

REINSPECTION REPORT

Howarth Hancorn Reinspection

26 November 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

HOWARTH HANCORN 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.

REINSPECTION REPORT

Howarth Hancorn Reinspection

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Scope of provision	2
About the reinspection	3
Overall judgement	3
Grades	3
Key findings	4

Detailed reinspection findings

Leadership and management	11
Equality of opportunity	13
Quality assurance	15
Business administration, management & professional	17
Retailing, customer service & transportation	20
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	23

REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Howarth Hancorn has its offices in the centre of Hereford. It offers training in customer service, business administration, and sport and recreation. There are 158 learners on programme, of whom 109 are advanced modern apprentices, 47 are foundation modern apprentices and two are following national vocational qualifications (NVQ) programmes through work-based learning. There are 33 learners following courses in business administration, 112 in customer service and 13 in sport and recreation. Learners receive some off-the-job training at the company's own premises and are placed with local companies for on-the-job training and NVQ assessments. The training is funded through Herefordshire and Worcestershire Learning and Skills Council (LSC).
2. Since the previous inspection in September 2002, Howarth Hancorn has changed its senior management and its staffing structure. One director has left the company, leaving sole responsibility to the other director. Consultants have been appointed to assist in strategic-planning and the formulation of quality assurance systems, as well as aspects of operational management. The consultants report directly to the company director. There is one training co-ordinator and five training assessors who take direct responsibility for training and assessment. In addition, a finance manager, an administrative assistant and a learner, support the other staff in the administration of the government-funded programmes. Internal verification is carried out by the company director and by one of the training assessors who is the lead internal verifier.
3. The economy of the district is dominated by distribution, hotels and restaurants, public administration and manufacturing sectors, which account for over two-thirds of all employment. In April 2003, the rate of unemployment in Herefordshire was 1.7 per cent, compared with 3 per cent in the West Midlands and 2.6 per cent nationally. The 2001 census identified that Herefordshire's minority ethnic groups represented less than 1 per cent of the population, compared with 11.3 per cent in the West Midlands and 9.1 per cent nationally. In 2001, 67 per cent of 16 year olds and 55 per cent of 17 year olds in Herefordshire participated in full-time education, compared with 69 per cent of 16 year olds and 56 per cent of 17 year olds in the West Midlands, and 71 per cent of 16 year olds and 58 per cent of 17 year olds nationally.
4. Howarth Hancorn is accredited as an Investor in People. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

5. There are 33 learners on business administration courses. Twenty-eight are modern apprentices, of whom 20 are on the management route, and the remaining eight are in administration. There are five foundation modern apprentices. Presently there are no NVQ learners. The requirements of the employer's rights and responsibilities are covered during a structured programme of workshops. Attendance at training is tailored to suit learners' and employers' needs. Learners are all employed or placed at suitable workplaces in the local area where they gain valuable experience. Learners are visited every two weeks at work where assessments and reviews are carried out by training staff. Learners also receive advice and help about completing and referencing work in their portfolios. Learners are recruited through Connexions, self-referral or from their employers.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

6. Howarth Hancorn provides customer service training to 112 learners. There are 78 advanced modern apprentices, 32 foundation modern apprentices and two learners working towards the customer service NVQ at level 2. Employers carry out training in the workplace. The employers range from large multi-national companies to smaller independent organisations in the customer service industry. Companies include retailers, restaurants, estate agents, leisure centres and other service providers. Learners are recruited through Connexions, employers, and directly from schools and can join at any time of the year. Four qualified staff visit the learners in the workplace every fortnight. Activities during these visits include additional individual training and support, assessment, and quarterly progress reviews.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

7. There are 13 learners in sport and recreation. Three are advanced modern apprentices and 10 are foundation modern apprentices. The programmes are delivered across seven sites. Learners are recruited through Connexions, school and employer referrals and can enrol at any time of the year. The 'leisure academy' has been introduced by the company to allow school leavers to develop occupational skills in sport and recreation. The academy has a July interview board and a September start. Academy learners move between sites to gain experience and skills in swimming pools and sports halls. Learners are visited in the workplace for progress reviews every one to two weeks to set short-term targets. Quarterly reviews are used to set medium- and long-term targets. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by the company's assessor. All learners are now working towards key skills qualifications and the technical certificate as part of their training programme.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	18
Number of learner interviews	38
Number of staff interviews	15
Number of employer interviews	19
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

8. At the previous inspection in September 2002, training in business administration, management and professional was satisfactory, but training in retailing, customer service and transportation, and in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel were unsatisfactory. Leadership and management was unsatisfactory as was quality assurance. Equality of opportunity was good. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision are now good.

GRADES

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

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

	Inspection	Reinspection
Business administration, management & professional	3	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	2

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

	Inspection	Reinspection
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

9. **There has been a significant improvement in retention and achievement rates** since the previous inspection. Eighteen of the 19 business administration advanced modern apprentices recruited during 2002-03 are still in learning. For 2001-02, none of the 10 learners have left since the previous inspection and three have completed their modern apprenticeship framework. Business administration foundation modern apprentices have a retention rate of 80 per cent for 2001-03, with all five learners achieving their NVQ and four completing the framework.

10. **There has been very good retention rates for modern apprenticeships in customer service since the previous inspection.** Of the 27 foundation modern apprentices in customer service, who were in learning at the previous inspection, one has completed the framework. There are 25 still in learning and only one learner has left early. For advanced modern apprentices in customer service, of the 50 new starts in 2002-03, 49 are still in learning. There is good development of learners' personal and occupational skills. Learners develop their self-confidence in customer service skills.

11. **In sport and recreation, the retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices have been good since the previous inspection.** Fourteen of the 18 learners in the 2001-02 intake achieved their qualification. Retention rates are 89 per cent for the 2001-02 intake. There are very low numbers on the foundation and advanced programmes, but recently recruited learners are making good progress towards the completion of their framework. Howarth Hancorn has made significant changes to recruitment and review policies and these are now working well.

12. **Key skills are now an integral part of the vocational training, especially in business administration.** Some of the work produced for key skills is common across the units of the NVQs and has proved valuable to employers. All evidence in the portfolios is work related and is clearly attributed to the learner. The inclusion of key skills evidence enhances the standard of portfolios. For example, one learner researched and produced a new health and safety policy and procedure for work. This included a detailed risk assessment. The learner made full use of literature and the internet to obtain up-to-date information. The employer has found the resulting document very useful. The learner gave a formal presentation of this work to other staff and this enabled the learner to cover several key skill units at the same time. Pass rates for key skills tests are satisfactory. Some learners are not clear about when and where they will take their key

skills tests, but they do show a good understanding of the work required for the portfolio.

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
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2

13. Learners in each vocational area are set good short-term targets. All learners are seen in their workplaces at least once a fortnight and many have more frequent visits depending on their needs. Learners are set clear, short-term targets at every visit. These targets are well defined and are clearly recorded on a visit record sheet. Learners and employers have a good understanding of what the targets are and when they will be reviewed. On each visit, learners have an individual session when previously agreed targets are reviewed. All learners are meeting these targets and are now making good progress. Formal review visits are every 12 weeks and enable the learner, employer and assessor to identify areas for further work. Targets are set for training activities in the workplace and evidence collection. Targets are clear and are linked to NVQ performance criteria. They help learners to identify the materials needed to develop occupational skills. Sport and recreation learners are given the opportunity early in their programme to gain qualifications that give them direct access to employment, including the national pool lifeguard, and first aid at work awards.

14. There is particularly good involvement of employers in the learning process. All have close working relationships with Howarth Hancorn and are kept fully informed about their learner's progress. All employers are given a comprehensive employer handbook which contains information on equality of opportunity and guidance notes on the structure of the training course. A copy of the NVQ and key skills is also provided and discussed. Employers are fully involved in the learner's development and show a good understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework. Employers provide good learning opportunities on the job and work closely with training co-ordinators to support learners. Effective discussions take place between employers and the training co-ordinators during the visits to the workplace and at the quarterly reviews. These discussions plan the on-the-job training and include the key skills. Learners are released to attend training and are involved in in-house training programmes. Employers are formally involved in quarterly reviews and visit reports, and are kept fully informed of their learners' progress.

15. There is good support for learners and this was identified in the self-assessment report. Learners receive effective support from training co-ordinators during workplace visits at least every fortnight. Learners appreciate the regular feedback that they receive and the productive working relationship that they have with their tutors. Individual learning needs are met effectively during these visits. The visits are arranged to meet the needs of learners and employers. The training co-ordinators visit learners at unsociable

hours when the learners are working shifts. There are good working relationships between learners, training co-ordinators and employers. Training co-ordinators provide good pastoral support and learners are able to contact them at any time.

16. There has been late introduction and slow progress towards technical certificates in business administration and in sport and recreation. The formal delivery of technical certificates has only just started. Learners have attended one or two sessions on equality of opportunity and issues covered in the employer's rights and responsibilities workbook. Some of this work is appropriate to the technical certificate, but is not specific. Dedicated workshops are timetabled for early December. Many of the learners who started in 2003 have still not carried out any work that can be counted towards these certificates. Arrangements for testing parts of the qualification are now in place. Learners have little understanding of the requirements of the technical certificate.

17. Some learners in customer service have experienced delays at the start of their programmes or have had short periods of inactivity during their programme. A few learners have been training for several months before planned learning and assessment takes place. There have been a number of staff changes and during this period several learners experienced delays in their progress.

18. Sport and recreation learners have a poor awareness of progression opportunities. Learners have difficulty progressing to sport and recreation qualifications because of their range of activities and responsibilities in their job roles. Learners have been transferred out of this occupational area to follow level 3 qualifications in management because of the difficulties in meeting the range for sport and recreation. Two learners who were about to finish their programmes were unclear about what progression opportunities were available to them.

Leadership and management

19. Strategic-planning is good. The strategic management group have identified seven key objectives for the company, based on action plans, and these are shared and understood by staff. Project plans have been built around each key objective. All staff understand how their own actions and targets contribute to the strategic objectives of the company. There is also a three-year business plan which is revisited annually. All staff have access to a copy of the business plan and development plan to ensure their understanding of it. There are clear links between the strategic plan, the business plan and the development plans. Staff understand the inter-relationships between all plans and their own contribution to the strategic management of the company. There is good leadership and management of all areas of learning. The development plan is well written and has identified key areas for improvement since the previous inspection. There have been impressive improvements to retention rates and to target-setting for learners. Changes have been made to induction and assessment procedures to deal with poor retention and achievement rates. Targets are set for learners and are discussed at team meetings. Progress is monitored for individual learners and intakes of learners and a new system of 'amber flagging' is being introduced to highlight learners who are falling behind their expected targets.

20. **Howarth Hancorn has effective links with employers.** There is good, frequent contact with employers at strategic and operational levels. An employers' forum meeting has recently been held to share feedback on the results of an employer survey. This forum was effective in bringing the key learning strategies to the attention of employers and also alerting employers to actions which Howarth Hancorn are planning to carry out in response to their comments. An exercise carried out at the forum identified the 10 key easily influenced motivators which employers and Howarth Hancorn could work on to raise the retention rates and motivation of learners.

21. **The communications are good.** Considerable changes in staffing have taken place since the previous inspection. There are regular team meetings when targets are set for recruitment, and associated matters are discussed. There are regular meetings for staff at all levels and they are accurately recorded and minuted. There are productive channels of communication between all staff in the company. There is a network of scheduled, focused meetings which have comprehensive terms of reference. Each meeting has a set agenda to ensure key issues are covered. Dates for the meetings have been fixed for the full year and staff have been informed. The meetings are well recorded and the minutes provide a useful and accurate record of discussions and actions emerging. However, in a few cases the actions are not always sufficiently explicit or systematically followed up. Staff meetings are effective at sharing information, but the reports received from other meetings are given verbally. Issues raised at the staff meetings are effectively adjourned to more focused meetings, when appropriate. Standardisation meetings are useful in dealing with identified weaknesses.

22. **The actions to deal with weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been very effective.** Strategies have been introduced to significantly improve retention and achievement rates on all programmes. Several initiatives have been introduced including more frequent visits to learners in the workplace and better recording of visits and reviews. Since the previous inspection, learners have completed 65 modern apprenticeship frameworks compared with only one framework previously. Since the previous inspection, eight learners have completed the framework in business administration, as well as three in management, 32 in customer service and retailing, one in hospitality and 20 in sports and recreation. Additionally there has been good progress on the management and implementation of key skills, which was a significant weakness in all areas of learning at the previous inspection.

23. **Howarth Hancorn has a good policy and strategy for equality of opportunity,** and staff are committed to them. Employers are all required to provide their own policies to Howarth Hancorn or accept Howarth Hancorn's policy as a minimum requirement. Copies of employers' policies are retained at the provider. Howarth Hancorn updates its policies every year and all staff have signed and dated a circulated copy. There is a nominated staff member responsible for equality of opportunity. All staff have received refresher training from the nominated officer. It is now planned to offer training in equality of opportunity to work-based supervisors. Learners have received training sessions either at Howarth Hancorn or in their own workplace. They show good awareness of diversity and equality and the session inspires them to recognise and

challenge their own prejudices.

24. **Howarth Hancorn has good links with schools to widen participation.** Staff attend careers evenings at all local schools. It carries out a detailed analysis of applicants, recruits, early leavers and achievers, to identify feeder schools. It also targets schools to identify 'at-risk' learners and provide appropriate support from the outset. Howarth Hancorn offers work placements to local schoolchildren and staff have participated in the 'team enterprise' initiative in partnership with schools, to offer NVQ level 1 units to schoolchildren to encourage them to continue learning.

25. **The self-assessment report is accurate, self-critical and evaluative.** Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors matched those in the self-assessment report. Action had already been targeted at some of the weaknesses in the report. The self-assessment report has been produced very inclusively, with contributions and consultation with staff, learners and employers.

26. Staff appraisal and development is satisfactory. Howarth Hancorn employs nine staff, including consultants, six of whom are directly involved with training, assessment or internal verification. All staff have a job description and a contract of employment, and participate in an annual staff appraisal process which is reviewed mid-year. Staff appraisal is effective and identifies staff development. Staff complete evaluation documents after each staff development event.

27. Internal verification is satisfactory and takes place throughout the programmes. There is a nominated lead internal verifier who oversees the process. Sampling plans cover all learners, and record the units and assessors involved. Internal verification covers the whole process including planning and implementation of assessment. Moderation of assessment is carried out by sampling the same unit across assessors. Assessors are given sufficient prior notice of internal verification events by e-mail. All internal verification events result in good reports which give detailed feedback to assessors. There is effective management of assessment and verification. There has been a reorganisation and refinement of job roles for staff and since these changes learners are making better progress. The review process and the records associated with it are good. Attention is paid to building good working relationships with employers.

28. **There is insufficient target-setting for staff.** Targets at staff appraisal concentrate on development needs. Staff understand targets for recruitment against the LSC's profiles, but they have no specific targets for retention or achievement rates.

29. **Quality assurance audits are incomplete.** Although they cover most aspects of the learning process from recruitment to exit, there is currently no direct monitoring or evaluation of the learning. Audits are scheduled throughout the year to sample different aspects of the process. An audit checklist was introduced in August 2002 as a one-off before the previous inspection. This has now been replaced by the standardisation meetings. It is planned that each assessor will complete a 'health check' on their own files and paperwork days are scheduled for the last Friday of each month. The health check is new and has not yet been carried out by all assessors, but it has been carried

out effectively where handovers have been necessary. The actions arising from these health checks do not have completion dates.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic-planning
- effective links with employers
- good communications
- very effective action to improve retention and achievement rates
- good promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity
- good initiatives to widen participation
- accurate self-assessment report

Weaknesses

- insufficient target-setting for staff
- incomplete quality assurance audit systems

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good retention rates and improving achievement rates on all programmes
- effective integration of key skills with vocational skills
- good target-setting
- very effective working relationships with employers to support learning

Weaknesses

- late introduction of technical certificates

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- very good retention rates on all programmes
- good support for learners
- very effective short-term targets
- particularly good involvement of employers in the learning process

Weaknesses

- slow progress for a minority of learners

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths

- good completion rates for foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks
- good retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- good support for learners
- effective short-term target-setting
- good involvement in the learning process by employers

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards technical certificates
- poor awareness of progression opportunities by learners

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

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

Strengths

- good strategic-planning
- effective links with employers
- good communications
- very effective action to improve retention and achievement rates
- good promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity
- good initiatives to widen participation
- accurate self-assessment report

Weaknesses

- insufficient target-setting for staff
- incomplete quality assurance audit systems

30. Strategic-planning is good. The strategic management group have identified seven key objectives for the company based on action plans and these are shared and understood by staff. Project plans have been built around each key objective. All staff understand how their own actions and targets contribute to the strategic objectives of the company. Staff appraisals have led to a comprehensive three-year development plan which is effectively costed and helps to resolve some of the staffing/expertise shortfalls over time. There is a predominant focus on vocational training and business developments. Staff development is followed up using reflective paperwork to evaluate each training event. There is also a three-year business plan which is revisited annually. All staff have access to a copy of the business plan and development plan to ensure their understanding. There are clear links between the strategic plan, the business plan and the development plans. Staff understand the inter-relationships between all plans and their own contribution to the strategic management of the company. There is a strong ethos of teamworking and contributing to the success and continual improvement of the company.

31. Howarth Hancorn has effective links with employers. There is good, frequent contact with employers at strategic and operational levels. Employers are kept well informed of learners' progress and of developments in training and learning. A good employers forum meeting has recently been held to share feedback with employers on the results of an employer survey commissioned by Howarth Hancorn. This forum was effective in bringing the key learning strategies to the attention of employers through presentations by the LSC, and also alerting employers to actions which Howarth

HOWARTH HANCORN REINSPECTION

Hancorn are planning to carry out in response to their comments. An exercise carried out at the forum identified the 10 key easily influenced motivators which employers and Howarth Hancorn could work on to raise retention rates and increase the motivation of learners. The forum was also used to update employers on the company's new key skills strategy and the employers' role in the learning process. The effective links are used to plan work for learners and to ensure they cover the range necessary to achieve their qualifications. In some cases, they are used to find learners alternative employment after redundancy.

32. The communications are good. There is a network of scheduled, focused meetings including strategic management group, staff meetings, assessor meetings and standardisation meetings. Comprehensive terms of reference exist for each group. Each meeting has a set agenda to ensure they cover key issues. Dates for these meetings have been fixed for the full year and staff have been informed. The meetings and the minutes provide a useful and accurate record of discussions and emerging actions. Staff are fully aware of the business performance and there are detailed discussions on learners' progress. In a few cases, the actions are not always sufficiently explicit or systematically followed up. Staff meetings are effective in sharing information with staff, but the reports received from other meetings are verbal and amount to feedback rather than a formal report. Some of the issues raised at the staff meetings are effectively adjourned to more focused meetings to make best use of time. For example, developments in the monitoring documents were diverted to an assessors' meeting to provide more focused input. Standardisation meetings are useful in dealing with identified weaknesses. Each morning, brief communications meetings take place to allow the exchange of information and to update staff on the activities for that day. There are frequent informal meetings between staff to discuss learners' progress. Frequent, effective informal and formal communications take place with employers, including a newsletter and celebrations of success. Employers value the working relationship with Howarth Hancorn.

33. There has been effective action to resolve the weaknesses from the previous inspection. Strategies have been introduced to significantly improve the retention and achievement rates on all programmes. Several initiatives have been introduced including more frequent visits to learners in the workplace and better recordings of visits and reviews. There is now clearly separate documents for visits and quarterly reviews. Employers are now active participants at all quarterly reviews and contribute to the record. They are given a copy of the paperwork for the reviews. Effective staff development has taken place on target-setting. One member of staff who attended a target-setting session shared the information with other staff to improve the target-setting skills for progress reviews. Howarth Hancorn has now claimed 65 frameworks since the previous inspection, compared with only one previously. Since the previous inspection, eight learners have now completed their frameworks in business administration, three in management, 32 in customer service and retailing, one in hospitality and 20 in sports and recreation. Also, there has been good progress on the management and implementation of key skills, which was a significant weakness in all areas of learning at the previous inspection. A consultant has been appointed with direct responsibility for the management and development of key skills and mentor staff. This has been

successful in developing assignments, improving staff target-setting and ultimately raising achievement rates. Key skills are now introduced early in the vocational training and all staff have taken part in key skills training. Key skills are now an integral part of the vocational training and are put in the context of the vocational area. Employers were given a presentation at the employers forum, to help them understand key skills. Progress against a few actions has been delayed due to upheaval at senior management level. This has now been resolved and learners' achievements are starting to be claimed.

34. Staff appraisal and development are satisfactory. Howarth Hancorn employs nine staff, including consultants, six of whom are directly involved with training, assessment or internal verification. All staff have a job description and a contract of employment and participate in an annual staff appraisal process which is reviewed mid-year. Staff appraisal is effective and identifies staff development needs. Staff complete useful evaluation documents after each development event. The finance/human resources manager now plans to review staff development every three months. Staff appraisals have been used effectively to plan a new organisational structure including identifying key staff to take on the role as lead internal verifier. The reliance of the structure on key staff has been recognised by Howarth Hancorn in a business development report which includes a realistic analysis. Contingency plans have started to be put in place and efforts are underway to recruit casual assessors or internal verifiers. Recently appointed staff have had a good induction into the company. New staff appreciate the supportive induction and mentorship offered by the company. There has been an effective handover of caseloads to new staff including health and safety responsibilities which has led to health and safety courses for one staff member. A good induction package is prepared for new staff, including mentorship and close observation by the internal verifier of new assessors. Appraisal and staff development have been used effectively to fill gaps in the company's expertise and to satisfy the aims of individuals, including teaching qualifications for assessors. Howarth Hancorn has just been re-accredited with the Investors in People standard to recognise its commitment to staff development. A contingency plan is now in place to identify the actions necessary to cover for all key staff if the need arises.

35. Howarth Hancorn has adequate strategies to manage the additional support needs for literacy and numeracy. Good individual support is given by the assessors. All learners who have less than a general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above are asked to take the adult Basic Skills Agency tests to identify support needs. There is a letter of agreement between Howarth Hancorn and a local college to access specialist support for adult basic literacy and numeracy, as required.

36. There is insufficient target-setting for staff. Targets at staff appraisal concentrate on development needs. Staff understand targets for recruitment against the LSC's profiles, but they have no specific, individual targets for retention or achievement rates.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

37. The promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity is good. There are good policies and a strategy, including anti-harassment, complaints and bullying

HOWARTH HANCORN REINSPECTION

procedures and a disability statement. The company is strongly committed to training all staff and learners in equality of opportunity. Employers are all required to provide their own policies to Howarth Hancorn or accept Howarth Hancorn's policy as a minimum requirement. Copies of the employers' policies are retained with the provider. Howarth Hancorn updates its policies annually and all staff have signed and dated a copy and have a clear commitment to its promotion. There is a nominated staff member who is responsible for equality of opportunity and they have attended relevant training events and disseminated the training to staff. Training has also been delivered in counselling, drugs and alcohol awareness and in the problems facing adults with severe learning difficulties. All staff have received refresher training on equality of opportunity from the nominated officer. It is now planned to offer training in equality of opportunity to work-based supervisors. Learners have had good training sessions on equality of opportunity either on Howarth Hancorn's premises or in their own workplace. They show good awareness of diversity and equality, and the session inspires them to recognise and challenge their own prejudices. Equality of opportunity is monitored formally on a quarterly basis, but is also monitored at the fortnightly assessment visits. Assessors frequently discuss equality of opportunity with employers. In one instance, a learner who has a hearing impairment in one ear had difficulty in her work as a receptionist. Howarth Hancorn worked with the employer to alter the layout of the learner's workstation to deal with the issue, and to make the learner more confident and more efficient in her work. Learners understand the complaints procedure and complaints are dealt with sensitively and quickly. Howarth Hancorn has flexible arrangements for its own staff. When necessary, working hours are arranged around school times and term times to accommodate the needs of staff without disadvantaging learners.

38. Howarth Hancorn has good links with schools to widen participation. Staff attend careers evenings at all local schools. They carry out a detailed analysis of applicants, recruits, early leavers and achievers by gender and ethnicity, to identify trends or patterns from feeder schools. This analysis is subsequently used to identify and target schools to ensure learners receive appropriate support or encouragement from the outset. Howarth Hancorn arranges or provides good work placements to local schoolchildren. Staff have participated in the team enterprise initiative in partnership with schools to provide NVQ at level 1 units to schoolchildren to encourage them to continue in learning. Howarth Hancorn stocks a good range of advisory leaflets and information, including some in large print or printed in other languages. There are only small numbers of people from minority ethnic groups within Herefordshire, but Howarth Hancorn provides good training on cultural diversity to raise the awareness of all learners.

39. Howarth Hancorn has satisfactory arrangements to accommodate learners who have restricted mobility. It has carried out a disability audit of their premises. Access to the upper floors is restricted and, since it is a listed building, it cannot easily be adapted. However, Howarth Hancorn has an agreement with a local employer to use their training rooms.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 2**

40. A new quality assurance system has been introduced since the previous inspection. There is a good range of comprehensive policies and procedures which are being compiled and updated. These clearly identify responsibilities and are available to staff on the intranet. One hard copy is retained as a master controlled document for reference if required. There are good monitoring mechanisms including data analysis and target-setting through the management information system, standardisation meetings and regular use of feedback from employers and learners. Standardisation meetings are useful in resolving identified weaknesses. Staff contribute well to the quality assurance procedures which cover all stages of the learners' experience, from recruitment to exit. A quality assurance schedule is available to identify the measures in place, including the focus of single agenda item standardisation meetings, but in few instances, this does not match directly with minutes of meetings or records. There are effective systems to collect and collate employers' feedback. Howarth Hancorn has frequent informal contact, as well as formal operational reviews, with employers which evaluate all aspects of their work. There is good discussion, and action plans are agreed. This year, Howarth Hancorn commissioned an independent survey of the employers to obtain views on how their service could be improved. The results were collated, analysed and an action plan was agreed with employers at a formal presentation. Employers appreciate the opportunity to share their views and improve the service. Learners' views are frequently collected at progress reviews or assessment visits and also through questionnaires and surveys. The results of the surveys are discussed in detail at staff meetings and actions are agreed. The quality assurance system has identified some important weaknesses since the previous inspection and effective action has been taken to rectify these. Key staff at all levels have attended external and internal training sessions on quality assurance and this has resulted in the production of a needs analysis document including an action plan, but it does not include dates for actions or identify monitoring mechanisms. There are plans for a second tier to show more detail, including timed actions, but this is not yet in place.

41. The self-assessment report is self-critical and evaluative. Many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors matched those in the self-assessment report. Action had already been targeted at some of the weaknesses. The self-assessment report has been produced very inclusively, with contributions and consultation with staff, learners and employers. Self-assessment meetings started in August 2003 and included all staff in the preparation and content of the self-assessment report. Early drafts were shared with staff for comment and amendment or update. Staff clearly accept responsibility and ownership of the document and the contents. The views of learners and employers have been collected and considered from a questionnaire carried out by an independent consultant. Collated feedback from the employers questionnaire was given at an employers' forum meeting before inspection. This included detailed feedback on the themes from the questionnaires as well as agreeing the action plan emerging for Howarth Hancorn to deal with issues identified. Employers found the forum to be informative and useful.

42. Internal verification is satisfactory. Sampling plans are available for internal

HOWARTH HANCORN REINSPECTION

verification of all learners, and record the units and assessors involved. Internal verification covers the whole process including planning and implementation of assessment. Moderation of assessment is carried out through sampling of the same unit across assessors. Assessors are given sufficient notice of internal verification events by e-mail. All internal verification events result in a good report which provides detailed feedback to assessors. These include a summary of actions which is revisited each month. Internal verifiers hold individual monthly discussions with assessors to complete the review, including identifying recurring problems. New assessors are given appropriate support and induction by the internal verifier, as well as an induction to the company.

43. Quality assurance audits are incomplete. Although they cover most aspects of the learning process from recruitment to exit, and monitoring of the application of the quality assurance procedures is good, there is no direct monitoring or evaluation of the learning. Audits are scheduled throughout the year to sample different aspects of the process. For example, monitoring of targets is achieved by sampling the learners' review documents. An audit checklist was introduced in August 2002 as a one-off before the previous inspection. This has now been replaced by the effective standardisation meetings. It is planned that each assessor will complete a health check on their own files, and paperwork days are scheduled for the last Friday of each month. The health check is new and has not yet been carried out by all assessors. However, it has been done effectively where handovers have been necessary. The actions arising from these health checks do not have dates for completion.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	33	2

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

Strengths

- good retention rates and improving achievement rates on all programmes
- effective integration of key skills with vocational skills
- good target-setting
- very effective working relationships with employers to support learning

Weaknesses

- late introduction of technical certificates

Achievement and standards

44. There are very good retention rates and improving achievement rates on all administration programmes. Eighteen of the 19 advanced modern apprentices recruited during 2002-03 are still in learning. For 2001-02, none of the 10 learners have left since the previous inspection and three have now completed the modern apprenticeship framework. Foundation modern apprentices have a retention rate of 80 per cent for 2001-03, with all five learners achieving their NVQ and four completing the full framework. Portfolios show satisfactory progress by learners, but many have several months left in training. The support that learners receive covers many aspects, including finding new placements or employment when a learner is either unhappy, failing to make progress or has been made redundant.

45. There is very effective integration of key skills with the vocational training. Some of the work produced for key skills is common across the NVQ and has proved valuable to employers. For example, one learner researched and produced a new health and safety policy and procedure for work. This included a detailed risk assessment. The learner made full use of literature and the internet to obtain up-to-date information. The employer has found the resulting document very useful. The learner gave a formal presentation of this work to other staff and this enabled the learner to cover several key skill units at the same time. Pass rates for key skills tests are satisfactory. However, some learners are not clear about when and where they will take their tests, but they do show a good understanding of the work required for their portfolio. Portfolios include evidence that is work related and is clearly attributed to the learner. The inclusion of key

skills evidence enhances the standard of portfolios.

Quality of education and training

46. Learners are set good short-term targets. All learners are seen in their workplaces at least once a fortnight and many have more frequent visits depending on their needs. On each visit, learners have an individual session, when previously agreed targets are reviewed. All learners are meeting these targets and are now making good progress. Learners are clear about the assessment process. Copies of assessments are given to learners to put in their portfolios. After assessment work is completed, new short-term targets are agreed and set. These take into account work requirements and are mutually agreed. Employers are given feedback from these visits. Other relevant information is also recorded including equality of opportunity, and health and safety. Formal progress review visits occur every 12 weeks and enable the learner, employer and assessor to identify specific areas where the learner needs to gain experience or needs job-specific training. This can include working in another department in larger companies, or training in specific company methods. Medium-term targets are set for learners during formal progress reviews and these identify the completion of units or specific key skills. Workplace assessments are pre-arranged with employers, who also supply witness testimonies to support the learner's statements.

47. There is a strong commitment from employers to be fully involved in the learning programmes. All have a close working relationship with Howarth Hancorn and are kept fully informed about their learners' progress. Employers are fully involved in the learners' development and show a good understanding of the frameworks. All employers are given a comprehensive information pack which contains specific information on equality of opportunity and guidance notes on the structure of the training course. A copy of the NVQ and key skills is also provided and discussed. Training staff go through these standards with employers to identify areas that are easily covered at work, or where learners may need to change jobs for a short period. On-the-job training that is being provided is also identified. Learners receive good support from employers. There are good, open communications between the training provider and employers. Howarth Hancorn arranged an employer's forum in October, which included presentations by guest speakers. This was as a result of an employers' questionnaire. Topics included motivating staff, details about NVQs and the future of training. Employers found the sessions very stimulating. All workplaces are of a good standard and have a good range of modern resources. Strict checks are made to ensure that they meet current employment legislation. Howarth Hancorn provides help in revising employers' policies that have insufficient detail.

48. Employers provide detailed statements to support learners' claims of competence. Assessors carry out good cross-referencing of evidence, and carry out observation assessments. Internal verification is satisfactory, with observation of assessors and ongoing sampling of portfolios. There is a clear internal verification process which is easy to follow and ensures that standards are consistently adhered to. The internal verification system has been redesigned since the previous inspection.

49. Induction and the related issues are dealt with adequately at the start of the training programme. Learners are given sufficient information on their programmes and their rights and responsibilities, and learners clearly remember their induction and its content.

50. The training premises are well maintained and bright. There are sufficient resources to cover all aspects of the administration frameworks. This is supported by the use of other training providers who offer a range of up-to-date computers and tailored training courses. Staff are appropriately qualified and occupationally experienced. The ratio of trainers to learners is satisfactory.

51. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners who do not have a GCSE at grade C or above have an initial assessment using the Basic Skills Agency standard tests. Also a key skills assessment is carried out on those learners who will need to take the formal tests. Learners who have additional support needs either for personal issues or literacy, numeracy or learning difficulties, receive appropriate help and advice from staff. When this help is needed, it is delivered in a discreet way.

52. The delivery of technical certificates has only just started. Learners have attended one or two sessions on equality of opportunity and issues covered in the employer's rights and responsibilities workbook. Some of this work is appropriate to the technical certificate, but is not specific. Dedicated workshops are timetabled for early December. Many of the learners who started in 2003 have still not completed any work that can be counted towards these certificates. Arrangements for testing parts of the qualification are now in place.

Leadership and management

53. The management of this area of learning is good. There has been a reorganisation and refinement of job roles for staff and since these changes have taken place, learners are making better progress. Detailed attention is paid to the progress review process and its documents. Howarth Hancorn also builds good working relationships with employers. There are regular team meetings when targets are set for recruitment and associated matters are discussed. There are productive channels of communication between all staff in the company. The self-assessment report was fully discussed and staff had an input to it. Some of the areas for improvement identified by self-assessment have already been resolved. The strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report broadly matched those identified by inspectors.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	112	2

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

Strengths

- very good retention rates on all programmes
- good support for learners
- very effective short-term targets
- particularly good involvement of employers in the learning process

Weaknesses

- slow progress for a minority of learners

Achievement and standards

54. The retention rates for modern apprentices have been very good since the previous inspection. Of the 27 foundation modern apprentices in learning at the previous inspection, one has completed the framework. There are 25 still in learning and only one left early. For advanced modern apprentices, of the 50 new starts in 2002-03, 49 are still in learning. Howarth Hancorn has implemented a good range of effective initiatives to improve and maintain retention rates. Initiatives include more frequent visits to learners and better integration of key skills. There have also been improvements to the structure of the induction with the aim of improving retention rates. One example was to divide induction into three stages over three visits. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their induction and are now given detailed information in a handbook at the start of the programme. Achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices are showing signs of improvement. At the previous inspection, achievement rates were less than 1 per cent, but statistics now show achievement rates at 29 per cent. Of the 44 learners at the previous inspection, 25 are still in learning, with only six leaving early. A total of 13 have now completed their framework.

Quality of education and training

55. The support for learners is good and this was identified in the self-assessment report. Learners receive effective support from training co-ordinators during frequent workplace visits, which are arranged to meet the needs of learners and employers. The training co-ordinators visit learners at unsociable hours, when the learners are working shifts. There are good working relationships between learners, training co-ordinators and employers. Training co-ordinators provide good pastoral support and learners are able to contact

their training co-ordinator at any time. Training co-ordinators offer learners diverse levels of support to meet their individual needs. For example, one learner had difficulty getting up in the morning to arrive at work on time. For two weeks, including weekends, the training co-ordinator telephoned the learner at 7.00am every morning. However, this high level of support is not always recorded on the learners' file. Training co-ordinators have good occupational experience from a wide variety of service providers. Learners and employers value the occupational experience and knowledge of the training co-ordinators.

56. Learners are set clear short-term targets at every fortnightly visit. The targets are well defined and are clearly recorded on a detailed visit sheet. Learners and employers have a good understanding of what the targets are and when they will be reviewed. Targets are set for training activities in the workplace and evidence collection. Quarterly progress reviews are well-recorded and effective. They contain clear, detailed mid-term targets. The progress reviews are completed at each assessment visit and generally repeat information from the assessment plan. Long-term targets are set and recorded in the individual learning plans. Accreditation of prior learning is recorded on the individual learning plans. There are good examples of flexible learning programmes including one learner who changed the additional units to reflect their career aims. These changes are clearly recorded on the individual learning plan.

57. There is particularly good involvement of employers in the learning process. Employers are well informed and have a good understanding of their learner's progress. All employers are issued with an employer handbook, which is comprehensive and includes copies of the NVQ standards and key skill requirements. Employers provide good learning opportunities on the job. Training co-ordinators work closely with employers to support their learners. Effective discussions take place to plan the on-the-job training and the integration of key skills. There are some good examples where workplace evidence has been effectively used for key skills. The overall key skills provision is satisfactory and learners have an adequate understanding of them. Plans and learning activities are formally recorded at quarterly progress reviews. Employers are fully involved in these reviews. There is good development of learners' personal and occupational skills. Learners develop their self-confidence and customer service skills. Learners' job roles are matched well to the customer service NVQ at levels 2 and 3.

58. Standards of assessment and internal verification are satisfactory. Portfolios contain a range of evidence, which is cross-referenced to the standards. There is satisfactory use of workplace observations for customer service learners on level 2 and 3 programmes. Internal verification clearly identifies weaknesses in assessment practice and monitoring the learners' progress throughout the programme. Records of assessment observations and verification are held on every training co-ordinator. These records are detailed and contain sufficient action to be followed up by the training co-ordinators. However, some of the actions have yet to be carried out. Well-recorded standardisation meetings are held each month, where concerns and good practice are shared. There is an adequate number of qualified staff. Resources are satisfactory.

59. There has been slow progress for a minority of learners. A few learners had been

HOWARTH HANCORN REINSPECTION

training for several months before planned learning and assessment took place. There have been a number of staff changes and during this period and several learners experienced delays in their progress. Learners continued to receive training on the job, but there were very few assessments. For a few learners there was a delay to the introduction of key skills.

60. There are adequate arrangements to meet learners' needs with literacy and numeracy and social skills. Howarth Hancorn has arrangements with external consultants to provide adequate provision.

Leadership and management

61. Management of the customer service provision is good. Training co-ordinators are allocated an appropriate number of learners. This effective management allows for frequent, flexible visits to meet learners' individual needs. The development plan is well written and has identified key areas for improvement since the previous inspection. Targets for improvement are set and performance is measured. There have been impressive improvements to retention rates. Another key area for improvement is target-setting, and this has been identified as a strength in this area of learning. Other areas identified as weaknesses in the previous inspection report were initial assessment and induction, and these two areas are now satisfactory.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	13	2

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

Strengths

- good completion rates for foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks
- good retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- good support for learners
- effective short-term target-setting
- good involvement in the learning process by employers

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards technical certificates
- poor awareness of progression opportunities by learners

Achievement and standards

62. The completion rates for foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks has been good since the previous inspection. Fourteen of the 18 learners in the 2001-02 intake completed their framework. The company has made changes to recruitment and progress review policies and they are now working well. The introduction of the new quarterly review in May 2003 and the use of team building exercises in selection are examples of the changes that the company has made. Achievement was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

63. Retention rates are good at 89 per cent for the foundation modern apprentices who started in 2001-02. There are very low numbers of modern apprentices, but recently recruited learners are making satisfactory progress towards the completion of their framework.

64. Portfolios are satisfactory. Learners show that they understand the background knowledge and practical elements of their programme through handwritten, computer generated and work-based evidence. There are examples of posters, work rotas, letters and presentation materials. Portfolios are clearly planned and well structured, and include worksheets, booklets and test exercises. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of their portfolio and are able to discuss and explain evidence.

65. Sport and recreation learners show satisfactory occupational skill development. Evidence is generated through on-the-job training which includes work shadowing and

HOWARTH HANCORN REINSPECTION

job rotation, and off-the-job training in workshops, observations, classes and individual progress reviews. In one example, a learner planned and organised a croquet competition to generate portfolio evidence. In another example, assessment material was generated from the analysis of a spa and fitness facility which is used by customers.

Quality of education and training

66. There is good short-term target-setting. Targets are clear and are linked to NVQ performance criteria. They help learners to identify the materials needed to develop occupational skills. There is clear guidance for learners on who to discuss evidence with, what form the evidence should take and where it is to be found. Learners are given the opportunity early in their programme to gain qualifications which give them direct access to employment, including the national pool lifeguard and first aid at work qualifications. This was not identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

67. There is good employer involvement in learning programmes. Employers are aware of the learners' programmes and have a good understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework. Learners are released to attend training and are also involved in in-house training programmes. Employers are formally involved in quarterly reviews and are kept informed of the learners' progress. Detailed information is provided about what employers have to contribute at the start of the programme. Employers' involvement in the learning process was not identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

68. Support for learners is good. Howarth Hancorn's staff carry out assessment, training and progress reviews. The visits take place at least every fortnight. Learners appreciate the regular feedback and the productive working relationships that they have with their tutors. Individual learning needs are met effectively during these visits, which are negotiated to accommodate workplace demands. In addition, the use of workplace mentors allows the learners to deal with daily training needs that may arise out of their programmes. Risk assessment, equal opportunities and health and safety are checked and recorded at each assessor visit. There is effective monitoring and follow up of issues raised through this process. This was not identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

69. During induction, learners are introduced to their programme, literacy and numeracy skills are assessed, and health and safety, and equal opportunities are discussed. Good team-building activities and formal interviews are included in the induction.

70. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by occupationally competent staff. Learners have access to an assessor at all times and are given mobile and work telephone numbers. Assessors visit at times to suit the learner and work demands and appointments are made at times which allow assessments to be carried out. Assessment is individually planned to accommodate the learners' needs. Monitoring of progress is continuous and is shared with the learners. Progress is monitored closely and assessors report to senior managers on individual learners' progress and the progress of each

intake at monthly meetings.

71. Teaching and learning resources are satisfactory. Learners benefit from a range of facilities that include pools, spas, and health and sports halls. All facilities provide appropriate training opportunities in a range of activities. Learners are able to generate evidence by dealing with customers, handling equipment and communicating with colleagues. The range of learning opportunities includes workshops, individual discussions, observations, in-house training and work-based learning.

72. There has been slow progress with the introduction of the technical certificates and learners have little understanding of its requirements. One learner did not know that it involved an externally assessed element and was unaware of the programme of workshops available. This was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report.

73. The learners are not fully aware of progression opportunities. Learners have difficulty progressing to sport and recreation qualifications because of their job roles and the range of activities and responsibilities in their workplace. Learners have been transferred out of this occupational area because of the difficulties. Howarth Hancorn has facilitated progression onto management qualifications.

Leadership and management

74. Management in sport and recreation is satisfactory, but there have been considerable changes in staffing in the past year. There is one assessor in sport and recreation and another is shortly to be appointed to look after another geographical area. The current adviser is line managed by the company director. There are regular meetings at all levels and they are minuted. Changes have been made to induction and assessment procedures to deal with the problems relating to retention and achievement. Targets are set for learners and are discussed at team meetings. Progress is monitored for individual learners, and intakes of learners, and a new system of 'amber flagging' is being introduced to highlight learners who are falling behind their expected targets. Internal verification is satisfactory and takes place throughout the programme. There is one full-time internal verifier in sport and recreation.