

INSPECTION REPORT

Bestco

28 April 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, **or**
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory.

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

Bestco

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Bestco was established in 1988 and is a private not-for-profit organisation limited by guarantee. It is based in Nottingham with offices in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Yorkshire. In May 2001 it merged with SNTA Education Training Development (SNTA). Bestco trains foundation and advanced modern apprentices, and learners working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in land-based, business administration, retailing, customer service and warehousing, and health care. It provides foundation programmes for adults in basic employability training (BET) and short intensive basic skills provision (SIBS). Bestco is also a pathfinder provider for the new entry to employment (E2E) programme.

2. The board of directors consists of three executive and three non-executive directors. The business support director and the operations directors are responsible for the day-to-day management of the organisation and they are supported by a part-time director of programmes and services. They have a team of co-ordinators and managers responsible for specific areas of the company. The company employs 85 staff throughout all activities and locations.

3. Bestco has contracts with Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Derbyshire LSC. It also holds contracts with Nottingham, Mansfield, Derby, and South Yorkshire & Humberside Region Jobcentre Plus.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Land-based provision

4. There are 31 learners on work-based programmes in animal care. Four learners are on advanced modern apprenticeship (AMAs) programmes, 16 are working towards foundation modern apprenticeships (FMAs). Ten learners are employed. Eleven learners are on NVQ programmes. Learners can start at any time of the year. Most learners are recruited through the Connexions service or directly by employer referrals. Learners receive an interview and initial assessment. They receive visits from assessors at least every month for assessment and portfolio-building. Key skills assessors visit learners according to identified needs. Learners have a formal review at least every 12 weeks.

Business administration, management & professional

5. One learner is following an AMA and 19 learners are FMAs in business administration. There are three learners taking level 2 units of the NVQ in business administration. Some learners are employed and some are unemployed. Work placements can vary, but are normally professional or public sector. Learners work normal office hours. Training takes place on and off the job. All learners attend an initial assessment and interview with a member of Bestco's welfare team to establish potential work placements/employers. Initial assessment includes basic and key skills diagnostic testing. Learning advisers visit learners every three months to plan and review the learning process. Assessors visit learners monthly.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

6. There are 23 learners on work-based learning programmes in retailing, customer service and distribution and warehousing. Seventeen are FMAs, one is an AMA and five are on NVQ programmes. Most learners are employed and are recruited to Bestco's training programmes directly through their employers. A small number of learners are recruited through Connexions and are found appropriate work placements by Bestco. Workplaces are varied and include small and large retailing stores and goods distribution outlets. Learners can join the programmes at any time. The recruitment process includes an interview, initial assessment, and induction, all carried out by Bestco staff. Training advisers visit learners in the workplace every three to four weeks. During these visits the training advisers carry out training and assessment in NVQs and key skills, progress reviews, and short-term action-planning. Formal reviews and longer-term action-planning are carried out quarterly by Bestco's learning advisers.

Health, social care & public services

7. There are 279 learners on early years and childhood education training programmes. One hundred and forty-one learners are working as AMAs and 72 as FMAs. In addition, there are 66 learners working towards an NVQ in early years and childhood education, of whom 40 are working at level 2 and 28 at level 3. Most learners are employed in a range of early year's settings. There are four men on the programme. Six per cent of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Three per cent of learners have a disability. Off-the-job training is provided by Bestco at a number of sites and also in some of the larger employers' premises. Assessors visit learners at least once a month to provide individual training where learners cannot attend the training centre. Formal progress reviews take place every three months. Learners can begin their training with Bestco at any point in the year.

Foundation programmes

8. There are 219 learners on foundation programmes at Bestco. One hundred and forty-five adult learners attend BET at seven of the organisation's centres. This programme lasts for 26 weeks and includes training in literacy and numeracy at entry level, jobsearch and activities to help prepare learners for employment. Sixteen of the learners at the Nottingham centre speak English as an additional language. Their programme leads to a certificate in speaking and listening at entry level. BET learners attend training for 30 hours a week. Twenty-nine learners are currently in work-experience placements. Two learners are on the SIBS course which lasts for eight weeks and provides support towards level 1 literacy or numeracy. In November 2002, Bestco introduced an E2E programme at two centres in Nottingham. E2E is a national pathfinder programme and has replaced Bestco's Life Skills and preparatory training for young people aged 16 to 18. There are 72 learners on the programme. E2E aims to develop motivation, self-confidence, personal effectiveness, vocational awareness, literacy, numeracy or key skills for young people. They may have negative experiences of learning, or barriers to learning or be unclear about their future career aims. Work experience weeks are offered. Some learners work towards NVQs at level 1 in the vocational area of their choice, the length of the programme being flexible, depending on individual learner needs. Learners attend for 16 to 30 hours each week.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	13
Number of inspection days	52
Number of learner interviews	193
Number of staff interviews	86
Number of employer interviews	36
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	51
Number of partner/external agency interviews	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

9. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, Bestco's leadership and management, equal opportunities and quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The quality of land-based, business administration, health care and foundation programmes is satisfactory. Its retailing, customer service and warehousing provision is unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

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

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

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

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

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

10. **Achievement rates are poor on NVQ programmes in small animal care.** Retention rates have declined on the NVQ programmes, from 90 per cent in 1999-2000 to 46 per cent in 2001-02. **However, there is good learner retention on the FMA in animal care.** There have been no early leavers in this programme since 2000-01. The retention rate for AMAs is improving, but there was no recruitment in this area for 2002-03. Most learners receive additional qualifications in health and safety and food hygiene. Learners benefit from on-the-job training and work well towards achieving practical competence. **There is insufficient use of accreditation of prior learning** and some slow progress.

11. No learners have been recruited to the AMA in business administration since 2001. Forty learners have been recruited to the FMA, of whom 19 are still in learning and four have successfully completed their programmes. Twenty-one learners have started NVQs, of whom four have successfully completed their programmes and three are still in learning. Eighteen learners have obtained health and safety certificates. Off-the-job training provided by employers is varied. Learners are able to gain additional qualifications. Learning resources are limited. Advisers and employers provide good support to learners.

12. Retention rates for modern apprentices and NVQ learners in retailing, customer service and warehousing are satisfactory. **Achievement rates for modern apprentices and NVQ learners are poor.** FMA achievement rates are below 30 per cent. Achievement rates for the NVQ programmes have declined from 57 per cent in 1999-2000 to 21 per cent for 2001-02 starters. Learners skill levels are developed well. They acquire additional skills to those required by the modern apprenticeship framework.

13. Retention and achievement rates in health care are satisfactory. In 1999-2000, 64 per cent of AMAs were retained and 46 per cent completed their full apprenticeship frameworks. Subsequent intakes still have many learners in training. Retention rates for the FMA framework are improving, from 46 per cent in 2000-01 to 48 per cent in 2001-02, with 21 learners still on programme.

14. Achievement of the NVQ has improved from 37 per cent to 55 per cent. Learners on FMA programmes are encouraged to progress to the advanced level. Most learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Many learners achieve key skills at a higher level than that required for their programme.

15. **Retention rates are good on BET and E2E programmes.** In the current year, 70 per cent of learners have been retained on the E2E programme. In 2002-03, 57 per cent of BET learners remained on the programme, an improvement of 15 per cent on the previous year. Most learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. **BET learners do not progress well into employment.** In 2002-03, 20 per cent of learners gained employment. An employment adviser has recently been appointed to help match learners to employment and work experience opportunities. Improved arrangements for jobsearch have been introduced and this is now satisfactory.

16. In 2001-02 and 2002-03, 26 per cent of BET learners completed their planned learning objectives. Monitoring of learner progress varies in quality and regularity. The E2E programme has not been in operation for long enough to be able to make judgements on achievement levels.

Quality of education and training

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	0	0	1	0	0	1
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Health, social care & public services	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	4
Foundation programmes	1	4	2	3	0	0	0	10
Total	1	4	4	6	1	0	0	16

17. **Learning programmes in animal care are very flexible.** Learners receive good on-the-job training through work experience or employment in a range of good-quality placements. **There is not enough planned off-the-job training to ensure that background knowledge is acquired.** There is a good range of vocational seminars available, but some learners are unable to attend because of work commitments or the location of their training. **The learning resources are inadequate.** There are few learning resource packs or unit-related resources to assist learners in developing their knowledge and understanding. **Support for learners is very good.** Learners with additional needs receive more frequent progress reviews to meet their needs. Assessors provide learners with good guidance on evidence requirements and portfolio-building, but some portfolios do not have sufficient workplace evidence. Information gathered at initial assessments is not used to provide specialist support for learners.

18. There is effective on- and off-the-job training in the workplace for business administration learners. Assessors visit learners monthly and offer individual sessions with learners based on learners' occupational knowledge. Learners are well supported by employers that offer additional training in specific systems and procedures to add to learners' skills. **Learners are well supported by their learning advisers** who plan and review the learning process and offer advice and support. Those learners with individual support needs identified by initial assessment are visited more frequently. Learners with suitable general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) grades are encouraged to achieve key skills at a higher level than the modern apprenticeship framework requirement. There is a good range of off-the-job training sessions available, but not all learners are able to attend. **Learning resources are available at providers' premises, but these tend to be textbooks, with insufficient additional learning material available.**

19. **Bestco is particularly effective at developing learners' employment skills in retailing, customer service and warehousing.** Many learners attend extra off-the-job training sessions. These learners acquire additional skills, over and above those of the modern apprenticeship framework and NVQ requirements. Learners are making satisfactory progress and produce portfolios of evidence that are well referenced to performance criteria. Learners are given a good deal of individual support. They regularly attend good-quality, additional off-the-job literacy and numeracy sessions. Employers are particularly supportive of their learners. **However, there is insufficient monitoring of the quality and accuracy of work-based learning.** Learners complete a diagnostic test to identify any basic skills needs, but there is no testing to identify specific learning needs.

Some assessment practice is weak and learner portfolios contain inaccuracies which have not been identified by staff. Some feedback to learners does not accurately inform them of their performance, and does not allow them to improve and develop further.

20. **In health care there is particularly effective support for individual learners.** They are given diagnostic tests to assess basic or key skills support. Assessors support off-the-job training by adapting their teaching to meet individual requirements. Employers are fully involved in the progress review process, and short-term action-planning for learners is thorough. **There are good opportunities to develop practical skills.** Most learners have support from supervisors who also act as mentors. There is a good range of reference books and magazines, tools and materials available in the workplace which are used to develop background knowledge. The induction procedure is satisfactory, but the planning of induction is poor. **There is no formal induction with a specific focus on childcare and the modern apprenticeship framework.** Assessment practice varies between assessors. Some portfolios rely too much on written evidence and there is insufficient evidence of work produced. Observation reports are well detailed. There are flexible arrangements for off-the-job training, but not all learners have equal access.

21. **On- and off-the-job training is good on foundation programmes and sessions are well planned.** Learners are allowed to work at their own pace. **There is good support and rapport between learners and staff and within learner groups.** Work-placement activities are well planned. In BET, every opportunity is taken to integrate and reinforce literacy and numeracy skills development in the workplace. Learners develop their employment and personal skills and raise their self-esteem. They appreciate the good level of E2E learner support, which helps to reduce barriers to beginning and remaining in learning. E2E learners frequently celebrate successes through award ceremonies. BET learners' individual needs are not identified adequately. Target-setting in individual learning plans is poor. Targets are not always SMART. There is insufficient recording of achievements. Learners are not always aware when progress reviews are due. **The literacy and numeracy components of the E2E programme are poorly developed and confined to off-the-job training.** The accommodation at some training centres is inadequate. Some remote centres are understaffed which has disrupted learners' progress. There is insufficient use of audio-visual or information technology (IT) resources. In some training centres, Internet facilities are inadequate. **Support facilities for those learners identified as having specific learning difficulties are poor.** There are no processes in place to record additional needs.

Leadership and management

22. **Learners and staff are well supported by their managers.** There are good arrangements to enable learners to follow flexible patterns of attendance on animal care programmes, and good management of additional support for learners in animal care and business administration. Assessment practice is satisfactory, but does vary from site to site. Not all employers are sufficiently involved in the training and assessment process.

23. Bestco is committed to the effective provision of equality of opportunity throughout

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the company. Most learners receive a balanced induction, **but equality of opportunity is not regularly re-emphasised at progress reviews.** There is good communication between assessors, employers and the learning advisers and there is good management of learning in health care but this is not consistent throughout all areas of learning.

24. Bestco has a new quality assurance policy which clearly focuses on the learner, concentrating primarily on key processes such as marketing, interviewing, initial assessment, induction, on- and off-the-job training, assessment and internal verification, and leavers. Bestco has introduced operational procedures, distributed to all staff to ensure consistency in these processes, on every programme and at each training centre. Key employment processes have also been identified, in order to monitor the quality of staff recruitment, training and development and to assure the continuous improvement of Bestco's teaching and training.

25. Internal verification processes are thorough and carried out systematically according to the required occupational standards and the Bestco internal verification policy.

26. Managers and staff have been involved in the self-assessment process throughout the past year, assessing their own occupational areas against the 'Common Inspection Framework'. All staff are familiar with the contents of the report, the development plans and targets for improvement that have been drawn up as a result. The information used in self-assessment includes learner and employer feedback, consultant reports, and data on recruitment and ethnic representation from the management information system. The business planning process is currently being aligned with the self-assessment process to provide stronger links.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- effective management of strategic goals
- well-managed support for learners
- strong commitment to continuous improvement of learner experience
- very significant commitment to equality of opportunity throughout the organisation

Weaknesses

- inconsistent management of training
- inadequate monitoring of employers
- no strategy for identifying specialist learning requirements

Land-based provision**Strengths**

- very good retention rate for FMAs
- good achievement level of additional qualifications
- very flexible learning programmes
- particularly good on-the-job support for learners

Weaknesses

- declining achievements in NVQ programmes
- insufficient recognition of learners' prior experience and qualifications
- insufficient background knowledge training for the NVQ
- insufficient awareness of training requirements by many employers

Business administration, management & professional**Strengths**

- effective on- and off-the-job training
- good achievements of additional qualifications
- effective welfare support

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of main programme qualifications
- insufficient learning resources for occupational NVQ

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Strengths**

- effective development of learners' employment skills
- good individual support for learners
- particularly supportive employers

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- insufficient monitoring of employers' training
- some weak assessment practices

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- particularly effective individual support for learners
- good development of practical skills in the workplace

Weaknesses

- poor planning of induction
- some inconsistent application of assessment practices

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good on- and off-the-job training
- good personal progress for learners
- strong pastoral support in E2E
- frequent celebration of achievement in E2E

Weaknesses

- poor achievement levels in BET
- poor individual target-setting in BET
- poor integration of literacy and numeracy in E2E
- inadequate resources at some training centres
- inadequate arrangements for additional learning support

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT BESTCO:

- 'I always have good help and support from staff - they are very friendly'
- 'the chance to work at your own pace with realistic guidelines and targets'
- 'good opportunities to develop my practical skills in the workplace'
- 'there is no bullying'
- 'it's a comfortable place to be'
- 'the staff are "wicked" - much better than school'
- 'staff do not judge you. They are not concerned about your past'
- 'we are learning something and having fun at the same time'
- 'this gives me a reason for getting out of bed'
- 'tutors are very helpful and approachable'
- 'the variety of people is good'
- 'extra basic skills sessions have helped me improve my writing and reading'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK BESTCO COULD IMPROVE:

- the level of staff at the key skills sessions
- the time allowed for induction
- the number of excursions
- 'I'd like to use the computer more for finding a job'
- 'there's too much paperwork - I want to improve my speaking'
- 'I'd like to do pretend interviews'
- 'too much time during assessor visits is spent doing paperwork'
- 'it would have been useful to have been introduced to all Bestco staff who would be visiting me in the workplace during my induction'

KEY CHALLENGES FOR BESTCO:

- improve achievements for all learners
- share good practice between areas of learning and sites
- ensure consistent practice at all sites
- improve monitoring of employer training
- improve promotion of good equal opportunities practice after induction
- improve training resources throughout the organisation

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective management of strategic goals
- well-managed support for learners
- strong commitment to continuous improvement of learner experience
- very significant commitment to equality of opportunity throughout the organisation

Weaknesses

- inconsistent management of training
- inadequate monitoring of employers
- no strategy for identifying specialist learning requirements

27. Bestco has had effective management of its strategic goals since its merger with SNTA in May 2001. Its board of executive and non-executive directors has worked successfully to merge two company cultures and different systems into an organisation that has expanded its operational base. It has dealt successfully with major changes in management issues surrounding the slimming down of the organisation. The board is well supported by its strategic development, human resources, quality and performance, finance, equal opportunities and health and safety subcommittees. Staff are able to contribute directly to the board through these subcommittees. Bestco's monthly and annual management accounting is audited by a company of chartered accountants in order to maintain its long-term viability. Bestco has a clearly defined mission statement and business plan for 2002-03 with a three-year strategy through to 2005. Its business plan has clear objectives, responsibilities and target dates and has recently been extended to bring its planning in line with its local LSC and its self-assessment process.

28. There is well-managed support for learners. Bestco shares specialist expertise throughout the organisation to the benefit of all learners, in areas such as drug awareness, initial assessment, learning support, and basic skills. The welfare co-ordinator now manages the induction process for all learners, including initial assessment, basic skills testing, interviewing and the follow-up of unsuccessful applicants with alternative training/employment offers. There is a strong team approach to the monitoring of individual learners' progress within the areas of learning and learners on all programmes receive pastoral and learning support for a wide range of issues. Learners have voiced their appreciation of this in their views on what they like about the provider. Two learning advisers are now responsible for the completion and monitoring of all work-based learners' progress reports.

29. Internal and external communications are satisfactory. There are effective

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communication methods throughout the organisation, including regular meetings, e-mails and informal discussion. Minutes from quarterly and monthly meetings are circulated to all directors, managers, co-ordinators and supervisors for sharing with staff. External communications are maintained through membership or participation in a variety of groups and forums, including provider network meetings and regular meetings with local LSCs.

30. Resources are generally satisfactory at Bestco. Staff are generally well qualified and are appraised twice yearly where performance and training needs are reviewed and recorded. Learners receive effective initial assessment that is recorded in their individual learning plan. All learners receive a diagnostic test to assess their basic skills requirements. Bestco does not have a strategy for identifying specialist learning requirements and there is no process in place to record learners' additional needs, such as those for learners with dyslexia. Staff are not trained to identify these learning difficulties and there is no specialist support in place for learners.

31. Bestco has recently updated its management information systems to collect and circulate information to managers and staff which impacts on the provision of training and learning outcomes. Staff are now provided with details on individual workloads that are regularly reviewed at team and management meetings. Learner recruitment data are analysed by gender and ethnicity and are intended to be used as the basis of marketing initiatives. Occupancy levels can be benchmarked against targets and the newly introduced learner progress records enable learner data to be recorded and monitored centrally. Learner support provision can also be monitored. Bestco's support for learners' literacy, numeracy and key skills needs is generally satisfactory.

32. The management of training is inconsistent throughout most areas of learning. Assessment practice varies between assessors. Recent changes to the assessment process are not fully understood by all assessors. This has not been adequately dealt with at the three-monthly standardisation meetings. Some weaknesses in assessment have not been identified through the process, including the lack of thoroughness in checking background knowledge. Some assessment practice is weak, learner portfolios contain inaccuracies which have not been identified by Bestco. Some feedback to learners does not accurately inform learners of their performance, allowing them to improve and develop further.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

33. Bestco has had an equal opportunities policy since its inception in 1988. This is reviewed annually and the process has now been linked with the self-assessment cycle to ensure that it is updated in line with other improvements to the organisation, through its development plan. The current equal opportunities and diversity policy meets the requirements of all recent legislation. Bestco has carried out an access and facilities audit on all its training centres, following the requirements of the 'Disability and Discrimination Act 1995'. A disability statement has been written outlining what Bestco can and cannot provide. It has taken reasonable steps to ensure that learners with mobility problems or additional learning needs can be accommodated in alternative

premises, or with suitable in-house adjustments. These arrangements have not been communicated to some staff in outlying training centres. Bestco provides some special facilities to meet individual learner needs at training sites, such as telephone amplifiers and bar magnifiers.

34. The equal opportunities and diversity group monitors the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy. This group is made up of staff representatives from across the organisation. Bestco has a long tradition of working closely with employers to support people who are disadvantaged. The responsibility for implementing the policy lies with all staff, including the board and the senior management team. Staff challenge unacceptable behaviour and explain their responses clearly and learners appreciate the support and encouragement they receive. Learners from ethnic minorities spoke of their very positive experiences with staff and other learners. Learners with a history of offending particularly appreciate the non-judgemental attitudes of teaching staff. Learners are aware of their rights and know how to complain about unfair treatment. However, there is some poor understanding of equal opportunities issues by learners in some areas.

35. All staff have a basic one-day in-house training course in equal opportunities and diversity, although there has been some delay in implementing this with new staff recently. Ten members of staff have had more extensive training about equal opportunities, equivalent to an NVQ at level 4. Employers have been offered a programme of equality and diversity training sessions recently and the response so far has been positive.

36. Considerable efforts are made to promote training opportunities to under-represented groups through liaison with local groups. Some of the media workshop images produced by the E2E learners are being considered to market some of Bestco's programmes. Marketing materials have now been produced in seven additional ethnic minority languages by Nottingham City Council at Bestco's request. Efforts are being made to recruit more male learners into care where there are currently four men. Bestco works in conjunction with the Education Business Partnership attending school careers events and offering taster sessions.

37. The generic induction programme for all learners was updated and revised in February 2003 to include extensive coverage of equality of opportunity, with a range of activities to illustrate discrimination, harassment and prejudice in action. It is well received by learners and is gradually being introduced to all programmes and training sites.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

38. Bestco has produced a self-assessment report every year report since its merger with SNTA in May 2001. The first self-assessment, as a new organisation, was produced in January 2002. Before this, Bestco and SNTA had a history of annual self-assessment. The current report was produced in February 2003. Managers and staff have been involved in the process throughout the year, assessing their own occupational areas

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against the 'Common Inspection Framework'. Evidence used includes learner and employer feedback, consultant reports and data about recruitment and ethnic representation in all programmes. All staff are familiar with the contents of the report and the development plans and targets for improvement. Many of the 50 or so new staff who have joined the company since September 2002 have recognised it as a useful reflection of the organisation and the way it provides training.

39. Bestco has a new quality assurance policy, produced in October 2002, which has a clear learner focus, concentrating primarily on key learning processes. It has introduced more comprehensive operational procedures for distribution to all staff to ensure consistency in all these processes, on every programme and in each training centre. Key employment processes have also been identified in order to monitor the quality of staff recruitment, training and development and assure the continuous improvement of teaching and training. Some of the changes have already started to have a positive effect on the way feedback is collected from learners and employers, how learner progress is monitored and recorded, and how learner inductions and initial assessments are carried out. Off-the-job training is observed and graded regularly and the outcomes of this process are fed into the appraisal system. Staff development is evaluated and recorded on staff files. Complaints are recorded and logged through a range of internal systems and procedures and action to resolve such issues are implemented quickly.

40. Internal verification processes are thorough and carried out systematically, according to the required occupational standards. Staff are appropriately qualified and verifiers carry out their responsibilities with due care and attention. Assessment procedures are inconsistent in some areas, but these have been identified by internal verification in many instances and action taken.

41. There are no formal systems for monitoring or observing the quality of the induction or on-the-job training provided by employers in the workplace. Many employers provide good-quality training and support to learners, but this is not always assured and some learners have had to be removed from work placements. Assessors and internal verifiers are not fully briefed to evaluate employer performance and are not always aware of what may constitute an equality of opportunity issue.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Land-based provision

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	31	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention rate for FMAs
- good achievement level of additional qualifications
- very flexible learning programmes
- particularly good on-the-job support for learners

Weaknesses

- declining achievements in NVQ programmes
- insufficient recognition of learners' prior experience and qualifications
- insufficient background knowledge training for the NVQ
- insufficient awareness of training requirements by many employers

Achievement and standards

42. Bestco has a good learner retention rate for FMAs in animal care. Of the 27 learners who have begun the FMA programme since 1999-2000, only two have left the programme early. Retention on NVQ programmes is declining. Ninety-one per cent of learners completed their programme in 1999-2000, but retention dropped to 74 per cent in 2000-01 with five successful completions. In 2001-02, 46 per cent of learners were retained, five successfully completed their programmes and six are still in learning. Most learners achieve additional qualifications, beyond the requirements of their chosen programmes. Learners are given the opportunity to achieve recognised certificates in health and safety and food hygiene.

43. Learners acquire good practical skills. Most employers are pleased with the progress made by learners and their ability to complete routine duties. Learners benefit from on-the-job training provided by the work placements and work well towards achieving practical competence. However, they do not develop sufficient knowledge of some key principles of animal care and nutrition. Learners' prior experience is recorded in their individual learning plans (ILPs) but learners who have achieved prior animal care qualifications have received no recognition of their prior experience or achievements. Their progress has been slow.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			2		4		1									
Retained*			0		1		0									
Successfully completed			0		0		0									
Still in learning			2		2		0									

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	12		4		6		5									
Retained*	0		0		5		4	80								
Successfully completed	0		0		1		1	20								
Still in learning	12		4		0		0	0								

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	9		24		19		11									
Retained*	0		11		14	74	10	91								
Successfully completed	0		6		5	26	8	73								
Still in learning	6		5		0	0	0	0								

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

Quality of education and training

44. Learning programmes in animal care are designed to be very flexible to meet the needs of learners. Most learners attend the work placement for two or three days each week. Some attend more than one work placement in order to gain further experience. Basic and key skills training are provided on an individual needs basis at the workplace where appropriate. Assessors and learning advisers visit regularly and time their visits to meet the needs of the learners.

45. Support for learners is very good. Assessors visit learners regularly and provide effective support for NVQ and personal issues. Most learners also receive progress reviews at least every 12 weeks. Learners with additional needs have more frequent reviews. Key skills and basic skills assessors visit the learners at the workplace to provide individual support, which is valued by learners. Staff are committed to supporting the learners who appreciate their involvement. One learner interviewed had received a moped and protective equipment through a local initiative, 'Wheels for Work', to enable her to access a remote work placement.

46. There is a good range of vocational seminars that covers aspects of animal care, including visits to local employers and visiting speakers from specialist organisations such as 'Hearing Dogs for the Deaf'. The sessions are varied and inspiring to learners, allowing them to broaden their experience. Some learners are unable to attend because of work commitments or their training location. There are plans to make these seminars more available to learners.

47. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Learners receive assessment visits in the workplace every month. The assessors provide learners with good guidance on evidence requirements and portfolio-building, but some portfolios do not have sufficient workplace evidence. Assessments are mostly planned in advance and are well recorded. Some assessments are not thorough enough, with limited assessment of background knowledge.

48. The assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills during induction is satisfactory. The initial assessment also uses dyslexia and dyscalculia indicators. However, this information is not used to provide specialist support for learners. Most learners are working towards an appropriate qualification, although some of them could achieve qualifications at a higher level.

49. Learners receive particularly good on-the-job training through work experience or employment in a range of good-quality work placements. Employers provide good work experience opportunities for learners, but there is no requirement for employers to provide a planned programme of training linked to NVQ requirements. Off-the-job training is not planned to provide all the background knowledge required by the NVQ. Some of the learners interviewed lacked knowledge of basic principles. Most learners are expected to research the background knowledge themselves, some rely on knowledge gained from previous animal care courses.

50. The learning resources in animal care are inadequate. Some texts are available to learners, but there is a limited supply and there are no video or specialist CD/ IT resources. Question sheets are prepared for learners, to help them produce evidence, but there are not enough learning resource packs or unit-related resources. Staff are adequately qualified and experienced for their jobs, but there are no suitably qualified assessors to allow Bestco to offer the current level 3 standards in animal care.

Leadership and management

51. The programme is arranged to enable learners to follow a flexible pattern of attendance and staff visit the learners regularly to provide training and support, although learners' need to develop their knowledge and understanding has not been recognised sufficiently. The provision of effective additional learning support is well managed.

52. Bestco does not involve employers sufficiently in training and assessment. Employers are committed to providing good work experience for learners, but there is no requirement for the employers to provide a planned programme of training. Few have a copy of the NVQ standards and there is no scheme of training to ensure that all learners receive a balanced learning experience. Employers would welcome more information.

53. Most learners receive a balanced induction programme, including training about equality of opportunity, but their awareness of equality of opportunity is not regularly re-emphasised during their programme. Those questions on the learner review form related to equal opportunities are limited and do not promote discussion.

54. Satisfactory targets are set for learners. Targets are set for work completion during assessment visits, which are then monitored and reviewed. Longer-term targets set during the progress review process lack detail and do not help learners' progression. There are satisfactory internal verification procedures in place, meeting the requirements of the awarding body. There is a planned programme of observations and checks on the various methods of assessment, but there are some weaknesses in assessment that have not been identified by this process, including the lack of thorough checking of background knowledge.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	23	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective on- and off-the-job training
- good achievements of additional qualifications
- effective welfare support

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of main programme qualifications
- insufficient learning resources for occupational NVQ

Achievement and standards

55. Bestco works closely with employers to ensure that learners achieve all aspects of their programmes. Learners benefit from this by gaining relevant skills and experience working in various departments. Learners receive individual support, and tuition is given by Bestco's staff at the learners' workplace. This supplements a good variety of off-the-job training provided by employers in the workplace. Learners are gaining additional qualifications in IT, and health and safety. Numeracy and literacy skills are offered at higher levels for those learners who have achieved basic levels.

56. The achievement level is poor in this area of learning. There was a 50 per cent achievement rate for AMAs three years ago. The following year there was a 100 per cent drop out because of poor recruitment. Since then, no learners have been recruited to the AMA programme, because of problems finding work placements that provide the necessary supervisory experience for learners. Forty learners have been recruited as FMAs, 19 are still in learning and four have successfully completed their programmes. Twenty-one learners have begun NVQs, four have successfully completed their programmes and three are still in learning. Eighteen learners have obtained health and safety certificates.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts					6		6									
Retained*					0		4									
Successfully completed					0		3									
Still in learning					0		1									

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	7		16		12		5									
Retained*	0		9		7		1	20								
Successfully completed	0		2		1		1	20								
Still in learning	6		9		4		0	0								

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		6		10		3									
Retained*	0		2		4	40	2	67								
Successfully completed	0		1		3	30	0	0								
Still in learning	2		1		0	0	0	0								

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

Quality of education and training

57. Most learners have access to individual tuition by Bestco staff. Employers provide good on-the-job training in relevant administration tasks and offer a variety of off-the-job training sessions designed to help learners with day-to-day activities. There is a wide variety of employment available for FMAs. Most learners currently on programme are employed and several employers have mentioned the value of learners' contributions to

the effectiveness and profitability of their businesses.

58. The initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy levels is satisfactory and includes accreditation of prior learning. Most learners have relevant GCSE passes at grades A-C, as many employers insist on this before employment or work placement. Bestco offers key skills in literacy and numeracy at a higher level than is required for learners' training programmes. Bestco offers further relevant additional qualifications to the learners, such as health and safety certificates, which are achieved by most learners.

59. Internal verification is satisfactory. There are four occupational assessors and two internal verifiers and key skills assessors, all of whom are experienced and well qualified. Bestco has experienced some problems related to staff turnover of assessors, but learners are now making good progress.

60. Progress reviews are satisfactory. Reviews are identified in learners' individual learning plans and advisers conduct quarterly reviews involving the learner and the employer. In addition, the business administration co-ordinator meets monthly with assessors, and learning advisers meet quarterly with employers to monitor learners' progress and to plan future learning. The focus of these meetings is to raise retention and achievement rates for all learners.

61. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Workplace assessments are well planned and are carried out regularly and recorded. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory and contain a range of evidence, learners receive guidance on evidence requirements and portfolio-building. The feedback given by assessors enables learners to gauge their progress and identify developments.

62. Learners are well supported by employers and Bestco staff. Learners who require support with personal problems are supported by Bestco's welfare team. Learners are also supported in work-related issues, such as redundancy, promotion and change.

63. The resources available to business administration learners are unsatisfactory. Bestco does not provide formal teaching sessions for learners. Some background knowledge materials are available to learners, but are not sufficient for the provision of business administration programmes. There are no learning resource packs and no alternative training resources available to learners. Learners do have access to computers in their workplaces and Bestco provides weekly access to computers at each site for key skills training in IT.

Leadership and management

64. The leadership and management of business administration is satisfactory. Most work placements for learners are good and most employers feel they are well treated and supported by Bestco. Bestco staff are generally considered to be approachable and amenable. Progress reviews are carried out regularly and employers provide good and relevant experiences for learners. Learners and employers value the support provided by Bestco's welfare team.

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65. Bestco management have identified problems with the AMA programme. These issues are largely historical and Bestco is now limiting access to this programme until suitable work-placement opportunities are identified. Bestco has introduced a major reorganisation of staff and assessment practice and made changes to the learning programme in order to raise retention and achievement rates. It is too early to judge whether these changes have led to improved retention and achievement rates.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	23	4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective development of learners' employment skills
- good individual support for learners
- particularly supportive employers

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- insufficient monitoring of employers' training
- some weak assessment practices

Achievement and standards

66. Bestco is particularly effective in developing learners' employability skills. Many learners attend additional off-the-job training sessions in Bestco's training centres. These learners acquire additional skills over and above the modern apprenticeship framework and NVQ requirements. Examples include basic health and safety, food hygiene, first aid, and lift truck training. Learners needing help with basic skills have improved their reading, writing and number skills by attending literacy and numeracy support sessions at Bestco training centres for half a day each week.

67. Learners currently on programme are making satisfactory progress towards achieving their qualifications. Most employers are pleased with the additional skills that learners acquire throughout their learning programmes. For example, some employers state that learners have gained knowledge of customers' legal rights and demonstrate more confidence in dealing with customer queries and complaints. Learners produce satisfactory portfolios of evidence that are well referenced to performance criteria. This evidence includes paperwork from the workplace, such as specific delivery documents, together with written statements as to how learners use them in the workplace. Retention rates for modern apprentices and NVQ learners are satisfactory.

68. Achievement rates for modern apprentices and NVQ learners are historically poor. This was partly identified in the self-assessment report. For the 1999-2000 starters, only 25 per cent of learners achieved the full FMA framework. This was followed by 21 per cent for 2000-01 starters. The achievement rate for NVQ learners beginning the programme in 1999-2000 was 57 per cent. This rate declined to 43 per cent for 2000-01 starters, and declined again to 21 per cent for 2001-02 starters. Some 2001-02 learners have transferred to E2E programmes, but even taking this into consideration,

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achievement is poor and declining.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			1		8		8									
Retained*			0		6		3									
Successfully completed			0		4		2									
Still in learning			0		0		1									

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	12		11		14		8									
Retained*	0		8		8		7	88								
Successfully completed	0		0		3		2	25								
Still in learning	10		5		2		0	0								

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		28		37		14									
Retained*	0		9		20	54	9	64								
Successfully completed	0		6		16	43	8	57								
Still in learning	3		2		0	0	0	0								

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

Quality of education and training

69. Learners are given a lot of individual support. They are visited in the workplace by their training advisers every three to four weeks. Focused, short-term targets are set and reviewed during these visits. These targets are very workplace-specific and relate clearly

to NVQ and key skill units. Training advisers are reliable and demonstrate flexibility in planning their visits. The visits are scheduled in advance, taking into consideration learner and employer needs. Where one learner was unable to attend Bestco's training centre to attend key skills training, a member of Bestco staff visited the learner in the workplace to carry out the training. Learners value the relationship with their training adviser and there is a good rapport between them. One learner stated that he had achieved his learning target as a result of the support that he had received from Bestco staff. Bestco celebrates learner successes, including the issuing of internal training certificates, and the introduction of an internal awards ceremony. Training advisers demonstrate a good understanding of individual learner ability, and take into account any basic skills needs. Good-quality additional off-the-job literacy and numeracy sessions are regularly available, and attended by these learners.

70. Employers are particularly supportive of their learners. Employers offer good training opportunities that give learners a wide range of learning and assessment opportunities. Some learners are already employed before they begin training. For other, unemployed learners, Bestco is responsible for finding work placements, most of which lead to employment for the learners. Bestco relies on employers to plan and carry out any on-the-job training for learners. However, there is insufficient monitoring of the quality and accuracy of this training. Employers state that Bestco staff are aware of training topics planned, but not of the actual content or provision of the training.

71. Progress reviews are satisfactory. Bestco's learning advisers visit the workplace and conduct quarterly formal reviews, the dates of which are planned in advance and detailed on each learner's ILP. Employers are involved in this review process wherever possible. Learners and employers are aware of progress against previous targets, and new targets are set. The learning adviser visits the learner in the workplace quarterly, setting long-term targets which are not sufficiently workplace-specific. Learners and employers receive copies of the progress review paperwork.

72. Learning materials are sufficient to meet learner needs. Bestco has recently introduced new vocational learning materials to help with background knowledge, but it is too soon to judge their effect on learners. There is an adequate number of experienced and qualified staff. There are four training advisers, one co-ordinator and one learning adviser. Three of these staff are qualified internal verifiers.

73. Before beginning training, learners receive an effective initial assessment, which contributes to the learners' ILP. Learners complete a diagnostic test at this time to identify any basic skills needs. However, there is no testing to identify specific learning needs.

74. Learners receive a recently improved and updated induction, before starting their programme. The previous induction procedure was adequate. Key skills training is introduced immediately, as part of the induction. Learners who have already achieved the necessary key skills qualifications for their programme are offered the option of completing key skills at the next level.

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75. Some assessment practice is weak. For example, some learner work being used as evidence in learner portfolios contains inaccuracies which have not been picked up by Bestco staff during marking. Some feedback to learners does not accurately inform learners of their performance, and does not give them a chance to improve and develop further. Workplace assessments are planned satisfactorily and carried out regularly by Bestco's training advisers.

Leadership and management

76. Staff appreciate the opportunities offered to them by Bestco for self-development. They are actively encouraged to obtain additional qualifications and to improve their skills. For example, one assessor is planning for a teaching course at a local college. There is an effective staff appraisal system.

77. All staff members in this area have been involved in the self-assessment process, and value the input that they have into Bestco's development. Bestco has a commitment to continuous improvement and takes immediate action when an issue is identified. For example, when one employer commented that a learner was having problems attending evening key skills training sessions, Bestco reviewed these arrangements and introduced afternoon sessions. Some employers and learners stated that they had received questionnaires from Bestco regarding service quality.

78. Communication is of a satisfactory standard, with planned and minuted fortnightly team meetings, and weekly staff update meetings. A new system for analysing achievement and retention data and setting targets has recently been introduced, but it is too soon to make a judgement on its effectiveness. Internal verification in this area of learning is satisfactory.

79. Learners in this area of learning demonstrate a poor understanding of equal opportunities. There is insufficient re-emphasis and promotion of equal opportunities with employers. Qualified Bestco staff conduct health and safety checks in learners' workplaces.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	279	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- particularly effective individual support for learners
- good development of practical skills in the workplace

Weaknesses

- poor planning of induction
- some inconsistent application of assessment practices

Achievement and standards

80. Retention rates are satisfactory. In 1999-2000, 64 per cent of AMAs were retained and 46 per cent achieved their full apprenticeship framework. Subsequent intakes still have many learners in training. Retention rates for the FMA framework are improving, from 46 per cent in 2000-01 to 48 per cent in 2001-02, with 21 learners still on programme. Achievements are improving. Achievements on the NVQ programme have improved from 37 per cent to 55 per cent.

81. Most learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Assessors set learners appropriate and time-bound targets. Some learners made slow progress in the achievement of key skills, but the new system for support of key skills training has resulted in better progress. Many learners achieve key skills at a higher level than that required for their programme. FMAs are encouraged to progress to the advanced level, and of 53 successful completers of the FMA in the past 12 months, 20 have done so. Attendance at training support sessions is monitored by Bestco and employers are informed of non-attendance. Most of the employers inform BESTCO of poor work attendance.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	59		68		74		53									
Retained*	1		16		33		34									
Successfully completed	0		4		16		25									
Still in learning	59		52		27		3									

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	59		52		24		6									
Retained*	2		25		11		1	17								
Successfully completed	2		13		8		0	0								
Still in learning	49		21		2		0	0								

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	40		111		38		35									
Retained*	1		51		25	66	19	54								
Successfully completed	0		36		21	55	13	37								
Still in learning	31		35		0	0	0	0								

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

Quality of education and training

82. There is particularly effective support for individual learners. They all have diagnostic testing to assess basic or key skills support requirements. Sessions are arranged to provide additional learning support, but some learners do not always attend these sessions. Flexible and effective support for key skills training is provided at training centres or at the workplace. Welfare and vocational staff effectively support learners to

overcome personal barriers to progress.

83. Assessors, learning advisers and employers provide good support for learners to develop their skills and knowledge. Most learners find their assessors are accessible, helpful and approachable. The assessors support off-the-job training in the workplace on an individual basis and adapt their teaching to meet individual requirements. Employers are fully involved in the progress review process, which produces thorough short-term action-planning. The learner and employer are clear about their targets for the next visit. Learners carry out a self-evaluation before the progress review, and, although this system is relatively new, it encourages reflection and a clearer identification of training needs.

84. Learners have good opportunities to develop practical skills with experienced, qualified staff. Learners benefit from a range of experiences within the work placement; employers and assessors discuss the learners' progress and identify new targets. Most learners have support from room supervisors who also act as mentors. Learners observe demonstrations of correct procedures. A good range of reference books and magazines, tools and materials is available in the workplace for background knowledge and to plan activities.

85. Arrangements to assess learners' literacy, numeracy and key skills are satisfactory. Learners' support needs are identified quickly and support is offered by a combination of workshops and individual coaching in the workplace. Written work is used significantly as evidence in portfolios. Some learners have literacy support needs, and others speak English as an additional language. Resources for basic skills in literacy were relevant, but the level of the language and meaning was too technical.

86. Assessment practice varies between assessors. Recent changes to the assessment process are not fully understood by all assessors. The three-monthly standardisation meetings are not sufficient to support the development of inexperienced assessors. Some portfolios rely too much on written evidence and there is insufficient evidence of work products. Many learners do not know they can carry forward evidence from level 2 NVQ to level 3. There is a delay in assessing some written evidence. Detail in observation reports is good. Valid judgements are made using a range of evidence. Internal verification is satisfactory.

87. Staff are appropriately qualified and occupationally competent to level 3 NVQ. Most also have teaching qualifications at the initial level. There is good support for new staff, including shadowing and frequent reviews. Training materials are satisfactory. Laptop computers are taken to some workplaces to support learners who might otherwise have no access to IT. However, some learners who attend the open-learning workshops would welcome better access to IT during the sessions.

88. Induction is poorly planned. Learners do not have time to absorb the information given during their induction to Bestco. The presentation of the induction is satisfactory and learners find some of the activities enjoyable. There is no formal induction with a specific focus on childcare and the modern apprenticeship framework. Learners who transfer to level 3 NVQ do not have a formal introduction to the new standards and

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learners who have joined Bestco from another company may not have an induction.

89. There are flexible arrangements for off-the-job training, but not all learners have equal access. Open-learning packages are issued to most learners. Recently introduced seminars on specific early years topics use a range of teaching methods, but insufficient time is allowed for activities. The seminar packs lack consistency and many resources consist of photocopies of materials that are not always appropriate. There are not enough activities to challenge level 3 NVQ learners, or to direct learners to other, linked resources.

Leadership and management

90. The training provision is well managed. The team is responsive to the immediate concerns of learners and employers and takes swift action to resolve any issues. The recently introduced 'traffic lights' system of monitoring learners at risk, is already starting to take effect. Staff identify particular examples of improvements in their own performance as a result of training and assessment observations. Staff are actively involved in the production of the self-assessment report and are given a day off-site to work on its early stages. The promotion of equal opportunities is satisfactory.

91. There is good communication between assessors, employers and the learning advisers. Outcomes of assessment are shared, and the details used to emphasise agreed target dates. Bestco has weekly team meetings and staff are well supported in professional development. Workloads are discussed and, when necessary, duties are reallocated to ensure that learners can be supported effectively. Quality assurance issues are discussed as well as the progress being made by learners.

Foundation programmes**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	147	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good on- and off-the-job training
- good personal progress for learners
- strong pastoral support in E2E
- frequent celebration of achievement in E2E

Weaknesses

- poor achievement levels in BET
- poor individual target-setting in BET
- poor integration of literacy and numeracy in E2E
- inadequate resources at some training centres
- inadequate arrangements for additional learning support

Achievement and standards

92. Retention rates are good. In the current year, 70 per cent of young people have been retained on the E2E programme. During 2002-03, 57 per cent of BET learners remained on the programme, an improvement of 15 per cent on the previous year. Attendance is closely monitored on all programmes.

93. There is poor progression into employment from the BET programme. During 2002-03, 20 per cent of learners gained employment. This is a slight improvement on the 2001-02 rate of 16 per cent but does not meet the Jobcentre Plus target of 38 per cent. Bestco has not focused sufficiently on job outcomes and the value of work experience. Currently only 29 learners are in a work placement. Some learners are unaware of the possibility of getting work experience. There are work placements available in some locations, but some learners are not fully ready to take these up. An employment adviser has recently been appointed to help match learners with employment and work-experience opportunities. Improved arrangements for jobsearch have been introduced, this area is now satisfactory.

94. During 2001-02 and 2002-03, 26 per cent of BET learners completed their planned learning objectives. Bestco's set targets are 50 per cent for both periods. There is insufficient recording of the achievement of personal skills development milestones. The monitoring of learner progress varies in quality and regularity. The E2E programme has

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not been in operation for long enough to be able to make judgements on achievement.

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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	554		613		146											
Retained*	318		259	42	47	32										
Planned learning completed	209		161	26	43	29										
Gained job	109		98	16	3	2										
Still in training	147		0	0	0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

95. On- and off-the-job training are good. Teaching sessions are satisfactory or better. The sessions are well planned. Schemes of work are comprehensive, logical and relevant. Trainers use a good range of teaching methods. Most sessions take account of different levels of ability with groups and some trainers pay close attention to learners preferred learning styles. Learners are allowed to work at their own pace. Staff relate well to learners, whose abilities and social circumstances vary. Learners participate enthusiastically, approach tasks with confidence and are not afraid to ask for help. There is a good rapport between learners and staff and within learner groups. Some classes are supported by volunteer assistants.

96. Bestco and the employers have good working relationships and regular communication, which benefits the learners. Work-placement activities are well planned. In BET, liaison between Bestco and the employers ensures that the most is made of opportunities to integrate and emphasises literacy and numeracy skills development in the workplace. There are regular three-way progress reviews in the workplace. Learners develop their skills and confidence in the workplace and are very positive about their work-placement experiences.

97. Most learners are very satisfied with their experiences on the training programme. On BET they are proud of the improvements they make in literacy and numeracy skills. These successes motivate them to progress with their learning. Learners value the support they receive from staff. Group work gives learners increased confidence in speaking to others and in their relationships with other people. Most learners benefit

from increased self-esteem and development of their employment and personal skills. They enjoy their time on the programme.

98. Learners appreciate the high level of support from staff on the E2E programme. Help with domestic issues, liaison with external agencies and assistance with buying clothing are examples of support that have been particularly effective. A recently introduced breakfast club is of significant help to learners who do not eat before attending each day. This support helps to reduce any barriers to beginning and remaining in learning.

99. E2E learners' success is frequently celebrated through award ceremonies. Photographs of learners receiving awards are displayed on walls and success boards. Learners' birthdays are celebrated with cards and cakes. These positive actions are particularly important for learners who have rarely achieved vocational or academic success.

100. BET learners' needs are not adequately identified and the targets set in their individual learning plans are poor. Targets are not always SMART. They focus mainly on the achievement of a literacy and numeracy qualification. There is insufficient emphasis on employment skills and milestones for personal development. Most learners are not clear about the scope of their whole learning programme. They do not have copies of their learning plans. Targets set during progress reviews are not always clearly negotiated with learners. They are not always aware of when reviews are due. The learners rely on their trainers to tell them what to do each day. There is insufficient recording of achievement. Most learners are unable to state what progress they have made towards specific learning goals.

101. The literacy and numeracy components of the E2E programme are poorly developed and confined to off-the-job training. Opportunities to contextualise and emphasise literacy and numeracy in the workplace are missed. Bestco recognised this weakness in its self-assessment report. A trainer qualified to teach literacy and numeracy has recently been appointed to help remedy this.

102. The accommodation at some training centres is inadequate. Training rooms are too small for the number of learners. Some remote training centres are understaffed. Problems with staffing levels have disrupted learners' progress. Not all staff hold qualifications to teach literacy and numeracy. Arrangements are being made to deal with this. There is an over-emphasis on the use of paper-based resources at some training centres. Some materials are poor in quality and context, are set at inappropriate levels, and are inconsistent with the levels identified in initial assessment. Few worksheets link literacy and numeracy learning with a vocational context. There is insufficient use of audio-visual or IT resources. Some training centres do not have adequate Internet facilities. Bestco has completed an audit of resources in training centres and has begun to purchase new materials and software.

103. Bestco has poor arrangements to meet the support needs of those learners identified as having specific learning difficulties and disabilities, such as dyslexia. Staff are

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not trained to identify these disabilities and there are no specialist resources available. There are no procedures in place to record additional needs. Not all training centres have support for learners who speak English as an additional language.

Leadership and management

104. The leadership and management of foundation programmes are satisfactory. In E2E the appointment of a manager has led to positive developments. These include structured schemes of work, greater integration of different aspects of the programme, more staff, continuous staff development and clearer communication systems. At some BET sites there is good communication, but arrangements are not as effective at the more remote sites. One member of staff has joined the organisation's communication working group to help drive improvements.

105. Bestco has a strong commitment to continuous improvement of its training provision. This commitment is strongly promoted by recently appointed managers. In its self-assessment Bestco identified many of the weaknesses identified during inspection. A full audit of the BET programmes was completed by the manager to identify areas for improvement. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process. A number of initiatives have been implemented to improve BET provision, but these are too recent to be able to judge whether they are being effective. Some procedures and good practice are not shared with the more remote training centres. Teaching observation has been introduced, but not all members of staff have been observed. There is a comprehensive system for managers to monitor progress and outcomes on BET. Moderation arrangements for the literacy and numeracy entry level qualification are thorough.

106. Equality of opportunity is adequately covered at induction for most learners, although the sessions are uninspiring. There are no modified materials to ensure that learners who speak English as an additional language fully understand their rights and responsibilities.