

# REINSPECTION REPORT

## **Zodiac Training Limited Reinspection**

**04 December 2003**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## ZODIAC TRAINING LIMITED REINSPECTION

### Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

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## **Zodiac Training Limited Reinspection**

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## REINSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Zodiac Training Limited (Zodiac) is a private limited company based in Gateshead, Tyne and Wear. It has six training centres and provides training in the Northeast of England and in West Yorkshire. Until very recently it also provided training for a few learners in Norfolk. All of these learners have now been transferred to another training provider and no more recruitment is planned in the Norfolk area. Zodiac provides work-based learning for young people and work-based learning for adults, funded by five local Learning and Skills Councils. Since the previous inspection, it has stopped providing training in foundation programmes, except as a subcontractor for other training providers, and has started to provide training in engineering.
2. The company has two directors, one of whom is responsible for the day-to-day delivery of training and the other is responsible for the support services and the recruitment of learners. There are programme co-ordinators for each area of learning, a staff development co-ordinator, nine internal verifiers, 29 training advisers, eight recruitment advisers, and 17 support and administration staff. There are seven managers, each of whom are responsible for marketing, quality assurance, human resources, finance, training and development, management information, and business development.
3. The 2001 census, shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the Northeast is 2.4 per cent, and in West Yorkshire it is 11.4 per cent, compared with 9.1 nationally.
4. Zodiac is accredited with the Investors in People standard, which is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

5. Zodiac provides training towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in performing manufacturing operations. At the time of the previous inspection there were no engineering learners, although Zodiac had previously provided engineering training. During 2002, recruitment restarted after the previous inspection and the company now has 17 learners, including 10 young people and seven adults, all of whom are based in three manufacturing companies in the Northeast. They were all recruited directly from their employers.
6. Training advisers visit the learners in the workplace to deliver training and to carry out assessments and progress reviews.

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

7. Zodiac provides advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships and NVQs in business administration, management, and teaching and training. It has 91 learners on advanced modern apprenticeships, 158 on foundation modern apprenticeships and 112 learners working towards NVQs. There are 268 young people and 93 adults, most of whom are following NVQ training programmes. Learners are recruited after referral by Connexions, after recommendation by employers, or after contacting Zodiac directly. Just over 5 per cent of learners are located in West Yorkshire and the rest are based in the Northeast. All of Zodiac's learners are employed.

8. Training advisers visit the learners in the workplace to deliver training and to carry out assessments and progress reviews. Some learners also attend additional training at Zodiac's training centres.

### **Information & communications technology**

9. Zodiac provides advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, and NVQs in information and communications technology (ICT). There are five learners on advanced modern apprenticeships, nine on foundation modern apprenticeships and two working towards NVQs. There are 15 young people on modern apprenticeships and one adult who is working towards an NVQ only. Learners are recruited after referral from Connexions, after recommendation by employers or after contacting Zodiac directly. Zodiac's staff provide training, coaching and assessment at the learners' workplaces. The company provides additional workshops at its training centres for those who want to attend. All of Zodiac's ICT learners are employed. Just over 12 per cent of learners are based in West Yorkshire and the remainder are in the Northeast.

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

10. Zodiac provides advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, and NVQs in customer service, retailing, warehousing and distribution and call handling. The company has 96 learners on advanced modern apprenticeships, 249 on foundation modern apprenticeships, and 119 learners on NVQ training programmes. There are 359 young people and 105 adults. Most of the adults are following NVQ training programmes. Learners are recruited after referral from Connexions, after recommendation by employers, or after contacting Zodiac directly. Just over 9 per cent of learners are based in West Yorkshire and the remainder are located in the Northeast. All of Zodiac's learners are employed.

11. Training advisers visit the learners in the workplace to deliver training and to carry out assessments and progress reviews. Some learners also attend additional training at Zodiac's training centres.

## Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

12. Zodiac provides advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships and NVQs in hospitality. It has 13 learners on advanced modern apprenticeships, 75 on foundation modern apprenticeships and 21 on NVQ training programmes. There are 89 young people and 20 adults. All the adults are on NVQ training programmes. Learners are recruited after referral from Connexions, after recommendation by employers, or after contacting Zodiac directly. The company offers courses in hospitality service, food and drink service, food preparation and cooking, bar service, hospitality quick service, and hospitality supervision. All of Zodiac's hospitality learners are employed. Training advisers visit the learners in the workplace to deliver training and to carry out assessments and progress reviews. Some learners also attend additional training at Zodiac's training centres.

## ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	10
Number of inspection days	44
Number of learner interviews	99
Number of staff interviews	74
Number of employer interviews	40
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	60
Number of visits	3

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

13. At the previous inspection, leadership and management, quality assurance and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. The training provided in business administration and ICT were satisfactory. The training provided in retailing, customer service and hospitality and in foundation programmes were unsatisfactory. Training in engineering was not inspected at the previous inspection. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

## GRADES

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

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

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	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people		3
Work-based learning for adults		None

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

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Information &amp; communications technology</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	3
Work-based learning for adults		None

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3
Work-based learning for adults		3

	Inspection	Reinspection
<b>Hospitality, sport, leisure &amp; travel</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3
Work-based learning for adults		3

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

**14. Retention rates in business administration, customer service, information technology (IT) and hospitality are improving steadily.** Very few learners now leave their training programme early.



15. Historically, achievement rates have been poor and so far there has only been a significant improvement in hospitality and on the NVQ training programme in customer service. However, all current learners in customer service, IT and hospitality are making satisfactory progress. In business administration, there is still some slow progress, particularly in one geographical area.

16. In 2002, training in engineering stopped for a few months. However, it has since re-started and all learners are making at least satisfactory progress and some have completed most of their training programme.

### Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	9
Information & communications technology	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	5	9	0	0	0	14
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	3	4	2	0	0	0	9
Foundation programmes	0	0	0	5	2	1	0	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>41</b>

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	4
Information & communications technology	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>

17. **In engineering, there is good training in the workplace.** All workplaces provide good technical equipment for learners and they gain good practical skills with help from knowledgeable workplace supervisors.

18. **There is some inappropriate use of witness testimonies for learners on the NVQ training programme in engineering.** Witness testimonies are prepared in advance and do not contain sufficient details about the learner's achievements.

19. **Zodiac does not plan additional training effectively for each learner in engineering.** There are few opportunities for engineering learners to attend workshops and other events at Zodiac's training centres.

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20. **In business administration, there is a wide range of good work placements.** These provide learners with challenging roles and good opportunities to develop administration and management skills. Business administration learners also receive good advice and guidance about the range of learning programmes available to them. A wide range of methods is used to assess learners' progress and they receive clear guidance about the relevance and importance of each assessment.

21. **In IT, learners are helped to develop particularly good professional skills** in word processing, graphical design, the use of spreadsheets and other relevant software. They also have particularly good progression opportunities to higher level programmes or other areas of learning.

22. **Zodiac is slow at allocating training advisers to some learners in IT.** Learners have to wait too long to start their training programmes after they have been recruited. Targets set during progress reviews are not sufficiently detailed. Timetables for completing individual units of the NVQ are vague.

23. **There is good on-the-job training for learners in customer service.** Learners develop good professional skills and the training is well linked to their jobs and to employer's needs. They receive good support for their individual learning needs from their training advisers. Zodiac makes particularly good use of electronic assessment to help customer service learners who work in a call centre. These learners are encouraged to use their IT skills to develop their portfolios at home and at quiet times during their working day. There are good arrangements with employers wherever this method is used.

24. **Progress reviews in customer service are ineffective.** Employers are not sufficiently well involved and the learners' next steps are not well planned.

25. **Learners in hospitality receive good initial advice and a good induction.** A wide range of courses is available and they are advised which one will be most appropriate for them and their workplace. They also receive good training support. Training advisers are flexible and make arrangements to suit learner's varied shift patterns and workloads.

26. **There is insufficient planning of learners' progress in hospitality.** Learners are not set effective targets during progress reviews and receive insufficient information on how much progress they have made and how much work still needs to be completed.

### Leadership and management

27. **There is good internal and external communication.** There are frequent management and staff meetings where the key issues affecting learners are discussed. Since the previous inspection, Zodiac has changed the structure of its management team and there is now much greater concentration on helping learners to stay in learning until they achieve their aims. Zodiac has also extended its links with other training providers and external agencies such as Connexions and community groups.

28. **Zodiac makes good use of learners', employers' and staff feedback,** and responds

quickly to suggestions for improvement or issues of concern. It also makes good use of management information.

**29. There are good procedures to train and develop staff and to increase their professional skills.** A very effective induction package for new staff has recently been developed and is now in use.

**30. Zodiac places a strong emphasis on equality of opportunity.** It takes great care to protect learners from harassment, bullying or discrimination and to increase their understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity during their learning programmes. It also has particularly effective procedures to attract under-represented groups to learning and has increased the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups significantly over the past three years.

**31. There is insufficient monitoring of training and assessment.** Most training and assessment takes place when training advisers visit learners in the workplace. However, the purpose of each visit is rarely planned in advance and the visits do not form part of an overall plan for each learner. There are insufficient arrangement to monitor the content of individual learning programmes.

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

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- good internal and external communications
- effective use of management information
- good staff induction and development
- very effective procedures to attract learners from under-represented groups
- strong emphasis on equality of opportunity
- extensive use of feedback from learners, staff and employers

### **Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- insufficient monitoring of training and assessment

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### **Strengths**

- good rates of progress
- good training in the workplace

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient planning of training for individual learners' needs
- some inappropriate assessment practices

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

#### **Strengths**

- improving retention rates
- wide range of good workplace opportunities
- good assessment practices
- good initial advice and guidance

#### **Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- slow progress by some learners

### **Information & communications technology**

#### **Strengths**

- improving retention rates
- good development of professional skills
- good progression opportunities

#### **Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- insufficient target-setting in progress reviews
- some slow allocation of training advisers to learners

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

### **Strengths**

- improving retention rates
- good on-the-job training
- good support for individual learning needs
- good use of electronic assessment

### **Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates for modern apprentices
- ineffective progress reviews

## **Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**

### **Strengths**

- good training support for learners
- good initial advice and induction

### **Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- insufficient planning of learners' progress

## DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

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

#### Strengths

- good internal and external communications
- effective use of management information
- good staff induction and development
- very effective procedures to attract learners from under-represented groups
- strong emphasis on equality of opportunity
- extensive use of feedback from learners, staff and employers

#### Weaknesses

- historically poor achievement rates
- insufficient monitoring of training and assessment

32. Zodiac has good internal communication. There is frequent and constructive informal communication within the company at all levels, as well as formal management and staff meetings. All formal meetings are well recorded and concentrate on improving the service for learners. Staff are allocated precise action points and the company monitors their progress effectively. Staff are well informed about work issues and developments, and the company encourage them to contribute ideas for improvements. The company's business plan contains objectives and specific targets for improving retention and achievement rates which have been clearly communicated to all staff. Information is also made available to staff through a relevant and interesting company newsletter, noticeboards and the effective use of e-mail. Since the previous inspection, Zodiac has implemented effective strategies and targets to improve the retention rates and accelerated the learners' progress towards achieving their qualifications. These strategies have been well communicated to all staff, who fully understand that Zodiac's priority is to help the learners achieve their aims. There is a new management structure, which has significantly improved communication about the learner's progress. Each area of learning is now managed by a programme co-ordinator, who has good occupational knowledge in that area. The programme co-ordinators and internal verifiers have effective regular meetings with training advisers, at which the learner's progress is discussed and action is taken when difficulties are identified. There are also effective new arrangements, whereby learners are contacted by telephone directly from the head office during their first few weeks in training to confirm that induction, and other introductory procedures have been carried out well. Additional telephone calls are also made when training advisers have concerns over individual learners. Internal verifiers now have increased direct contact with learners, to provide continuity for them if training

advisers leave or change job roles. These new management arrangements are fully supported by all staff and have been very effective in reducing the number of learners who leave early. However, at the end of the reinspection period, the impact on overall achievement is still relatively small. Historically, achievement rates have been poor in all areas of learning and they have not yet shown widespread improvements.

33. The scale and scope of Zodiac's external communication is now also good. Communication and contact with employers are now more frequent. Zodiac's approach to employers is supportive and responsive. It willingly arranges additional training if employers request it and works closely with employers to manage training advisers' visits. For example, at one busy call centre with many learners, Zodiac introduced special arrangements to book appointments with learners through the operational scheduling teams, to guarantee the availability of learners and to reduce disruption in the workplace. Zodiac has very good working links with partner organisations, including business partnerships, Connexions, schools and colleges, and a range of other community-based organisations. In the Northeast, Zodiac is working closely with a local association of training providers, to provide improved referral routes for potential learners.

34. Zodiac has maintained and developed its very effective and accessible management information system. The company uses this well to manage all aspects of the training provision and staff performance. It produces good quality, detailed reports on demand to analyse a wide range of information related to recruitment, learners' progress, employers' details, satisfaction surveys and equal opportunities. The company updates the system every day and evaluates it continuously. Zodiac produces a wide variety of reports for staff at different levels. These provide an appropriate amount of detail to assist each member of staff in carrying out their responsibilities.

35. Zodiac has good procedures for staff induction, appraisal and development. All new staff receive a detailed and thorough induction to the company, covering general procedures and information, in addition to the requirements of their specific job role. There are formal staff appraisals every six months and these are very effective in analysing staff performance and in identifying individual training and development needs. Less-formal monthly staff reviews help identify issues of concern at an early stage. Zodiac has a strong commitment to developing its staff and has established a culture of personal improvement. It supports its staff through appropriate in-company training, or by providing financial assistance or time for them to attend external courses. Since the previous inspection, Zodiac has also improved its recruitment procedures for new staff and introduced new mentoring procedures to help them become effective quickly. Staff turnover has started to decline steadily.

36. Zodiac manages its resources efficiently. The financial manager sets and monitors a realistic overall budget for the company. Staffing levels are appropriate for the number of learners. Learning accommodation and the resources used to support training are satisfactory.

37. There are satisfactory arrangements to identify and support learners who need

additional help with literacy, numeracy or language skills. All learners have their literacy, numeracy and language skills assessed and, where there is an identified need, Zodiac provides appropriate support to enable them to cope with their training programme and job role. Zodiac has recruited specialist staff to co-ordinate and manage this support.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 2**

38. Zodiac has very effective procedures to attract learners from under-represented groups. The company makes effective use of data to monitor the composition of its learners by gender, ethnicity and level of disability. It has recently improved its management information system and can now produce relevant information rapidly. Zodiac has used these data to set itself clear strategic targets for improvement, which it expresses simply, and the recruitment and marketing staff understand them well. For example, each area of learning has annual improvement targets to reduce differences in the numbers of men and women on Zodiac's training programmes and to increase the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups. It has worked effectively with local community groups to encourage learners from all backgrounds. Since the previous inspection, Zodiac has carried out a wide range of marketing and poster campaigns in diverse locations such as community centres, libraries, sports centres and shopping centres and youth clubs. It has continued to develop its relationship with local schools to attract year 11 pupils from all backgrounds into work-based learning and has developed effective links with local charities working with vulnerable young people. Within customer service, Zodiac secured additional funding to attract women returning to work back into learning and worked closely with some employers to promote this successfully. All publicity material and posters are free from stereotypes and Zodiac evaluates the success of each marketing activity thoroughly to help plan future events. Since the previous inspection, Zodiac has improved access to its training centres for people with restricted mobility. All of its training centres, except the head office in Gateshead, now have access arrangements and toilet facilities for people with restricted mobility. Zodiac has plans to vacate the its head office in Gateshead and move to a more suitable location by January 2004. It has also developed a brief but clear policy on recruiting ex-offenders into learning. These procedures continue to be effective. For example, in the 12 months before the previous inspection, the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups had doubled to 3 per cent and it has now grown to 5 per cent, which closely matches the communities it serves.

39. Zodiac still places a strong emphasis on equality of opportunity for staff and learners. It has a succinct equal opportunities policy statement which covers the relevant legislation. Since the previous inspection, it has produced a new disability statement, which is clearly written and explains the support available to learners with disabilities at each training centre. This includes written material in large print, support from a reader and specialist help for learners who have dyslexia. All newly recruited staff receive full training on Zodiac's equality of opportunity principles during their induction and some have also attended extensive external training: in some cases leading to high-level formal qualifications. Zodiac's staff also participate in local equality forums. The increased knowledge is used effectively to help reinforce understanding throughout the company. For example, Zodiac has produced an extensive diversity toolkit for staff which explains



the relevant legislation and provides guidance on good practices. Training advisers have started to use this to work with employers to develop their policies and practices.

40. Equality of opportunity is covered during the learners' induction, and in most cases learners' understanding is now checked regularly and reinforced during their time with Zodiac. Their basic understanding is monitored during progress reviews and Zodiac has introduced a wide range of additional methods to reinforce learning and understanding. These include questionnaires, word searches, quizzes and crosswords. Many learners have also been given useful explanatory leaflets. When these activities or materials are introduced, most staff take care to fully explain the context to learners so that their understanding increases. Some of these activities are relatively new, but most learners have a good understanding of the principles of equality and diversity and their rights and responsibilities.

41. Since the previous inspection, Zodiac has improved its procedures for monitoring the equality of opportunity policies and practices of employers. It now carries out a more detailed check on their policies and challenges examples of poor practice, such as displays of offensive material. Continued compliance with good practice is monitored more closely along with regular health and safety checks. The level of risk to learners is assessed and more frequent checks are arranged for those employers with less-comprehensive practices. All learners are fully protected from harassment, bullying, intimidation or exploitation in the workplace or at Zodiac's premises. The monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is no longer a weakness.

## **Quality assurance**

## **Contributory grade 3**

42. Zodiac makes good use of feedback to introduce improvements to the training provision. Extensive learner feedback is gained through questionnaires at the beginning, middle and conclusion of the learner's training programmes. Individual suggestions are also collected through telephone calls from the head office. The responses are analysed effectively and relevant action is taken to improve the quality of provision for learners, in groups and individually. Frequent surveys of employers are carried out to gain feedback on the quality of training and to encourage suggestions on how the provision can be improved. Responses are followed up by meetings and careful consideration of the issues to implement appropriate action. Staff are actively encouraged to contribute ideas for improvement through surveys, meetings and suggestion boxes.

43. All Zodiac's key training processes are well recorded. There is an effective audit system which checks for compliance and for the relevance of the procedures themselves. Procedures are reviewed and updated in response to user comments and any changes are well communicated at management and staff meetings.

44. Arrangements for self-assessment are satisfactory. Self-assessment has been carried out since 1998 and the self-assessment report is updated regularly. All training staff are fully consulted and regard the report as an important tool to highlight the improvements needed for learners. The most recent version was completed in April 2003. Overall it gives an accurate assessment of the quality of training provided by Zodiac, although

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some standard practices were inappropriately claimed as strengths.

45. There are satisfactory arrangements to manage assessment and internal verification. Different assessment methods are used to different extents in each area of learning, according to learners' needs and the opportunities offered in different workplaces. There are effective strategies for internal verification with effective practices for sampling, observing and recording learners' work. Where potential problems arise, managers usually act promptly to rectify the difficulties. For example, a recent shortage of qualified internal verifiers in engineering was resolved by using a suitably qualified and experienced external consultant.

46. There is insufficient monitoring of training and assessment. Most training and assessment takes place during visits to the workplace by training advisers. The purpose of each visit is not sufficiently well planned as a part of a co-ordinated programme for each learner. There are insufficient monitoring arrangements to ensure that best use is made of each visit to provide learners with the training or assessment they need. Procedures for sharing good practice in training and assessment have not been fully effective. For example, there are some good practices for planning assessment in business administration, but these have not been shared with other areas of learning.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	10	3
Work-based learning for adults	7	None

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

#### Strengths

- good rates of progress
- good training in the workplace

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient planning of training for individual learners' needs
- some inappropriate assessment practices

### Achievement and standards

47. Learners are making good progress and very few leave early. Since recruitment to engineering restarted during 2002, there have been 18 starters and only one learner has left so far. There has been insufficient time for any learners to complete their full qualification, but all are making good progress, including those with additional learning needs. All current learners are at least on target to finish their NVQ by the due date and many have made very rapid progress. For example, one learner has completed 95 per cent of a 12-month learning programme within the first five months. Learners are interested in the learning programmes and develop new and useful skills for the workplace. For example, after Zodiac had provided close additional support for a learner with additional learning needs, his employer measured a significant improvement in the quality of his day-to-day work. Many learners have no other vocational qualifications and take pride in the work they have completed, studying keenly for the background knowledge questions in their own time. Their portfolios are well structured and contain a satisfactory range of evidence.

### Quality of education and training

48. There is good training in the workplace. Zodiac's training advisers use a wide range of training materials and techniques to encourage learning, particularly in the wider skills aspects of the NVQ such as working with others, health and safety and equal

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opportunities. Employers are very supportive of learners and provide ample time for training and assessment by Zodiac's staff. Supervisors are very knowledgeable in their work role and support learners in their training. The work environment for learners is good and they experience an extensive range of work activities which fully meet the requirements of the qualification. In all three workplaces, there is a good range of industry-standard equipment for learners to work on. At one site, the specialist production equipment is only 14 months old. All training sessions observed during the reinspection were satisfactory.

49. Training advisers provide effective individual help and guidance for learners who need support with literacy or numeracy. Zodiac's training advisers work closely with learners and there are effective arrangements for good pastoral support. Zodiac has also provided specialist support for learners who have dyslexia. The learning programmes are appropriate to the workplace and very relevant to the needs of the employers.

50. There is insufficient planning of training for individual learners. Learners' skill levels and training requirements are assessed at the start of their learning programmes, but there is insufficient planning to ensure that individual needs are always met in the most effective manner. For example, assessments may indicate that a learner has training needs in several areas, but training plans do not describe how these will be met. There are few opportunities for engineering learners to attend the training courses and learning opportunities provided at Zodiac's training centres. Employers do not fully participate in learners' progress reviews and there are insufficient arrangements for them to help to plan the next steps with Zodiac's training advisers.

51. Assessments are carried out in the workplace by Zodiac's training advisers who use observations, guided discussion, product evidence and witness testimonies. There is some inappropriate practice in the use of witness testimonies. They are pre-prepared for signature by witnesses and do not clearly identify the date of the activity or the status of the witness. Zodiac already has plans to modify this practice.

## Leadership and management

52. Zodiac's promotion of equality of opportunity to learners is very effective. Learners have a good knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, which is reinforced effectively during progress reviews. The workplaces are safe and non-threatening. However, two employers could not readily provide copies of their equal opportunities policies. Zodiac's monitoring procedures had not identified this shortcoming.

53. Until recently there has been a shortage of internal verifiers, and interim internal verification for some learners has been delayed. Zodiac has recognised this and has recently appointed a suitably qualified external consultant to carry out internal verification and help to train and mentor existing staff.

54. Zodiac's self-assessment report in this area of learning was compiled when only a few learners had been recruited. However, it gives a reasonably accurate assessment of the quality of training provision, correctly identifying the main strengths and weaknesses. However, internal verification was incorrectly judged to be thorough and comprehensive.

**Business administration, management & professional****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	268	3
Work-based learning for adults	93	3

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

**Strengths**

- improving retention rates
- wide range of good workplace opportunities
- good assessment practices
- good initial advice and guidance

**Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- slow progress by some learners

**Achievement and standards**

55. At the previous inspection, achievement and retention rates were poor, with many learners leaving their training programmes early. Overall achievement rates are still poor, but there has been a noticeable reduction in the proportion of learners who leave early. For example, in 2002-03 there were 316 starters and over two-thirds are either still in learning or have completed all aspects of their learning programmes. Since August 2003, there have been 101 starters and none have so far withdrawn. It is still too early for many of these new learners to have completed their qualification, but learners are now gaining good professional skills from their training programmes. Several have taken on additional responsibilities in the workplace. The standard of their work in portfolios is still good, with well structured and clearly cross-referenced evidence.

56. Some learners still make slow progress, particularly in one geographical region. Staff turnover rates have improved, but some learners have had up to four assessors which has delayed their progress. There has also been some delays with completing individual learning plans after recruitment. In some cases, key skills training is still introduced too late for individual learners. For example, some learners had not started any key skills work after being on programme for over 12 months.

## Quality of education and training

57. As at the previous inspection, there is wide range of good workplace training opportunities for learners. Training advisers visit learners very frequently and encourage them to improve their professional skills, and work with employers to help to arrange secondments and changes of role in the workplace. Many learners are in responsible and challenging roles. They increase their self-confidence about their employment during their learning programmes and often make significant contributions to the organisations where they are employed. They receive good informal mentoring from their employers and develop good skills in business administration. All work placements are appropriate to learners' needs. All training sessions observed, at the previous inspection and during the reinspection, were satisfactory or better. Zodiac offers a wide range of short off-the-job training courses and arranges additional sessions on relevant topics when requested by learners or employers. For example, Zodiac has recently provided assertiveness training for a learner who had been promoted to a supervisory role, and advanced spreadsheet training for a learner who had taken on responsibility for administering the company payroll.

58. Zodiac continues to use a good variety of assessment methods. Product evidence, observation, question and answer sessions, professional discussion and witness testimony are all confidently used by training advisers. Planning for assessments is thorough. Learners are given clear written guidance to help them prepare for assessment. Training advisers make good use of prior learning and achievement by learners. There are satisfactory procedures for internal verification. Since the previous inspection Zodiac has encouraged closer contact between learners and internal verifiers to help to provide continuity if training advisers leave.

59. There is good initial advice and guidance for learners. Advice given to potential learners is clear, personal and helpful. Initial assessment is good and is well used to produce meaningful individual learning plans. Zodiac now offers a wide range of different learning programmes in this area of learning, including NVQ levels 4 and 5 in management and administration. Training advisers provide good advice to all learners and employers about the most appropriate subject and level. Learners receive a thorough induction which covers the content of the learning programme, health and safety and equality of opportunity. When recruiting directly from employers, Zodiac takes particular care to manage appointments well, to keep strictly to time and to promote a positive business-like approach to learning.

60. Learners receive appropriate pastoral support from the training advisers and there are satisfactory arrangements to provide additional help with literacy and numeracy when required. This may be provided on an individual basis in the workplace by training advisers, or specialist help may also be provided at Zodiac's training centres. At the time of the reinspection there were comparatively few learners with additional learning needs.

61. Overall, there are sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified and experienced staff

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to deliver the training programmes. However, staff turnover is still quite high in some locations and there have been local shortages of training advisers and verifiers. There are satisfactory resources, such as workbooks and other materials to support learning in all areas of the country.

### **Leadership and management**

62. Since the previous inspection, management arrangements have changed significantly. Training is now led by a programme co-ordinator who has overall responsibility for learners' progress. Many of the staff are either newly recruited or new to their current roles. Internal communication is good and all staff fully understand their new responsibilities and now place a greater emphasis on helping learners to achieve their qualifications.

63. Awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity among learners is good. Constant reinforcement takes place during progress reviews and all learners are confident about their rights and responsibilities.

64. Business administration staff were involved in compiling the self-assessment report and it provides a good overall assessment of the quality of provision.



**Information & communications technology****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	15	3
Work-based learning for adults	1	None

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

**Strengths**

- improving retention rates
- good development of professional skills
- good progression opportunities

**Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- insufficient target-setting in progress reviews
- some slow allocation of training advisers to learners

**Achievement and standards**

65. Historically, retention and achievement rates have been poor. However, fewer learners are now leaving their training programmes early and all are making satisfactory progress. For example, since August 2002 there have been 20 starters and 65 per cent of them are still in learning. Only four have started since August 2003, but none have left so far. At the end of the reinspection, four of the five advanced modern apprentices were only half way through the expected duration of their training programmes and eight of the nine foundation modern apprentices also had several months still left on programme. All of these learners had made reasonable progress and were on target to complete the modern apprenticeship framework.

**Quality of education and training**

66. There is good development of learners' professional skills. Training advisers visit learners in the workplace very frequently, at least every two weeks. They have a wide range of computer skills and deliver training in a clear and practical manner which is relevant to the learners' work. Learners increase their confidence with their work and are keen to apply their new skills in the workplace. Learners place a high value on the frequency of visits from training advisers and quickly establish good productive working relationships with Zodiac's staff. They receive good personal support and professional advice and guidance when needed.

67. There is also a good standard of work in learners' portfolios, which clearly show

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progress towards professional expertise. Many of the tasks from work are shown from start to finish and the evidence collected demonstrates a particularly wide range of skills. For example, several learners have produced detailed instruction booklets which demonstrate good skills in word processing, inserting graphical images and using the internet as a sources of information. In some cases this work has been well used to include aspects of key skills as well as the requirements of the NVQ. Electronic portfolios are still being used to good effect in this area of learning.

68. There are particularly good progression opportunities. Many learners take advantage of moving on to other qualifications in business administration or customer service, take additional units from these areas or move from a level 2 to level 3 or higher qualification. They are given good guidance on the relevance of different options to their career plans and personal interests. Workplaces and employers are supportive and provide help and additional learning opportunities such as training in telephone techniques, website design and programming languages. For advanced modern apprentices there are good opportunities to take on additional responsibilities in many workplaces, which helps them to understand and apply the supervisory aspects of the qualification.

69. There are sufficient resources to cover all aspects of the IT qualifications on offer. Learners have access to a good range of up-to-date computer equipment in their workplaces and there are reliable connections to the internet. These facilities are particularly well used by learners who work with electronic portfolios. Training staff are appropriately qualified and occupationally experienced.

70. At the time of the reinspection, none of the learners in ICT needed additional help with literacy and numeracy. However, Zodiac has satisfactory arrangements to provide support when needed. Learners' skills are assessed during initial assessment and Zodiac has sufficient specialist staff to provide for foreseeable needs in this area of learning.

71. Procedures for assessment and internal verification are satisfactory. All assessments are in line with awarding body procedures and a wide range of methods are in use. Questioning is particularly well used to confirm knowledge and understanding. For e-learners, when online assessment takes place, feedback is given within five working days. Assessment decisions are internally verified following a clear plan which fully meets awarding body requirements. Most portfolios are examined part-way through and units are sampled at random on completion. Internal verifiers provide useful feedback to assessors and any questions are always dealt with promptly.

72. There is insufficient target-setting during reviews of learner's progress. Learners are only set short-term targets which are not detailed. Often, targets are simply lists of evidence to be collected. Learners are not given sufficient guidance on how these relate to their qualification. Targets for the completion of units are not well-used to help learners move steadily through their learning programmes. For example, in most cases the completion date for all units is the same as the end date of the learning programme. Progress reviews are not used effectively to explain to employers the importance of particular tasks for learners to progress. Similarly, employers are not sufficiently involved

in discussing how the off-the-job training can be applied on a day-to-day basis.

73. There is some slow allocation of training advisers to learners. After recruitment, learners receive an initial assessment and receive an induction pack. A training adviser should then be allocated to them and visit them promptly in the workplace to start the training programme. However, there have been cases where learners have waited between six weeks and three months for this first visit. These delays are frustrating for learners and employers.

### **Leadership and management**

74. Since the previous inspection, management arrangements have changed significantly. This area of learning is now led by a programme co-ordinator with overall responsibility for learners' progress. There have been noticeable improvements in learners' retention rates and rates of progress. Key skills training continues to be effective and is now introduced earlier into the learning programmes.

75. Learners generally have a good understanding of equality of opportunity. It is discussed at progress reviews and on other occasions throughout the learners' programmes. There is some good use of support materials to promote understanding.

76. Zodiac's most recent self-assessment report contained a broadly accurate description of the quality of provision in this area of learning. However, some standard practices had been identified as strengths and the significance of some of the weaknesses had been under-estimated. All staff had been sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	359	3
Work-based learning for adults	105	3

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

**Strengths**

- improving retention rates
- good on-the-job training
- good support for individual learning needs
- good use of electronic assessment

**Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates for modern apprentices
- ineffective progress reviews

**Achievement and standards**

77. At the previous inspection, achievement and retention rates were poor, with many learners leaving their training programmes early. For modern apprentices, achievement rates are still poor but there has been a noticeable reduction in the proportion of learners who leave early. For example, in 2002-03 there were 399 starters and 62 per cent are either still in learning or have completed all aspects of their learning programme. Since August 2003 there has been 96 starters and none have left so far. The pattern is similar on the NVQ training programmes where there has also been a noticeable improvement in achievement rates. For example, of the 90 learners who started in 2001-02, 57 per cent went on to achieve the qualification. Zodiac now monitors the rates of progress of individual learners more closely and although a few learners are still making slow progress, most are now progressing steadily. Slow progress is no longer a significant weakness in this area of learning.

**Quality of education and training**

78. As at the previous inspection, there is good on-the-job training which is well managed. Training is well linked to learners' day-to-day work. For example, additional training sessions have been arranged in how to respond to customer complaints, in first aid, telephone techniques and computer skills. Training advisers make effective use of simple training records, which are linked to individual learning plans, to plan and record training activities by employers and Zodiac. Training advisers visit learners frequently, often out of normal working hours. They provide effective on-the-job coaching to

support the development of professional skills and knowledge. There is a significant increase in learners' confidence during their learning programmes. Working relationships between learners, employers and training advisers are good and there are effective arrangements for learners to contact their training advisers between visits. All training sessions observed at the previous inspection and during the reinspection were satisfactory or better.

79. There is good support for individual learning needs. Learners' needs for training in occupational skills and literacy and numeracy are identified through good initial assessments using paper-based tests, and follow up diagnostic assessments using laptop computers. Training advisers respond quickly to additional learning needs, and arrange additional individual training, provide suitable workbooks and arrange specialist support and resources if needed. For example, Zodiac has arranged for the NVQ standards to be printed on blue paper for learners who have dyslexia. Additional training is carefully planned, with methods and dates identified on the training record. Zodiac also provides additional training for learners who have met the formal requirements of their qualifications but wish to develop further. For example, it has provided help with spelling even though learners have completed the relevant key skills qualifications. Resources for learning are satisfactory. There is a satisfactory range of workbooks. Occupational learning materials are also available online at Zodiac's training centres, although only a few learners make use of them. Staff have appropriate qualifications and occupational experience.

80. During the previous inspection, assessment practices were weak. Zodiac has since made some significant improvements and now makes good use of electronic assessment in more workplaces, particularly for learners who work in call centres. Zodiac has worked effectively with the awarding body to establish this method of assessment. It is especially appropriate for learners with good IT skills and internet access and is now well used by these learners. They receive good advice and training on how to prepare, scan and send evidence and how to interpret the feedback they receive electronically, including numerical information, about the amount of progress they have made. Zodiac has also worked closely with employers to guide learners on when they may use their computer to provide electronic evidence, such as during quiet periods when incoming call rates are low. Some training advisers have also just started to use digital voice recorders to make taped professional discussion more convenient to use as an assessment method. Zodiac is planning to purchase suitable equipment for all training advisers in the next few months.

81. Traditional methods of assessment are now also used correctly. Paper-based portfolios are now well presented and an appropriate range of assessment methods is used. Assessment records are generally well completed and accurately linked to the NVQ standards.

82. Zodiac provides several different training programmes in this area of learning and they are offered at appropriate workplaces to suit learners' and employers' needs.

83. Reviews of learners' progress are ineffective. Insufficient use is made of challenging

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targets to help learners progress quickly. There is too much concentration on the details of evidence to be collected for the next assessment. There is insufficient employer involvement in progress reviews. Most do not take part in the discussion of learners' progress with the training adviser and are not involved in target-setting. They receive insufficient information about individual learners' progress to be able to provide good support to the few who are still making slow progress. Reviews are not used to ensure that all assessments take place in the most timely manner. For example, assessment plans for all requirements of the modern apprenticeship are completed shortly after learners have been recruited. They have insufficient detail or timetables for the completion of NVQ units and provide inadequate guidance for the learner's time with Zodiac. They are only rarely reviewed and updated. Assessment of key skills is often delayed until late in learning programmes, in some cases after full achievement of the NVQ.

### **Leadership and management**

84. Since the previous inspection, management arrangements have changed significantly. Training is now led by a programme co-ordinator who has overall responsibility for learners' progress. There is good communication between staff through regular team meetings. Target-setting for staff is carried out at monthly progression meetings. Staff development is good, with new staff having an effective induction into the organisation and its procedures. In one geographical region, however, staff turnover is still having an adverse effect on the learners' progress and achievement.

85. Internal verification is satisfactory, although there has been insufficient sampling of portfolios in one geographical area. Staff at all levels were included in the self-assessment process. The most recent self-assessment report contained a good summary of the strengths, but did not identify the shortcomings with progress reviews.

86. Learners generally have a good understanding of equality of opportunity. It is discussed at progress reviews and on other occasions throughout the programmes. There is good use of support materials to promote understanding.

**Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	89	3
Work-based learning for adults	20	3

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

**Strengths**

- good training support for learners
- good initial advice and induction

**Weaknesses**

- historically poor achievement rates
- insufficient planning of learners' progress

**Achievement and standards**

87. Historically, achievement rates have been poor. However, since the previous inspection there have been some significant improvements. For example, for foundation modern apprentices, the 62 who started during 2001-02 were still in learning at the time of the previous inspection, 35 per cent have now completed the framework and a further 16 per cent are still in learning. There has also been a recent improvement in the number of learners who are staying in learning. Since August 2003, there have been 45 starters and no leavers. During 2002-03, there were 126 starters and 44 per cent are either still in learning or have completed all their learning aims. Current learners are gaining satisfactory professional skills and the standard of work in their portfolios is also satisfactory.

**Quality of education and training**

88. As at the previous inspection, there is good training support for learners. This was also identified in the self-assessment report. Training advisers visit learners in the workplace, at least every month and fortnightly or even weekly when learners need additional training. They are very flexible in adapting to the varying shift patterns and workloads in many workplaces. For example, a training adviser visited a learner in a public house to deliver key skills training and changed the purpose of the visit to assessment by observation when a good opportunity arose. Arrangements for key skills training have been improved since the previous inspection and are no longer a significant weakness. Training for key skills and technical certificates is delivered at employers' premises or at Zodiac's training centres. Key skills tests are now well organised and have been arranged in local venues, such as Jobcentre Plus offices, for



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those learners in more rural areas who have difficulty attending training centres. Training advisers continue to support learners when their funding has ended. Some workplace supervisors are very knowledgeable about the content of the learning programmes and take a full part in progress reviews. They also help to arrange for new skills to be practised in the workplace. For example, one employer regularly checks the learners' file to identify additional training needs or to determine if changes to learners' day-to-day responsibilities may help to improve progress or consolidate learning.

89. There is good initial advice and a good induction for learners. Zodiac provides a wide range of subjects in this area of learning and learners are carefully directed onto the right programme and level for their needs. Some programmes have been particularly well designed and promoted to groups of learners who have little access to training. For example, Zodiac provides training in hospitality quick service, for a group of adults who work in community enterprise shops. The requirements of the courses are well explained during induction and learners are given good guidance on how to present their evidence. Induction is delivered flexibly, in the workplace or at Zodiac's training centre. It is well structured and covers all relevant issues with good guidance on health and safety, manual handling and the use of personal protective equipment.

90. Zodiac has satisfactory arrangements to provide support for literacy and numeracy. Learners' skills are assessed during their initial assessment and additional support is arranged through the training adviser and specialist staff. There are good workbooks, and training advisers offer additional support with tasks such as preparing evidence statements. Additional specialist support is also available for learners who have dyslexia. All additional support is provided sensitively and learners increase their self-confidence as a result.

91. There are sufficient resources to support learning. All hospitality staff have appropriate qualifications and receive regular training to keep their professional knowledge up to date. There are satisfactory arrangements for internal verification with effective sampling of learner's work and observations of assessment. Appropriate feedback is given to assessors.

92. There is insufficient planning of learners' progress. There is insufficient use of accreditation of prior learning and there are still some delays in newly recruited learners receiving their portfolios. During reviews, too much time is devoted to completing paperwork and there is insufficient dialogue on helping learners to plan their next steps effectively. Learners are not set effective targets to help them to achieve their qualifications as quickly and efficiently as possible. For example, target achievement dates for all NVQ units are usually the same as the expected finish date for the full qualification. Learners have insufficient guidance on how much progress they have made and how much work they still need to complete. Assessment plans are not precise and often contain only generalised statements of assessment options. There is insufficient use of cross-referencing to use suitable sources of evidence for different elements or units.



## Leadership and management

93. Since the previous inspection, management arrangements have changed significantly. Training is now led by a programme co-ordinator who has overall responsibility for learners' progress. There have been noticeable improvements in achievement and an important weakness relating to key skills training has been resolved. Staff turnover has continued to be relatively high, but arrangements to increase the level of contact between internal verifiers and learners have worked well to improve continuity for learners when training advisers have left.

94. Staff in hospitality use the internal documents in different ways and there are insufficient procedures to share good practice. For example, some training advisers make much more effective use of training records to help plan training, but good practice has not yet been shared with the full team. Zodiac's most recent self-assessment report identified all the key strengths and weaknesses. All staff contributed to these judgements and they are sufficiently aware of the conclusions.

95. Equality of opportunity is well promoted to learners. All learners are aware of how to appeal against unfair treatment, and their understanding of equality and diversity is increased further through the use of quizzes and through reinforcement at progress reviews.