

REINSPECTION REPORT

General Physics Corporation UK Limited Reinspection

10 December 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. 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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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. General Physics Corporation UK Limited (GP) was established in 1966 and is the trading name for a privately owned multinational company which employs more than 130 staff in the United Kingdom. It operates mainly in the north of England and in Scotland. Its head office is in Stockport. The reinspection focused on training centres in England only. There are six regional training centres in Bradford, Halifax, Newcastle, Stockton, Stockport and Birkenhead. GP provides work-based learning for foundation and advanced modern apprentices in retailing, customer service and warehousing, and in health and social care. It also provides national vocational qualification (NVQ) only training in land-based trades, and foundation training for learners on Entry to Employment (E2E). Most of its learners are in retailing, customer service, and health and social care. There are 830 learners. All are employed except for those on E2E and land-based programmes. The training provision is funded through contracts with five learning and skills councils (LSCs). The lead LSC is West Yorkshire.

2. Two regional managers are responsible for the training operations, financial management, and the strategic direction of the company. The quality assurance manager has responsibility for the implementation of all policies and procedures. The company's internal verifier is responsible for standardising internal verification practice. Since the previous inspection in October 2002, the company has closed its centre at Harrow, and no longer offers business administration training. All staff are attached to a training centre.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Land-based provision

3. There are eight learners in Stockport. Three are employed, and the rest are on work placements. All are working towards NVQs at level 2 in horticulture (landscape or nursery). There are no modern apprentices. GP also provides NVQ training at level 1 in amenity horticulture. All learners are referred to GP by Connexions. Learners attend the training centre once a week and visit a local nursery to use the practical training facilities. All learners have additional learning and/or social needs. All complete an initial assessment and induction to help determine the appropriate level of NVQ, and to identify their need for literacy, literacy and language support. Learners are given additional help with their literacy and numeracy, jobsearch and personal employment skills during the weekly training sessions. Tutors visit learners in their workplace approximately every four weeks to review progress. There is no key skills training. There are two qualified assessors, one tutor for literacy and numeracy and one qualified internal verifier.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

4. There are 599 learners in this sector. Training is offered at five centres, Newcastle, Stockton, Bradford, Stockport and Birkenhead. All learners are already employed before starting with GP. There are 139 foundation and 58 advanced modern apprentices in customer service. In retailing, there are 320 foundation and 53 advanced modern apprentices, and there are eight foundation and five advanced modern apprentices in warehousing and distribution. There are also five NVQ only learners at level 2 in customer service and 11 at level 2 in retailing. Most training, coaching and assessment is carried out by GP's staff in the workplace. Some learners attend off-the-job training. GP provides all training specialists with a laptop computer which is used for information technology (IT) and other support training in the workplace.

Health, social care & public services

5. There are 144 learners on care and childcare programmes, 50 advanced modern apprentices, 90 foundation modern apprentices and four working towards an NVQ. Eleven are following a level 2 and 11 a level 3 NVQ in early years care and education. Eighty-three are working towards an NVQ at level 2 and 39 towards an NVQ at level 3 in care. Learners work in residential homes, nursing homes, and private and community run nurseries. Off-the-job training is provided at GP's training centres in Bradford, Newcastle and Stockton. GP's assessors carry out assessments of learners' practice in the workplace.

Foundation programmes

6. There are 10 learners on E2E programmes at the Stockport centre. This is a new programme for young people who are not yet ready for direct employment, a modern apprenticeship or a level 2 NVQ programme. It replaces the foundation for work programmes previously offered at Stockport and Gateshead. Learners attend at times to suit their individual needs. Two learners are in work placements and only attend the centre for training on one day a week. The remainder attend the centre daily. Vocational tasters are offered to all learners in all vocational areas. There is a programme manager with seven staff in this area of learning.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	38
Number of learner interviews	43
Number of staff interviews	13
Number of employer interviews	15
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	23
Number of partner/external agency interviews	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. At the previous inspection in 2001, training was judged unsatisfactory in land-based programmes, business administration and management, retailing and customer service,

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health and social care and foundation programmes. Leadership and management were unsatisfactory, as were the arrangements for quality assurance and equal opportunities. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were judged to be satisfactory or better. More specifically, GP's leadership and management are now satisfactory as are its arrangements for quality assurance and equal opportunities. Training in foundation programmes, E2E and retailing is good. Land-based programmes and health and social care are satisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

	Inspection	Reinspection
Land-based provision	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Retailing, customer service & transportation	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	2

	Inspection	Reinspection
Health, social care & public services	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Foundation programmes	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Entry to Employment		2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. **Achievement rates in land-based provision are good** and have been improving since the previous inspection. Retention rates are also good although numbers are small. Learners make slow progress towards achievement. Portfolio evidence is satisfactory, but the range of evidence is narrow. Literacy, numeracy and language skills are beginning to be integrated with the vocational work. Learners acquire a satisfactory level of practical skills.

9. Health, social and childcare learners who have started since July 2003 are making satisfactory or good progress. However, the improvements in supporting learners' achievements have not sufficiently benefited learners who started before this. Many of these learners are slow to achieve their units. Retention rates have improved slightly overall and are now satisfactory.

10. **Retailing learners achieve good occupational skills and increase their confidence.** They make good progress towards achieving their individual targets, develop their personal skills, and produce good work. The retention rate has improved and most learners recruited in 2003-04 are still on programme. Key skills achievement is satisfactory. Achievement is celebrated by awards for learners of the month.

11. **Learners on E2E programmes achieve positive outcomes from their training.** Of the 16 learners, one has progressed into full-time employment and five others into part-time work. Two learners in work placements are progressing onto NVQ courses. Learners' achievements are often celebrated publicly. They are presented with certificates for progress towards their curriculum targets.

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
Land-based provision	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	4	7	7	1	2	0	21
Health, social care & public services	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	5
Foundation programmes	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	4
Total	0	5	9	13	4	4	0	35

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Land-based provision	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
Foundation programmes	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	4

12. **All training and learning in land-based provision is satisfactory or better.** Learners are encouraged to develop independent study skills but learning is not always checked frequently enough. Assessors are appropriately qualified and have good occupational experience. **There are good work placements with supportive employers.** GP owns a commercial garden centre and off-the-job training facilities there are good. Learners' achievements are celebrated frequently and this improves their motivation.

13. **Assessment practice is poor in land-based training.** Feedback given to learners is not clear enough to allow them to improve. There are too few observations of learners' competence. Some learners and employers are insufficiently clear about the NVQ standards.

14. **The induction process for land-based learners is good.** Initial assessment results are used to ensure learners are placed on appropriate programmes and to identify additional learning needs. Learners are supported well by a literacy and numeracy tutor.

15. **Target-setting and progress reviews are poor** for land-based learners. Targets are not sufficiently challenging and are not made clear to learners. Individual learning plans are not used effectively to set or monitor learners' targets.

16. **In health, social care and childcare the planning of training is very good, and employers contribute well to progress reviews.** Key skills training is now integrated better with vocational training and some assessors are working towards key skills qualifications. The monitoring of learners' progress has improved. Learners and assessors are keenly aware of learners' progress, but managers do not have sufficient overview of the progress of all learners.

17. Induction for health, social care and childcare learners is much improved and is now effective. **There is good initial assessment in most centres.** Resources are now satisfactory. Assessment practice is satisfactory and learners are very clear about the progress they are making, what has been achieved and what will be covered at the next assessment. Support for learners is satisfactory.

18. **In retailing, individual learning plans are prepared and used effectively and initial assessment is thorough.** Training and assessment activities are well planned and clear targets are set. Employers are appropriately involved in reviewing learners' progress and setting targets. In some cases, inexperienced assessors make incorrect assessment decisions. Employers match their own training programmes to the learners' assessment planning. Employers are issued with plaques to recognise their work in supporting learners. **Assessors provide good support for learners and learners make good progress towards their qualifications.** Some learners are working at key skills levels above the

framework requirements. Induction and off-the-job training are satisfactory.

19. **In E2E programmes induction is good and meets the needs of individual learners.** Learners are informed of the outcomes of initial assessment and know what they have to do to improve. Support for learners on learning and personal issues is good and available at times to suit their needs.

20. **Work-placement procedures effectively ensure that E2E learners are placed with the right employer, and take account of their individual needs.** Learners do not go into a work placement until they are ready. Partnerships with external agencies are effective. Equality of opportunity is effectively covered with learners and employers. **Individual learning plans on E2E programmes are not always used effectively** and are not clearly linked to the outcomes of initial assessment or learners' reviews. The targets set are insufficiently challenging and specific to the needs of the individual. The language used for promotional materials is not appropriate for the needs of learners and is too complex for some learners who have low levels of literacy.

Leadership and management

21. A range of effective management actions has resulted in **improved retention and achievement rates in all areas of learning, although some learners are still making slow progress** towards their qualification. The actions include measures to improve the quality of training, and tighter monitoring of learners' progress. Targets are set to measure progress, and these are met by most learners.

22. **Effective action has been taken to ensure that all stages of learning contributing to learners' success are of a high standard.** There are noticeable improvements in the quality of induction for new learners, the process of initial assessment, individual learning plans and learners' progress reviews. Staff benefit from a good programme of staff development opportunities and new staff receive a comprehensive two week intensive induction. This enables new staff to feel confident and competent enough to perform their job roles. The quality of the training provision and the verification processes have improved since the previous inspection.

23. Communications within the company are satisfactory. The self-assessment report was satisfactory and reflected the position of the company at the time of the inspection. There are satisfactory levels of physical resources for training purposes. The company's use of feedback from employers, learners and external verifiers is satisfactory. The management of initial assessment and support for learners with language, literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory, although there are not enough trained staff to meet all learning needs in two centres.

24. **Equal opportunities is promoted well to learners, and significant improvements have been made to the quality and clarity of documents and forms.** The promotional brochures have won awards for their use of plain English. Staff reinforce learners' understanding of equal opportunities effectively at reviews, and learners' understanding

has improved noticeably. GP's staff evaluate employers' equal opportunities and health and safety policies and practices effectively.

25. The use and analysis of management information to plan and monitor provision remains incomplete. Considerable improvements have been made but the full range of information and reports required by managers and trainers is not yet available. Some trainers and assessors have not yet received training in how to use the management information system and have to rely on administrators to produce the information for them. Insufficient use is made of performance indicators to measure the effectiveness of procedures. GP's targets for improvements in achievement and retention rates are not always sufficiently challenging. The company does not monitor the effectiveness of its equal opportunities policy and procedures, and there are no data on the distinctive achievements of different groups of learners.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good management actions to improve retention and achievement rates
- effective measures to improve key processes that support learning
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity to learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient use and analysis of data to monitor performance trends in some centres

Land-based provision

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- frequent celebration of learners' achievements
- good off-the-job training resources
- good work placements
- comprehensive induction

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards unit achievement
- poor assessment practice
- poor target-setting and progress reviews

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good achievement of personal and occupational skills
- very effective preparation and use of individual learning plans
- effective assessment planning
- good employer contribution to learners' progress

Weaknesses

- some poor achievements by advanced modern apprentices

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- thorough and effective induction
- very good planning of training

Weaknesses

- some slow unit achievement

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good outcomes for learners
- regular celebrations of learners' progression and achievement
- good induction and work-placement procedures
- good support for learning and personal issues
- constructive reviews of learners' progress
- effective reinforcement of equality of opportunity with learners and employers

Weaknesses

- too difficult language used in promotional and course materials
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

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

Strengths

- good management actions to improve retention and achievement rates
- effective measures to improve key processes that support learning
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity to learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient use and analysis of data to monitor performance trends in some centres

26. Effective measures have been introduced by managers to improve retention and achievement rates. A wide range of changes implemented over the past 18 months have contributed to improved training. Tighter monitoring of learners' progress and target-setting have been accompanied by improved achievement for most learners. Rates of achievement and retention have improved on many programmes, although they are still low in some areas. Staff meetings focus clearly on the development of better measures to monitor performance. All staff are very well informed about changes in procedures, and understand their role in supporting and implementing these changes. Staff are set targets for their learners' retention and achievement rates. These targets are reviewed and closely monitored by managers, and are clearly understood by staff. However, some targets are not ambitious enough to sufficiently improve achievement. Targets range from 18 per cent to 80 per cent for achievement and retention rates on modern apprenticeships and NVQ training programmes.

27. Effective action has been taken to improve many of the key processes that support learning. Improvements to induction, initial assessment, individual learning plans and learners' progress reviews have all benefited learners. Arrangements to meet learners' needs for additional language, literacy and numeracy support are satisfactory. This provision is well managed. All learners receive an effective initial assessment during their induction to determine their levels of literacy, numeracy and language, and key skills. The use of laptops, which are now available to all assessors, allows learners to receive immediate results and feedback. This information is then used to determine their training programme. Regular progress reviews keep employers informed of learners' progress towards their qualification.

28. Staff enjoy good opportunities for training and development. Initial training is given during a two-week intensive induction which covers all aspects of the company's activities. At the end of this induction staff feel confident enough to perform their job roles. All staff are reviewed twice a year and targets are set for their performance. Each

member of staff has a development file containing comprehensive details of their experience, qualifications and the outcomes of training and reviews. Training is enhanced by additional opportunities to further develop their job skills. Staff can also request training that is not relevant to their job roles. Additional skills acquired through this are often found to be of benefit to the company. Staff are enthusiastic about these training courses and are highly motivated by them. The quality of the training provision and the verification processes has improved since the previous inspection.

29. Communications within the company are satisfactory. Meetings are used well to cover strategic and operational issues and they take place at all levels of management as well as in local training centres. The centre management and NVQ meetings take place monthly and are used to discuss issues such as the new requirements of the awarding bodies and targets for training staff. All staff attend these meetings and some are mandatory. Meetings are used to disseminate information and to share best practice. Staff, learners and employers also attend various forums, and information from these is published in newsletters. Action is taken quickly on important developments. For example, when a new NVQ framework was published the staff at GP were receiving training on this the very next day. Good use is made of outside speakers from awarding bodies and other agencies to keep staff informed of new initiatives which affect training.

30. GP's self-assessment report was updated in November 2003 in preparation for the reinspection. The self-assessment report was satisfactory and reflected the position of the company. There are satisfactory levels of physical resources to support training. However, there are some access problems in land-based provision. The company's use of feedback from employers, learners and external verifiers to improve the service is satisfactory.

31. The management information system is still incomplete. This was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection and since then there have been a number of changes to the system. The system still does not provide the full range of information and reports required by managers and training staff. Some staff have not yet received training and development in the use of the system. These are mainly the assessors and verifiers who have to rely on administrators to produce the information for them. A full statistical analysis for inspection purposes cannot yet be produced. The system has been re-scheduled to be fully operational early in 2004.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

32. The promotion of equal opportunities to learners has improved since the previous inspection and is now effective. Documents and forms have been improved and are now written in much clearer language. The brochures have won awards for their use of plain English. Staff make good use of progress reviews to check and reinforce learners' understanding of equal opportunities. There is good personal and academic support for learners. For example, trainers take laptop computers out to shift workers in GP's northeast region to allow them to take part in key skills training or assessments. Transport was arranged to allow another group of remote workers to attend the training centre.

33. The commitment to promote good race relations is not sufficiently explicit in the equal opportunities policy. GP collects data on recruitment trends, and reports to its funding body on the diverse nature of its learners. GP is largely meeting the targets agreed with the LSC for widening participation. However, the company does not monitor the effectiveness of its equal opportunities policy and procedures. It has no data on the achievements of different groups of learners.

34. Publicity brochures have an appropriate range of positive images, including a wheelchair user and learners from minority ethnic groups. There is no strategy for widening participation in Stockton, and in Bradford action is only just being taken to deal with the under-representation of men among the learners. There is not enough use of community languages in Bradford in publicity brochures. GP's commitment to equal opportunities is evident in the open door approach to potential learners. All learners with appropriate job roles are invited for an initial assessment. Those who need to attend classes in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) are referred to Connexions or the LSC. Those with literacy or numeracy needs are supported by GP's staff. Generally this provision is satisfactory and there is a good system to identify additional language, literacy and numeracy needs. In some centres arrangements are less well developed and in two centres there are insufficient qualified staff to support all learners. In one centre, there are no specially adapted IT facilities to meet the needs of learners with disabilities.

35. GP's staff monitor how well employers promote equal opportunities. They appraise employers' equal opportunities and health and safety policies and practices. Employers sign an agreement confirming that they will meet legislative requirements and to show that they have understood and accept the learners' training entitlements. However, in Bradford some learners still find their employers are reluctant to allow them to take time off to learn. Diversity training is offered to employers, but take-up to date has been low. Staff have attended equal opportunities training and have a satisfactory understanding of the main issues.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

36. GP has successfully introduced measures to improve internal verification. The company's lead internal verifier is responsible for standardisation, and supports local internal verifiers through quarterly meetings. These meetings are well used by staff to share good practice. A senior project manager and the lead internal verifier audit a sample of learners' portfolios to identify non-compliance and poorer performance by assessors. They use the results to write development plans for assessors, and support them in improving their performance. They follow up these plans in most cases. In one centre, the manager was unaware of the audits, and the audits did not find weaknesses identified by inspectors. Arrangements to get feedback from learners and employers are satisfactory. Local managers act promptly and effectively to deal with any problems reported. However, there is no overall analysis of the quality of learners' experience, whether it is changing over time, or whether different groups have different experiences.

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37. A clearly documented and comprehensive quality assurance system has been introduced. There are clear written procedures for all the main aspects of training, including the use of individual learning plans and progress reviews. They have significantly contributed to the standardisation of key procedures. Performance indicators are not used to measure the impact or effectiveness of quality assured procedures. For instance, data on the rate of progress of some learners were not available at one centre. Key company targets for achievement and retention rates are insufficiently challenging.

38. Arrangements for self-assessment are satisfactory and the self-assessment report is closely related to the business plan. Learners' achievements, and recruitment are compared with targets in the three-year development plan. The self-assessment report has an appropriate focus on the quality of learners' and employers' experience. Feedback forms are not sufficiently analysed by managers to determine trends. The self-assessment report accurately describes learners' and employers' high levels of satisfaction. All staff contribute to the self-assessment process and receive feedback from managers on issues they raise. The development plan responds to the key issues but monitoring of progress on these was not sufficiently stringent in one centre.

39. The rate of learners' progress has improved, and is now satisfactory. GP does not have a system for observing training and learning, and there are no plans for training observers.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Land-based provision

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	8	3

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

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- frequent celebration of learners' achievements
- good off-the-job training resources
- good work placements
- comprehensive induction

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards unit achievement
- poor assessment practice
- poor target-setting and progress reviews

Achievement and standards

40. Achievement rates are good. There has been a significant improvement since 1999-2000, when only 31 per cent of learners achieved the NVQ. The proportion rose to 50 per cent in 2002-03 and of the 16 starters, eight have achieved and seven are still on the programme. Retention rates have improved. Only 38 per cent of learners were retained at the time of the previous inspection. This rose to 56 per cent for 2002-03. Most learners produce a satisfactory portfolio of evidence that meets the awarding body requirements. Satisfactory progress is being made in improving learners' literacy and numeracy skills.

41. Learners acquire a satisfactory level of practical skills. One was given greater responsibility and carried out a range of activities under limited supervision in a local commercial nursery. This included dealing directly with customers and carrying out plant maintenance tasks.

Quality of education and training

42. All teaching and learning is satisfactory or better. Schemes of work and lessons are planned satisfactorily. Trainers ensure that lessons have clear aims and objectives which

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are shared with learners. They do not always take account of individual learning needs or encourage evaluation of the training by the trainer. Learners are encouraged to work independently during off-the-job training. In one session, learners had to measure rectangular features and calculate the area and perimeter of a garden. They gained a better understanding of area measurement as a result of the trainer putting this into a vocational context. There has been an improvement in the integration of literacy, numeracy and language skills with the vocational aspects of the training. There are insufficient checks on the learners' progress in some sessions. Various teaching methods are used to stimulate learners' interest, including workbooks, practical demonstrations, video presentations and IT. Learners are not always sufficiently involved in the training sessions. Assessors are appropriately qualified and have good occupational experience.

43. GP frequently celebrates learners' success. Interim certificates of achievement are awarded and staff make a point of celebrating this openly. Learners are motivated by this and are proud to show off their achievements. A roll of honour is displayed in the training centre. This is distributed to the other centres and appears in a general newsletter.

44. There are good off-the-job training resources. GP owns and runs a commercial garden centre and nursery. This is used for on- and off-the-job training. Learners' practical horticulture and retail skills are developed at the nursery. Learners are given some independence to carry out work unsupervised during off-the-job training. There is a good range of plants at the nursery and these are used to develop plant identification skills. The training centre contains an adequate selection of resources to support the training, including specialist journals and books, workbooks for literacy and numeracy, videos and computers.

45. The work placements are good. Some learners are employed by local landscape and grounds maintenance businesses and a nursery. These provide valuable learning opportunities. Learners are able to carry out a wide range of practical horticultural activities. Employers are highly supportive of the learners and of GP. Learners appreciate the way they are integrated into the workplace and treated as equals with existing staff. One employer has employed a learner full time and provides work experience for another.

46. The induction process is good. It is comprehensive and is carried out at the start of the training. Key features of the process include equality of opportunity and health and safety awareness, details of the training programme and initial assessment. Learners can recall the process and commented on how it had helped them to settle into the training. Initial assessment includes occupational screening and the use of a recognised diagnostic test for literacy and numeracy and key skills. Results are used to place learners on appropriate programmes and to identify levels of literacy and numeracy. Additional social needs are also identified during induction. Learners receive good support and encouragement in the training environment. There is a good rapport between trainers and learners. Learners comment favourably on how helpful and approachable staff are. They respond well to the support that they receive. All the current learners require additional support in their training, and this is provided by a dedicated tutor.

47. Learners and most employers have a satisfactory understanding of the NVQ process. Learners are able to recall the NVQ awareness session they attended during induction, but most are not fully aware of where they are up to in their training programmes. They do not fully understand how to generate sufficient evidence to meet the standards. Some employers do not understand how they can assist with the training and assessment aspects of the learning process. Learners' progress towards their learning aims is sometimes slow.

48. Some learners are making slow progress towards achieving units of their NVQ. One learner has been in training for seven months, and three for up to six months, without achieving full unit accreditation.

49. Assessment practice is poor. Learners are given feedback verbally and in writing, but are not given clear enough guidance on how they can improve. The evidence in portfolios, although generally satisfactory, is taken from a narrow range of sources and consists mainly of direct observation from the workplace, and background knowledge workbooks. There is insufficient use of photographs and witness testimony. Portfolios contain incomplete evidence for many units. Much of the evidence of learners' background knowledge has not been assessed. Internal verification procedures are satisfactory and they are understood by staff, but they are not applied thoroughly enough to ensure improvements are made in assessment practice. Practical observations are not carried out regularly enough to help learners to make good progress. Some workplace assessment is carried out by the workplace supervisors. There is insufficient cross-referencing of learners' evidence.

50. Target setting and progress reviews are poor. Progress reviews are carried out every four weeks. Learners are not always given specific and measurable targets relating to individual units. Reviews do not focus sufficiently on improvements which might lead to faster progress by the learner. Individual targets are insufficiently challenging and action plans are not reviewed effectively. Some portfolios contain no summaries of learners' progress. Individual learning plans are created during induction. However, there is insufficient use of these to set and monitor training targets. Where achievements have been added to the individual learning plan, these are not always dated.

Leadership and management

51. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is a detailed plan for the provision, and effective steps have been taken to provide relevant qualifications to meet the needs of learners. Recruitment onto horticulture programmes is declining. GP recognises this and is working with local agencies to promote them more effectively.

52. Awareness of equal opportunities among learners and staff is satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is introduced at induction, and regularly reinforced during progress reviews. Since the previous inspection, GP has established a satisfactory system to provide support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs. All new learners take an

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initial test for literacy and numeracy and key skills.

53. There are good staff development opportunities. All staff have received comprehensive professional updating and are attending additional training in delivering literacy and numeracy skills.

54. Staff carry out reviews of potential employers' health and safety practice before they are approved. There is satisfactory awareness of general health and safety practice for off-the-job training in horticulture. A generic risk assessment is carried out by a suitably qualified health and safety officer. However, staff do not fully understand the process of risk assessment and hazard analysis relating to specific tasks during the off-the-job training.

55. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. Staff understand the importance of self-assessment, and contribute to the production of the annual self-assessment report and development plan. The self-assessment report on this area of learning was descriptive, but not sufficiently critical. It did not identify all the key weaknesses found during reinspection. Performance targets are openly displayed in the training centre resource room and serve as a reminder to staff about the performance of their area of work. These include targets for retention and achievement rates.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	599	2

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

Strengths

- good achievement of personal and occupational skills
- very effective preparation and use of individual learning plans
- effective assessment planning
- good employer contribution to learners' progress

Weaknesses

- some poor achievements by advanced modern apprentices

Achievement and standards

56. GP has made significant progress towards rectifying the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. During the reinspection, and across all the sites visited, no key weaknesses were identified. One of the previous weaknesses relating to weak initial assessment has been turned into a strength and two other weaknesses of slow progress and weak progress reviews are now satisfactory.

57. The other weakness relating to poor retention and framework achievement is historic. Since the previous inspection the proportion of learners remaining in learning has increased and is now satisfactory. Most learners recruited in 2003-04 are still on programme, although five of the nine advanced modern apprentices in retailing have left early. Progress made by existing and new learners towards achievement of their target qualifications has improved and is now satisfactory. Learners are achieving full units of their NVQ as well as completing elements. They are also achieving key skills qualifications. Arrangements have been made for learners to start work on the technical certificate. Of the learners who started in 2003 on foundation modern apprenticeships, 82 per cent are still in learning. The achievement rate for warehousing and distribution advanced modern apprentices remains poor, but GP is no longer recruiting onto this programme. There are only 14 new advanced modern apprentices in customer service. GP has continued to support learners who started in previous years but did not complete in the anticipated time, even though they are no longer funded.

58. Learners achieve good occupational skills and increase their confidence. They are making good progress towards achieving the targets identified on their individual learning plans, including the development of their personal skills. Learners are well motivated and produce good work. Portfolios are well structured and contain an

appropriate range of evidence including records of observation and witness testimonies. GP recognises learners' progress and celebrates their achievement by issuing in-house certificates for each of the units completed. Learners receive a plaque for learner of the month and their names are published in a regular newsletter. Assessors visit learners every two weeks. Learners have good access to assessors between visits, and relationships between learners and their assessors are good. Some learners progress from foundation to advanced modern apprenticeships. At their own request, many learners are working towards key skills at a higher level than is required by their framework.

Quality of education and training

59. There is very effective preparation and use of individual learning plans. The weakness identified at the previous inspection on initial assessment has been dealt with successfully. GP carries out a thorough initial assessment of learners' skills, accredits their prior learning and achievement, and identifies their preferred styles of learning. An effective system is used to identify the level of learners' current occupational skills and the employer is involved in discussions about how evidence for optional units and key skills can be identified in their job roles. Possible sources of evidence to demonstrate achievement are identified. A training needs analysis is used to plan the training. Thorough preparation of the learning plans ensures all parties are aware of the learners' starting level, identifies the training that will take place, and sets the date they can expect to achieve by. The learning plan is effectively referred to at each visit, to ensure the learner is making appropriate progress. The most recent self-assessment report identified this as a strength.

60. The assessment planning is good. Assessment plans are devised well and are recorded in individual learning plans. They effectively link on- and off-the-job training to allow learners to obtain appropriate training and work experience before assessment. Learners and employers actively participate in assessment planning, agreeing target dates and assessment methods with the assessor. Although detailed, assessment plans can be modified to accommodate the needs of learners and assessment opportunities in the workplace. Employers have a good understanding of the assessment process and their responsibilities for providing opportunities for assessment and witness testimony. Assessment practice is generally satisfactory, although some inexperienced assessors make assessment decisions based on insufficient evidence.

61. Employers contribute well to learners' progress and are effectively involved in training from the start. Many employers have their own structured training programmes and work with the assessors to identify and deliver appropriate training for the learners to develop their occupational skills. Employers are knowledgeable about the qualifications and help to identify workplace evidence that can be used by learners to show competence. Employers are appropriately involved in reviews. GP acknowledges the employers' input and awards plaques to employers of the month. The self- assessment report identified this as a strength.

62. Induction is satisfactory and takes place over a number of weeks. In some instances, learners find it difficult to absorb all the information, although they are given a reference booklet as a reminder. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Learners have copies of the off-the-job training schedules and are aware that they can attend the training if required. Not all learners attend the training sessions. Assessors also provide individual coaching sessions in the workplace and give learners handouts containing the relevant information. Learners can get access to the resource libraries at the training centres by emailing the administration staff and requesting the information be sent to them. Arrangements are currently being made for training sessions to take place at more venues so that learners do not have to travel too far. Laptop computers can be taken into the workplace for learners' use if required. Resources are satisfactory and further materials are being developed.

63. Key skills training is satisfactory. Learners have a good knowledge of the key skills aspects of their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Key skills are integrated with vocational training from the start of the programme. Learners' existing knowledge of key skills is identified during initial assessment. The assessment gives a detailed analysis of their training needs. Key skills training is given by GP's staff during off-the-job training and on-the-job coaching. Progress reviews are satisfactory and take place in the workplace every 12 weeks. New documents have helped staff to focus on recording essential details. Some reviews are insufficiently detailed. At the end of each review learners and employers know what new action points have been agreed. Health and safety and equality of opportunity are monitored and reinforced at every review. GP has an informative reference guide for assessors which suggests questions to be asked at reviews. After every assessment, assessors produce an action plan for the learner, which enables them to carefully monitor the learner's progress.

Leadership and management

64. GP has worked hard to deal with the key weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. The initial assessment process has substantially improved and has contributed to increased retention and achievement rates in most programmes. This process is now a strength. GP has developed effective working relationships with employers to ensure that training and assessment are effectively co-ordinated. Staff have good knowledge of the self-assessment processes and the key strengths and weaknesses identified in GP's own self-assessment report. Internal verification is satisfactory. Although thorough, it does not place sufficient emphasis on further developing the assessment skills of staff.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	144	3

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

Strengths

- thorough and effective induction
- very good planning of training

Weaknesses

- some slow unit achievement

Achievement and standards

65. Retention rates have improved slightly and are satisfactory overall. Overall rates in 2001-02 were about 50 per cent and the figures for 2002-03 indicate an improvement of approximately 5 per cent on this. Learners who have started training since June 2003 are making good progress. They have completed one or two NVQ units and have gathered some evidence for all of their key skills units. In addition, many have accumulated evidence towards their optional units. However, some learners are making slow progress, especially those who started training before June 2003. Learners' portfolios are well organised and most work is of a good standard. Learners' understanding of equal opportunities has improved and most have a satisfactory understanding for their stage of training. They know how equal opportunities impacts on their own rights and responsibilities, and can apply the basic principles to the client group. Many learners on early years programmes have insufficient knowledge of the 10 underlying principles of early years care and education.

Quality of education and training

66. There have been significant improvements in the quality of training and learning since revised procedures were introduced for induction, initial assessment, and the planning of training. Learners who started before June 2003 have not benefited fully from these new processes. Assessors pay careful attention to gradually identifying the specific needs of each learner in order to help them improve their progress. Induction is much improved and is now effective and thorough. Learners have a good knowledge of the NVQ process including methods of assessment and health and safety in the workplace. There is good initial assessment of learners' key skills and their literacy, numeracy and language needs and abilities. Learners IT skills are also tested through initial assessment. Learners understand the purpose of the assessments and are given the

results very quickly. Most employers are also aware of the results and understand how best to support the learner. Many employers are involved in assessing occupational competence during stage two of the induction process. Employers provide the occupational induction. This is well integrated with the induction given by GP. Learners' preferred learning styles are identified but this information is not used effectively to enhance learning. The induction includes the completion of detailed individual learning plans.

67. The planning of training is very good. The process to produce the individual learning plan is detailed and thorough. The whole learning programme is planned at the outset of training. In some centres it is done in two stages to give the employer and learner time to consider suitable optional units. Training, coaching and assessment for each aspect of the modern apprenticeship framework are carefully considered and clearly recorded on the individual learning plan. Short- and long-term targets are clearly set. Additional support for learners' language, literacy and numeracy skills is offered where it is needed. The individual learning plans are routinely updated following assessment and are kept in the learners' portfolios. Learners know and understand their learning plan. The employer has a copy which is also regularly updated. Most employers are very involved in the planning of the learners' training. They support the learners in their choice of optional units. They participate in reviews and contribute to decisions about further training and assessment. Any additional training provided by employers is included in the individual learning plan. Learners attend off-the-job training according to their learning plan. The technical certificate has only recently been introduced.

68. Integration of key skills with vocational training has improved and is now satisfactory. Key skills are now introduced within the first three months of training. Learners are registered for key skills tests after six months. They understand how to collect key skills evidence alongside evidence for the NVQ. Individual or small group support is available and there are monthly teaching sessions for key skills. GP's trainers and assessors have, or are working towards, key skills awards at level 3.

69. Resources have improved and are now satisfactory. There are more textbooks and videos available to learners. There is a satisfactory range of equipment for practising and demonstrating practical childcare skills.

70. Assessment practice is satisfactory. There is some good assessment of learners' performance in early years at one of the centres. Performance and knowledge are assessed at the same time, through direct observation. Knowledge is confirmed through oral questioning. There is good use of the nursery routine to assess a variety of NVQ units. Achievement is clearly recorded. The individual learning plan and element tracking sheets are updated immediately after the observation. The learner is very clear about what has been achieved and what will be covered at the next assessment. The employer is informed of the assessment outcomes and the employer's copy of the individual learning plan is updated. Internal verification is satisfactory. GP provides a satisfactory range of qualifications in health and care and early years.

71. Support for learners is satisfactory. Individual needs are now clearly identified

through initial assessment. Support is planned and implemented. Literacy, numeracy and language support is given satisfactorily by assessors who are either qualified tutors for literacy and numeracy or are working towards this qualification. Learners are visited in the workplace at least every three weeks. They receive more frequent visits if needed.

Leadership and management

72. There are clear strategies to improve the quality of the provision. GP is working thoroughly on one strategy at a time. New learners have benefited particularly from these new initiatives and some of the measures have not been fully applied to learners who started before June 2003. This has adversely affected the achievement of some of these learners. Although learners and assessors are keenly aware of learners' progress, managers do not have sufficient overview of all learners' progress. Targets for achievement are low in this occupational area. Managers accurately identified most strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Staff training needs are identified and support for their personal and professional development is good.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Entry to Employment	10	2

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

Strengths

- good outcomes for learners
- regular celebrations of learners' progression and achievement
- good induction and work-placement procedures
- good support for learning and personal issues
- constructive reviews of learners' progress
- effective reinforcement of equality of opportunity with learners and employers

Weaknesses

- too difficult language used in promotional and course materials
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

Achievement and standards

73. Learners achieve positive outcomes from their programmes. Of the 16 learners who started the E2E programme, one has progressed into full-time employment and five others are in part-time jobs for up to 30 hours a week. Learners make satisfactory progress. Learners are acquiring new knowledge and learning skills. In one session, learners demonstrated that they could plan and draft a piece of writing effectively. One learner said he had never written a letter before; another wrote about his achievements and decided that he would produce a newsletter from what he had learnt in the lesson. Learners' personal skills are effectively developed with support from their mentor and the training staff.

Quality of education and training

74. There are regular celebrations of learners' achievement. Achievement certificates are awarded when learners show evidence of some progress towards meeting their personal targets. Learners' achievements are recognised when they complete part of their programmes such as preparing a good curriculum vitae, learning effective interview techniques, showing an awareness of the importance of body image, understanding bullying or progressing to some form of further training. The learner of the month is nominated by the other learners, and receives a certificate, plaque and money.

75. New learners are effectively inducted into their programmes using a process

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tailored to meet their individual needs. GP identified this as a strength in the self-assessment report. Learners clearly understand their roles and responsibilities, and know how to make good use of the support available for dyslexia, literacy or numeracy needs. Learners are informed of the results of their initial assessment and know what they have to do to improve. However, some of the information given to learners at the induction is in words they do not understand. Attendance and punctuality is monitored regularly, and the incentives offered have resulted in improved learner performance. Learners are offered tea and toast if they arrive early, but if they are repeatedly late they have their money for attendance reduced.

76. There are good procedures to find learners appropriate work placements. Work placements are fully checked to ensure that they are suitable. All learners are given protective clothing if they need it. Employers receive a full information pack which outlines their roles and responsibilities, and have to agree to make time available for off-the-job training before a placement is confirmed. The employers are informed when learners have additional learning or social needs, such as dyslexia. The particular needs of each learner are taken into account and learners do not go into a work placement until they are ready.

77. Learners' progress reviews involve their employers and are thorough and constructive. For example, in a first review observed the assessor covered a wide range of issues including attendance and performance, opportunities for progression, health and safety and equal opportunities. The review was carried out sensitively by the assessor using skilful questioning, and the employer and the learner were fully involved and contributed effectively. Both were aware of possible progression routes to an NVQ and knew what type of support GP made available.

78. Learners receive good support with their training and on personal issues. They are supported in sessions to encourage them to be fully involved. In one session a learner who was too shy to answer questions used the additional teacher as an intermediary to feed back to the rest of the class. Learners speak positively about the levels and range of support available to them at any time on issues such as bullying, confidence building and worries about their personal life or their training.

79. Training and learning are satisfactory or better. Teachers take full account of the needs of individual learners when planning lessons, and use an appropriate variety of teaching strategies to enable learners to achieve and progress. In one session, learners were challenged to climb a training wall with the guidance of a professional instructor. All the learners achieved more than they expected to and the exercise encouraged effective team work, trust and confidence. In another session, learners enhanced their communication skills by being given responsibility for running part of the lesson and seeking responses from the group to the tasks that had been set. Learners make satisfactory progress in developing their literacy, numeracy, personal, social and vocational skills. They benefit from attending taster sessions in horticulture, hairdressing and administration to enhance their awareness of possible vocational options.

80. Recruitment and admissions procedures are satisfactory. Young people are referred

by Connexions or apply directly to GP. An weekly admissions day is held for potential learners. Learners complete a personal questionnaire, an initial assessment and then have a detailed discussion about their learning needs. Resources for learners and staff are satisfactory. Learners have weekly access to an IT room and an appropriate range of learning materials. However, there is no adapted IT equipment for learners with restricted mobility.

81. Individual learning plans are not used effectively to record and monitor the achievement of learning and personal targets. Individual learning plans are not sufficiently linked to the outcomes of initial assessment. Learners' personal targets are insufficiently challenging and are not specific to the needs of the individual. The plans do not have enough detail on what learners need to achieve or by when. There is no explicit link between learners' progress reviews and the individual learning plan.

Leadership and management

82. The leadership and management of the E2E programme are satisfactory. Staff recognise the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. Regular meetings enable staff to discuss learners and the further development of the E2E programme, and communication between staff is good. Good training opportunities enable staff to keep up to date and to carry out their duties effectively. Revised quality assurance procedures have yet to be fully implemented.

83. GP has effective partnerships with external agencies which have resulted in the sharing of good practice and learning materials. The company works with a wide range of partners, including Connexions, in the Stockport E2E partnership group. The group brings together several providers who focus on measures to ensure that E2E is successfully implemented throughout the area.

84. Learners' and employers' knowledge of equality of opportunity is effectively reinforced. In one session, good use was made of a presentation and a video to encourage learners and employers to discuss their existing knowledge of equality and how it affects them. Good use was made of case studies on video to encourage discussion about employers' responsibility to prevent fighting in the workplace and, separately, what an employer should do to ensure that a woman would fit into an all male workforce. All participants responded well with their own ideas on how the situations should have been dealt with effectively. During a work placement review a prompt sheet was used effectively to encourage the learner to think about equal opportunities and how to deal with harassment and racial issues.

85. The level of language used for course literature and marketing materials is not appropriate to the needs of learners. Many learners have low literacy levels and do not understand much of the content or the words used.