years and there has been a gradual improvement in retention rates over the past three years.

22. Ineffective targets are set for NVQ unit achievement in individual learning plans. Targets are set following initial assessment. Learners do not have a copy of their

individual learning plan and it is generally not updated following unit achievements. Advanced modern apprentices are expected to complete the framework in less than 16 months. However, the target date for completion of the first unit on the individual learning plan is 12 months after the start date. Medium-term targets for unit achievement are not set at progress reviews and no reference is made to individual learning plan targets. Progress reviews generally repeat the short-term action plans set by the assessor. Learners are unaware of any unit targets. Unit achievement is slow in some cases. For example, two learners who have been on the learning programme for six months have not completed a unit although the individual learning plan unit achievement targets have been passed by three months. Employers are not kept up to date on their learners' progress. Most assessment is carried out at the end of the learning programme. The internal verifier has introduced measures that have improved the achievements of some learners. There is no assessment of discussions in the workplace between learners and colleagues.

23. There is insufficient planned training. On-the-job training does not refer to the NVQ or key skills requirements. On-the-job training is not evaluated or recorded by the provider. Many learners attend training programmes run by their employer. The learner informs the assessor of this training, often after it has taken place. An occupational skills assessment is conducted at induction, but is not used effectively. Until recently, recording of training provided by the employer has been poor. Gaps in off-the-job training have not been identified. However, a rolling programme of off-the-job training for key skills, NVQ and technical certificates has been developed to complement the on-the-job training and is currently being implemented. It is too early to judge the impact of this training. No current learners in this area of learning attract funding for additional learning needs. Where a need is identified through initial assessment or self-referral, assessors arrange basic skills classes or additional time on key skill tests. One administration assessor has appropriate qualifications in basic skills to provide relevant support.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	43	3

24. There are 43 learners on work-based learning programmes in retailing and customer service, including those learners who started their learning programmes in 2002-03. Of these, nine are on retailing learning programmes and are employed in different branches of one company. The learners working towards customer service NVQs are employed in a range of workplaces including nurseries and a local shipping company. They are recruited by the recruitment team who carries out interviews, a basic skills test, an occupational skills scan and an induction. The information is then passed to an occupational assessor who visits the learner in the workplace and checks through all the information with both the learner and the employer. Off-the-job training for some of the key skills is carried out at the centre. Recently a scheme of work and a 'rolling programme' of training sessions have been developed but this is not yet in operation. Some training is carried out in the workplace. Assessors and internal verifiers are appropriately experienced and qualified.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	35		50		45											
Retained*	8		21		9	20										
Successfully completed	6		17		2	4										
Still in learning	7		1		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)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	141		146		132											
Retained*	36		49		14	11										
Successfully completed	30		35		2	2										
Still in learning	10		1		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																
	2000-01		1999-2000													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		2													
Retained*	0		1	50												
Successfully completed	0		0	0												
Still in learning	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

STRENGTHS

- good assessment practice
- good integration of key skills training and assessment
- good pastoral support

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates
- some ineffective progress reviews
- poor internal verification practice

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more recording of on-the-job training
- better recording of information on individual learning plans

25. There is good assessment practice, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Assessors produce well-written assessment plans with short-term targets set for completion by the next planned visit. The previous assessment plan is referred to as necessary. Assessors constantly refer to the NVQ and key skills standards and explain the evidence requirements clearly to the learners. Assessment plans are well referenced to the relevant NVQ and key skills units. Assessors and learners thoroughly discuss the assessment plan before both parties countersign to confirm acceptance. Copies of the plans are kept in portfolios of evidence and in learners' personal files. Learners are encouraged to identify where their evidence meets the NVQ and key skills standards. Learners are able to carry forward any items of evidence they have been unable to source to the next assessment plan. Assessors use a range of assessment methods including direct observation, open questions, product evidence and witness testimony. Verbal feedback is given to the learner on completion of observation and is also recorded on the assessment plan. Learners' portfolios are well structured and clearly laid out. Evidence is well presented. Assessors and learners discuss each piece of evidence against the relevant standards and authenticate and validate by dating and signatures.

26. There is good integration of key skills training and assessment, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Assessment plans show a clear record of the key skills being included in the evidence-collection requirements. The provider has developed a generic pack of learning materials, which are very clearly written to the key skills units and are easy to follow. Assessors discuss in detail the exact requirements of the pack with the learner. Progress towards key skills is recorded on a key skills monitoring document in the learner's portfolio. A similar document also records NVQ-unit progress. Mock test and final test dates are discussed with learners and employers to allow them to select the most suitable time for them. After the mock test, where additional learning needs have been identified, support is given either as a group activity at the training centre or individually at the learner's workplace.

27. There is good pastoral support for learners, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Learners are given their assessors' mobile telephone number for contact at any time. Learners receive good guidance from their assessors. Assessors make frequent visits to the workplace to carry out assessment. Learners work through an equal opportunities and a health safety workbook to further enhance their knowledge. These workbooks are also cross-referenced to the appropriate background knowledge section in the NVQ and can be completed at the learners' own pace. There are good working relationships between learners and employers. Where on-the-job training takes place, this is often not recorded.

28. There are currently no learners identified with any additional learning, social or language support needs in this area of learning. A basic skills diagnostic test is carried out for all learners and the details are recorded. If any additional needs are identified, learners are referred to the basic skills/key skills co-ordinator who visits them in their workplace, then makes any appropriate arrangements for relevant support. Support is available either at the training centre where a learner can obtain individual support, or a

visit can be arranged to the learner's workplace. The co-ordinator is currently working towards a relevant qualification. Induction, initial assessment, and resources are satisfactory.

29. Achievement and retention rates are poor, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. However, measures have recently been introduced aimed at improving both and current learners are achieving units of their NVQs and key skills. Between 1999 and 2002, a total of 130 learners started advanced modern apprenticeships. Only 25 achieved the full framework. The achievement rates for 1999-2000, 2000-01, and 2001-02, are 4 per cent, 34 per cent, and 17 per cent, respectively. Retention rates have increased from 20 per cent in 1999-2000 to 42 per cent in 2000-01. For 2001-02, retention was 23 per cent. For the same three-year period, a total of 419 learners started foundation modern apprenticeships. Only 67 completed their full framework. The achievement rates for 1999-2000, 2000-01, and 2001-02, are 2 per cent, 24 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. Retention rates increased from 11 per cent in 1999-2000, to 34 per cent in 2000-01 and 26 per cent in 2001-02. However, on the NVQ programme, of the three starts over the three years, none has achieved and none is still in learning. No learners were recruited on NVQ training for 2001-02.

30. Some learners' progress reviews are ineffective. The self-assessment report did not identify this weakness. Progress towards the NVQ is not always recorded. Some learners have been on programme for some months and their progress towards achieving units is not fully recorded. However, the assessment plans are very detailed and progress is checked in those plans. Individual learning plans are not used in some progress reviews and target dates are not checked. Employers are not always involved in the discussion and the target-setting although they do read the details and do sign the forms. Some of the retail shop managers are not fully aware of the NVQ and the learning programme requirements, as this information has been given to other staff. Various shift patterns means that the same person is not always available. Training Plus has identified problems and taken actions to manage the programmes more effectively.

31. There is poor internal verification. For the nine learners currently doing NVQs in retailing, no internal verification has taken place. Two learners started on the learning programmes 10 months ago and have had NVQ units assessed, four others started four months ago and one four weeks ago. Two others have been in training since 2001 and although some assessment had been carried out, they have lost their portfolios and started again. A member of staff has taken up the job role of internal verifier since January 2003. Internal verification for the retailing learners has been planned for next month. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. Internal verification in customer service is satisfactory. Unit accreditation has been recently introduced for learners who leave but have not completed the full NVQ.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	75	4

32. There are 23 advanced modern apprentices and 52 foundation modern apprentices on work-based learning programmes in hairdressing including those learners who started their learning programmes in 2002-03. All learners are employed. Foundation modern apprenticeships last for 25 months and advanced modern apprenticeships, 18 months. Progress reviews take place every six weeks. Learners can join a learning programme at any time during the year. All learners attend an induction, which includes an outline of the training programme, and information on equality of opportunity and health and safety policies. Learners complete an initial assessment of their basic and key skills. This information identifies those who need additional support. Additional support is provided by provider staff on an individual basis. Off-the-job training is provided at the provider's training academy situated in the city centre. All learners attend training at the academy for one day each week for theory and practical training. Some learners only receive practical training in the workplace. Assessment takes place at the training academy and in the workplace. Recruitment of learners is mainly through employers' referral, Connexions and direct involvement with schools. There are four assessors and one internal verifier. Three of the assessors are working towards their internal verifier awards. There are also 10 work-based assessors. All have appropriate qualifications and experience.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	24		53		58											
Retained*	3		18		9	16										
Successfully completed	3		15		6	10										
Still in learning	6		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)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	110		116		96											
Retained*	27		33		17	18										
Successfully completed	25		30		10	10										
Still in learning	19		1		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 support for learners
- good progress reviews
- good understanding of key skills by learners, assessors and employers

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of individual learning plans
- more work-based assessment

33. Learners receive good pastoral support. Staff frequently give support and advice to learners in the workplace. Learners have good working relationships with staff. When starting employment, learners are given the mobile telephone number of the recruitment manager, who can be contacted at any time to discuss problems. There are communications between Training Plus and employers. Learners who need additional support are able to attend drop-in sessions organised on a weekly basis. Learners are encouraged by staff of Training Plus to become involved with presentations and hair shows. Some learners take part in hairdressing competitions. Learners' achievements in competitions and hair shows are celebrated by Training Plus and there is sometimes coverage in the local press. Good off-the-job training takes place in well-resourced training environments. All off-the-job training sessions are supported by a standardised lesson plan. In most instances, this describes the learning activity and has a method of assessing learners' understanding. Tutors use teaching methods appropriate to the

different learning styles of the learners. Learners receive good support from their employers who provide additional workplace training. Many employers allow learners to attend additional training such as manufacturers' courses. Learners' workplaces are of a high standard with good resources, including professional products. Learners are encouraged to use photographic evidence in their portfolios to support their practical work. This is of a good standard. Learners take pride in their portfolios and collect sufficient supplementary evidence to support their NVQ.

34. Learners receive good progress reviews. Internal progress reviews take place at the training centre every six weeks. A further review takes place at 12-weekly intervals at the learner's workplace with either the employer or salon manager. Both the learner and the employer or manager are encouraged to set short-term targets for learners. Learners are aware of their targets and when they should be achieved. Targets are sufficiently challenging to motivate the learner to progress. There is good co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training. Employers support the theory training sessions. Training Plus's staff contact employers by telephone to make them aware of their learner's progress. This contact is often weekly. Individual learning plans are not included in their portfolios and do not always contain the long-term targets that are regularly updated.

35. There is a good understanding of key skills by learners, assessors and employers. Key skills training and assessment are well integrated within the learning programme. Key skills training starts at the beginning of the learning programme. Good use is made of everyday work activity to provide key skills evidence. Learners have a clear understanding of how key skills tasks are linked to their NVQ and their vocational area. Staff work well to reinforce key skills within the learners' theory and practical off-the-job training. Learners also use evidence from the workplace for their key skills. Some employers reinforce the linking of key skills to the vocational area during learners everyday work.

36. Internal verification procedures are satisfactory. Internal verifiers organise regular meetings with assessors to share good practice. Internal verification sampling of assessment practices are carried out by new assessors within the training centre and in the workplace increases until the verifier feels their work has reached an appropriate standard. Assessment takes place both in the Training Plus's training academy and the workplace. Learners who do not have access to work-based assessors are mainly assessed at the training academy. Although learners' progress is satisfactory, there is not enough work-based assessment. Employers are being encouraged by Training Plus to achieve the assessor's award.

37. All learners are tested during induction to determine levels of literacy and numeracy. There are procedures to ensure that relevant support is provided with assignments and theoretical work. There is detailed evidence of the support sessions in the learners' personal files. Some learners do not know what support is available. There is some evidence of a structured delivery of basic skills and re-testing to record developments.

38. Retention and achievement rates are poor. Of the advanced modern apprentices who started their learning programmes in 1999-2000, the retention and achievement rates are 16 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. The retention and achievement rates for the foundation modern apprentices for the same period, were 18 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. Of the advanced modern apprentices who started learning programmes in 2000-01, the achievement rate was 28 per cent. The achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices for the same period was 26 per cent. In 2001-02, the retention and achievement rates for foundation and advanced modern apprentices are 15 per cent and 23 per cent, and 25 per cent and 13 per cent respectively.

Good Practice

Learners are encouraged to enter an annual competition which includes learners from other providers. The event attracts good press coverage which celebrates learners' achievement.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	107	3

39. There are 51 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3, and 55 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQ at level 2, in early years care and education. All learners work towards key skills at level 2. One learner is working towards an NVQ at level 2. This includes those learners who started their learning programme in 2002-03. Learners work in local education authority (LEA) or privately owned day nurseries and primary schools. Most learners are recruited from advertising, recommendation or through Connexions. Others are recruited from local community agencies. Learners can join the learning programme at any time. All applicants for training are interviewed by the provider's recruitment team. Learners' understanding of the job role is assessed during interview. Learners' abilities in basic skills and key skills are assessed during three-hour induction at the training centre. All NVQ assessment takes place in the workplace. There are two internal verifiers, one of whom is also the programme manager for childcare, and four training and assessing staff. Some learners attend weekly training sessions at the training centre. Portfolio-building and key skills are included in these sessions.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	28		49		14											
Retained*	2		7		2											
Successfully completed	1		3		2											
Still in learning	14		13		2											

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	61		49		43											
Retained*	8		15		2											
Successfully completed	6		2		10											
Still in learning	29		2		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																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1				41											
Retained*	0				1											
Successfully completed	0				0											
Still in learning	1				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 induction
- some very good training
- effective integration of key skills training and assessment
- good progress reviews
- good support for learners
- thorough internal verification process

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention and achievement rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of individual learning plans

40. Induction is well structured and effective. Learners receive a detailed booklet on all aspects of their training. This is reinforced with questioning on completion of the induction. The provider explains the commitment required from learners, including action for non-attendance and poor achievement. Learners have a good understanding of their learning programmes and how to collect evidence. They are aware of equal opportunities and the appeals and complaints procedure. As part of the induction learners complete a job analysis with the provider and the employer to ensure they are on the level of NVQ that matches their job role. Each learner receives an early visit from their assessor where feedback is given on initial assessment of basic and key skills. Workplace supervisors attend this meeting and an action plan is agreed. All learners clearly remember their induction and are able to recall the information given to them.

41. There are some very good training sessions. Good use is made of resources. There is good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Employers allow learners to attend additional off-the-job training sessions. Learning sessions tailored to the individual learners' needs.

42. There is effective integration of key skills training and assessment. Learners are introduced to key skills during their induction as they complete the equal opportunities workbook. Provider staff teach and assess key skills alongside the NVQ. Good assessment planning and progress reviews identify NVQ and key skills evidence from everyday work tasks. Learners fully understand the relevance of key skills to their qualification and to their work. Learners are confident in using key skills evidence for their NVQ programme. Employers have a good understanding of key skills and give learners sufficient time to prepare for and attend external key skills assessment tests.

43. Progress reviews are good and take place every six weeks. Additionally, assessors visit learners frequently to review learners' progress. Additional training days provided by the employer are used well to provide NVQ evidence. Learners and employers fully understand progress made. Learners complete a monitoring document of achievement, which is updated after every review. They agree a short-term action plan for their NVQ and key skills with clear, achievable targets, which is signed by all parties.

44. There is good learner support. Learners' basic skills are assessed at induction and specialist basic skills staff provide necessary support. When minimal help is required, the learners are allocated additional assessor time. There is careful and detailed assessment planning to observe activities that provide evidence for many units. Learners are taught their practical skills well and are confident in their work with children. Attendance of foundation modern apprentices at training sessions is good. The provider has good initiatives in place to improve the attendance of the advanced modern apprentices by

contacting employers to identify a more suitable time and day for providing training. Assessor practice is good, using diverse methods of assessment. Learners produce good portfolios of evidence. Learners receive good support in the workplace from their managers and workplace supervisors and are able to work with all age groups, ensuring full coverage of the NVQ units. They are able to attend off-the-job training and receive thorough on-the-job training, advice and guidance. Many employers support NVQ and key skills achievement by providing extensive pastoral support for their learners.

45. Internal verification is thorough, comprehensive and effective. There are three key stages to internal verification. The first stage ensures learners are fully aware of the NVQ process. The second stage ensures learners are on target and identifies any additional support needs. The final stage comprises samples of assessor practice such as observations, knowledge and understanding. This is above the awarding body requirements. The competent and knowledgeable lead internal verifier gives detailed written feedback to the assessor. An action plan is compiled to tackle areas of concern. This is closely monitored by the programme manager until completion. The lead internal verifier also monitors assessor practice in the workplace twice each year. Assessors meet monthly to standardise their practice.

46. Retention and achievement rates are poor. The retention rate on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme for 1999-2000 is 14 per cent with 14 per cent still in learning. Only 7 per cent of this group have achieved their full framework. Achievement of the NVQ is higher at 21 per cent. In 2000-01, 14 per cent of advanced modern apprentices were retained on the programme. Twelve per cent of all those who started achieved their full framework qualification. In 2001-02, 4 per cent of advanced modern apprentices achieved their framework with an improved retention rate of 50 per cent. Achievement of the foundation modern apprenticeship in 1999-2000 was low at 2 per cent. However, 53 per cent of these learners achieved their NVQ. In 2000-01, 31 per cent of learners were retained, of whom 24 per cent achieved their framework. Four per cent are still in learning. Twenty-nine per cent achieved their NVQ. In 2001-02, 11 per cent of learners achieved their framework, with 48 per cent still in learning.