

REINSPECTION REPORT

Nova Training Reinspection

29 January 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

NOVA TRAINING REINSPECTION

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Nova Training (Nova) is part of Staff Select Ltd and is based in the Black Country. It was established in 1992. Nova provides training for all people in the local communities, especially those who have been in learning and the long-term unemployed. Currently it holds contracts with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Jobcentre Plus. There are 284 learners, including advanced and foundation modern apprentices, national vocational qualification (NVQ) learners and, most recently, Entry to Employment (E2E) learners.

2. The head office of the provider is located in Willenhall. Nova operates from four sites, three of which are in the Black Country and the fourth is in Telford. All Black Country sites deliver work-based learning, including E2E. A short intensive basic skills (SIBS) course funded by Jobcentre Plus is provided at the Telford centre.

3. Since the previous inspection, Nova has been restructured. It now has a six-member senior management team. The managing director is responsible for the overall strategic planning of the company. The operations director is responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the company and reports directly to the managing director. He is assisted in his role by the deputy operations director, quality assurance learning standards manager, human resources manager and E2E programme manager. Each of the four training centres has a centre manager. Health and safety, and equal opportunities are co-ordinated by a champion for each area. There are 45 staff in total including senior managers and directors.

4. The Black Country has a total population of 1.1 million. Minority ethnic groups make up 11 per cent of this total. At the end of 2002 the overall unemployment rate in the UK was 2.5 per cent. The comparative rate for the West Midlands region was 2.9 per cent and for the Black Country, 3.8 per cent. The index of multiple deprivation 2000 shows that 30 of the Black Country's 87 wards are ranked within the 10 per cent most deprived wards in the country.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

5. Nova has 32 learners on motor vehicle programmes, four foundation modern apprentices and 28 NVQ learners. Twenty learners are working on NVQs at level 2, four at level 3 and four are on the E2E programme. The E2E learners were transferred to the E2E programme in August last year. Off-the-job training is carried out in the provider's training centre. All learners are in work placements: some of which are main dealerships, others are small independent garages. All learners are assessed in the workplace. Learners' progress reviews take place at least every 12 weeks.

Business administration, management & professional

6. Eighteen learners are training on Nova's business administration programmes. Sixteen of these are foundation modern apprentices and two are on NVQ programmes. Learners are working towards NVQs in business administration at level 2 and key skills at level 1 and 2. Eleven of the learners are also working for technical certificates. Learners are recruited from Connexions or are already employed. Nova provides all learners with an induction which includes an overview of the modern apprenticeship framework, and their rights and responsibilities regarding health and safety, and equality of opportunity. All learners have a work-based induction when they begin a new work placement. Initial interviews and assessments are carried out with each learner. Fourteen learners already have the required key skills qualifications or equivalent qualifications and two will take external key skills assessments.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

7. Twenty-nine learners are on work-based learning programmes for young people. Twenty-one learners are on customer service programmes, four are on retailing programmes and four are working towards distribution, storage and warehousing qualifications. Three are advanced modern apprentices, 13 are foundation modern apprentices, five learners are working towards an NVQ at level 3 and eight learners towards an NVQ at level 2. There are also five learners on E2E programmes who have chosen to work on units for retailing operations at level 1. Learners are recruited from Connexions or directly from employers. All work placements are arranged by Nova. Most training is carried out in the workplace by employers, with support from Nova's staff. All learners are visited in the workplace fortnightly for assessment. Nova's staff internally verify all portfolios. Learners' progress is reviewed every eight weeks. Learners with additional learning needs are supported either by their assessor, or an associate from an association of training providers within the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) area, or at local colleges.

Foundation programmes

8. The E2E programme has 100 learners at various stages of learning. Young people on Life Skills and level 1 NVQ courses in motor vehicle were transferred to the new E2E programme in August 2003. Eighteen are in their eight-week initial assessment period, 22 are working towards NVQ units in retailing and motor vehicle, and 60 are attending work placements. Eight clients attend the Intensive Activity Period (IAP) course and 10 clients attend SIBS courses. E2E courses are available in three training centres. IAP and SIBS are available in one centre.

9. Young people are referred by local Connexions centres. They are able to join the E2E programme at any time. The eight-week SIBS programme helps people to improve their literacy, numeracy and language skills and pass national tests at level 1. The 13-week IAP course helps unemployed people find work.

10. Teaching is provided by 12 tutors and there are three training centre supervisors to manage programmes locally. All of the learners on E2E have a personal adviser at Connexions and adult clients have a personal adviser at Jobcentre Plus. Nova's staff, personal advisers and employers carry out learners' progress reviews.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	28
Number of learner interviews	77
Number of staff interviews	45
Number of employer interviews	18
Number of partner/external agency interviews	2
Number of visits	26

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

11. At the previous inspection on 12 April 2002, Nova's training provision was judged to be unsatisfactory in engineering, technology and manufacturing. The training provision in foundation was good, and it was satisfactory in business administration, management and professional, and retailing, customer services and transportation. Leadership and management were unsatisfactory, quality assurance was unsatisfactory, but equality of opportunity was satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection, leadership and management, business administration and retailing were found to be satisfactory. Foundation programmes are good. Engineering programmes are unsatisfactory. Nova has been referred to its local LSC for emergency action.

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GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

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

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

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	2

Grades awarded at reinspection

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	2
Quality assurance	4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

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

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

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Entry to Employment	2
New Deal 25+	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

12. Learners achieve their targets well. They develop self-confidence, good employability and study skills on all programmes. On E2E programmes, learners' communication and assertiveness skills are very well-developed in drama sessions. They can use their new skills effectively in work and everyday situations. **They are fully engaged and well motivated.**

13. **Retailing and business administration learners develop very good skills in the workplace.** Work placements are well matched to learners' needs and provide them with a good range of experiences. They greatly value the opportunities given to them. They recognise that they are acquiring skills, and many progress to employment with their work placements.

14. **The quality of learners' work is of a very good standard.** Their portfolios are well structured and they take pride in their work in all areas of learning.

15. Learners' achievement of key skills qualifications is satisfactory. Key skills are now introduced earlier in the programmes than at the time of the previous inspection.

16. **Retention and achievement rates are improving in all areas of learning.** Strategies to improve retention and achievement rates are successful. Many motor vehicle learners develop good, job-related skills and get jobs. **The achievement and retention rates are improving on foundation modern apprenticeship and NVQ retailing programmes.** These were very poor at the previous inspection. From a very low base of 5 per cent, achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices improved significantly to 33 per cent in two years. Retention rates have also improved significantly from 12 per cent to 50 per cent in the same period.

17. **Foundation learners have good achievement levels. The achievement of level 1 national tests in literacy, numeracy, or both, by 86 per cent of learners on the SIBS programme, is outstanding. Their achievement of short-course qualifications is also good.** In a period of five months, 43 E2E learners have achieved football coaching

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certificates, 47 have achieved a first-aid certificate and 12 learners have achieved a manual handling certificate. Sixty per cent of learners have passed the driving theory test.

18. Retention and achievement rates in business administration have improved considerably during the past six months. Six foundation modern apprentices have achieved full modern apprenticeship frameworks, one learner has achieved an NVQ and two have achieved key skills units. The proportion of learners achieving the foundation modern apprenticeship framework is steadily increasing: from 7 per cent in 1999 to 23 per cent in 2002. The number of learners leaving their programmes before completing their foundation modern apprenticeships is decreasing consistently, from 85 per cent in 1999, to 13 per cent in 2003.

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
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Foundation programmes	0	1	1	4	1	0	0	7
Total	0	1	2	5	1	0	0	9

19. **Learners work on good, work-based key skills projects.** They use the projects to benefit their employers, as well as to gather very useful evidence for their portfolios.

20. **Nova's staff provide a very good match between learners and work placements. They identify appropriate work placements extremely quickly.** Work-placement providers are supportive and give learners effective practical training at work to develop their skills and to provide evidence for their qualifications.

21. **Assessment is generally good in all areas of learning.** The initial eight weeks of the E2E programme are well planned and include a comprehensive range of effective initial assessment. A good range of initial assessment tools is used on the SIBS programme. Good, computer-based diagnostic assessment is used to identify learners' individual literacy, numeracy and language needs. Learners complete a learning style questionnaire to identify what is the best method of learning for them. They respond positively to this approach. Retention and achievement rates have improved.

22. **Progress reviews are generally effective in all areas of learning.** Learners' progress is reviewed very regularly by staff, employers and personal advisers. Tutors check learners' progress accurately and set targets for the next visit. Learners are motivated to achieve results.

23. **Pastoral support is good.** Learners feel well supported by staff and are confident in the staff's ability to help them solve their problems. Learners are very well protected from any harassment and bullying. If they have any personal problems these are dealt with promptly and effectively.

24. **Teaching overall is satisfactory, but some teaching on foundation programmes is dull and uninspiring.**

25. Learning programmes overall are suitable for learners, employers and the examination bodies but **the IAP programme is poor.** Initial assessment, the teaching of jobsearch, assessment and progress reviews are all ineffective on IAP.

26. **Some training is poorly planned.** Support is inadequate for learners with additional needs, such as language, literacy and numeracy training. Some learners have identified specific learning needs, but these have not been met. **Some timetabling on E2E programmes is too rigid and does not allow all learners reasonable access to learning.**

Leadership and management

27. **Nova has effective links with outside organisations which are of benefit to learners.** Nova uses these links to support learners and potential learners.

28. **Nova has a good three-year strategy to improve training provision.** The plan sets challenging targets, actions and success indicators for achievement in key areas of the business. The main focus of the strategic plan is recruitment, retention and learners' achievements. The plan instigated by the new E2E programme has been the driving force for structural changes. New job roles in quality assurance and programme management have been created at senior management level. Assessment and verification practices are satisfactory in all relevant areas.

29. **Nova has a good internal staff training programme** which focuses on key learning processes, such as initial assessment, identifying learner aims and objectives, drawing up individual learning plans and setting identifiable targets.

30. **Most learners have a good understanding of equality of opportunity, dignity and respect for others,** particularly E2E learners. They are fully aware of the well-presented procedures for dealing with grievances, harassment and bullying. Tutors regularly reinforce learners' understanding and frequently integrate equality, fairness and dignity into group training sessions. **Nova has introduced good initiatives to involve learners in training.**

31. Nova did not effectively respond to the previous inspection findings for 18 months. The new company strategy, the strengthened management team and new quality assurance systems, were not developed and implemented during this period. The provider has now implemented a wide range of effective changes at strategic and operational level to focus on the learners' experience in training. The changes have begun to take effect, but learners continued to receive an unsatisfactory service for a long period following the previous inspection.

32. **Nova's management and deployment of staff is weak in the business administration programme.** It has had a very high staff turnover at tutor and assessor level.

33. **Management of health and safety is poor in engineering.** There is a culture of complacency and acceptance of high levels of risk. Existing policies to manage health and safety are not followed. Health and safety is not considered a priority in the training centre workshops, and health and safety matters are poorly monitored in the work placements.

34. **Nova has no effective strategy in place to ensure timely, relevant or systematic delivery of literacy, numeracy and language support.** Some support is offered during teaching sessions by occupationally competent trainers, but there is no monitoring of the support given, or evaluation of its effects. Many experienced and trained staff are not offering additional learning support.

35. **The quality assurance framework is not applied consistently throughout the foundation area of learning.** Areas of concern are: the observation of teaching; the use of data and target-setting; and the sharing of good practice.

36. **Self-assessment at Nova is still poor.** Nova produced its sixth self-assessment report for the reinspection. Learners', employers' and staff's views are not systematically sought and used. Their views are not effectively incorporated into the writing of the self-assessment report. The report did not identify some of the key weaknesses found by inspectors. Many of the strengths identified by Nova were considered to be normal practice by inspectors.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- effective links with outside organisations
- good strategy to improve provision
- internal staff training programme focused on learners' needs
- good understanding of equal opportunities topics by most learners
- good initiatives to involve learners

Weaknesses

- ineffective response to previous inspection report
- weak deployment and management of staff
- poor management of health and safety in one area of learning
- ineffective strategy to meet literacy, numeracy and language support needs
- inconsistent application of quality assurance framework

- poor self-assessment process

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good learner progress reviews at work placements
- good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor management of health and safety

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- improving retention and achievement rates
- particularly good assignment of learners to appropriate work placements

Weaknesses

- poor management of training

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- improving retention and achievement rates on foundation modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes
- very good skills development in the workplace
- good standard of learners' work
- good work-related key skills projects

Weaknesses

- poor planning of training

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- outstanding achievements by adult learners on literacy and numeracy programmes
- good achievement of personal objectives and short-course qualifications
- good initial assessments on E2E and adult literacy and numeracy programmes
- good progress reviews

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- effective partnerships to support learners
- good understanding of equality and diversity topics by E2E learners

Weaknesses

- some weak teaching practice
- insufficiently flexible system for individual learning needs
- poor IAP programme
- inconsistent application of quality assurance framework

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

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

Strengths

- effective links with outside organisations
- good strategy to improve provision
- internal staff training programme focused on learners' needs
- good understanding of equal opportunities topics by most learners
- good initiatives to involve learners

Weaknesses

- ineffective response to previous inspection report
- weak deployment and management of staff
- poor management of health and safety in one area of learning
- ineffective strategy to meet literacy, numeracy and language support needs
- inconsistent application of quality assurance framework
- poor self-assessment process

37. Nova has effective links with outside organisations. Directors, managers and staff are actively involved in a wide range of partnership activities. These are aimed at continuously improving the quality of work-based learning in the local area. The staff identify and share good practice within Nova and with other providers. Nova uses these links to support learners and potential learners. During the inspection week, a learner was made homeless and Nova was able to find them short-term accommodation promptly. The organisation has good links with the schools in the Black Country. It encourages disaffected young people into learning, by providing motor vehicle programmes and vocational tasters.

38. Nova has a good strategy to improve training provision. The company has developed a clear strategic business plan covering the period August 2003-July 2006. The plan sets targets, actions and success indicators for achievement in key areas of the business. The key focus of the strategic plan is recruitment, retention and achievement rates. The plan has been the driving force for structural changes. New job roles for quality assurance and programme management have been created at senior management level. Staff have been fully involved in drawing up the plan. Working relationships and communications are good. Communications are effective among the training centres. Directors are easily accessible to the staff.

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39. Nova has a good internal staff training programme. It emphasises the organisation's key objectives of improving recruitment, retention and learners' achievements. A series of four effective, one-day courses have focused on key learning processes, such as initial assessment, identifying learner aims and objectives, drawing up individual learning plans and setting identifiable targets with E2E learners. Training packs are detailed, with comprehensive guidance notes and example documents. The training sessions are supported by a monthly newsletter, which includes items about good practice, other aspects of delivering good standards of teaching and learning, and Nova's expectations of staff.

40. Management information is used satisfactorily and it has improved since the previous inspection. Each area of learning has a booklet of data information which identifies clearly the status of each programme area, against targets set for recruitment, retention and achievement rates. Staff use this information to measure and monitor their performance in relation to targets set. Most areas of learning have improved their retention and achievement rates since the previous inspection. Learners' progress is also checked on the basis of a traffic light system. The learners not performing well are identified as red lights. Immediate, effective action is taken to deal with the weaknesses.

41. Overall, staff appraisal and training are satisfactory. All staff have regular monthly performance reviews, which set targets for the next month. In some cases, staff reviews are not appropriate; for example, one member of staff was reviewed by a manager who had little knowledge of the work of the member of staff. Training needs identified at the progress reviews are used to develop detailed learning plans for staff. Nova has recently introduced a good software programme which matches employee's and the company needs for training against the current national standard for training standards.

42. Nova has implemented a wide range of effective changes at strategic and operational level, designed to place emphasis on the learners' experience. Most of the changes have been driven by the new E2E programme. However, changes have not been implemented quickly enough. The company's strategy, restructuring, strengthened management team and new quality assurance system were not developed and implemented until 18 months after the previous inspection. The changes have begun to take effect, but learners continued to receive an unsatisfactory service for a long period of time.

43. Nova's management and deployment of staff is weak. It has had a very high staff turnover at tutor and assessor level during the months before inspection. Many staff who joined during this time only remained in post for two or three months. This was a problem particularly in business administration, where those learners and employers interviewed by inspectors reported having three or four assessors in a short period of time. Some of the qualified teaching staff are in training centre management roles and do not teach, some of them have literacy and numeracy teaching qualifications, but are not used effectively in this role. Staff pay improved significantly, to match the sector average, during the six months before reinspection. Recruitment procedures have been improved and senior staff are now involved in recruitment and selection.

44. The management of health and safety matters in the engineering, technology and manufacturing area of learning is poor. This applies to Nova's training centres, as well as some of the work placements. Health and safety checks on the work placements are ineffective. Responsibility for health and safety is with one of the champions; this member of staff is not a senior manager, but has access to the senior management team. Nova has a good strategy for vetting and monitoring health and safety, but it is not effectively implemented at operational level.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

45. Most learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities topics. They are fully aware of the well-presented procedures for dealing with grievances, harassment and bullying. These take the form of a simple flow chart, directing learners through the processes. Learners fully appreciate the continuous focus on equal opportunities training. It takes a variety of formats, such as short induction, clearly printed materials, effective group discussions, and participative video and role-play sessions in which learners act out different scenarios. Nova also has a policy which deals with appeals. Learners are given comprehensive information at induction. Most learners know how to use the procedures effectively.

46. Nova has good initiatives to attract potential learners and widen participation. Recruitment from minority ethnic groups is good. Seventeen per cent of Nova's learners are from minority ethnic groups. This compares favourably with the local minority groups representation of 11 per cent in the Black Country. Ten per cent of Nova's staff are from minority ethnic groups. Nova has good links with 13 local schools. It delivers short courses and taster courses in motor vehicle studies to disaffected 14-16 year olds from these schools.

47. All training staff are suitably occupationally qualified and experienced and meet the needs of the groups they teach. Nova is aware of the need to continuously improve the quality of teaching. Many staff are working towards teaching qualifications.

48. Nova monitors learner progression and destination effectively for all programmes. The results of monitoring are issued to programme areas routinely. Managers always comment on identified areas for concern, but this information is not used to set retention and achievement targets within areas of learning.

49. Nova's staff have carefully checked recently acquired teaching materials for stereotypes or cultural bias. However, there are no records to show that a specific teaching aid, or handout has been approved for use.

50. Since the previous inspection, some areas of the training centres have been adapted to meet the needs of those learners with restricted mobility. All learners have access to the training rooms. Currently there are no staff with mobility difficulties, but access is restricted to some parts of the building. Nova has not conducted an accessibility audit of any of its buildings.

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51. Nova no longer offers discrete classes to develop learners' literacy, numeracy or language learning needs; attendance at the classes was very poor. Learners' support needs for literacy, numeracy and language are identified during initial assessment and from data received from agencies such as Connexions. Learners' skills are developed through various projects. However, there is no effective strategy to ensure timely, relevant or systematic delivery of additional support. Some support is offered during teaching sessions by occupationally competent trainers; there is no monitoring of the support given, or evaluation of the success of this support. Many experienced and trained staff are not being used to offer additional learning support. Nova has an action plan to meet this need through local agencies and partners.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

52. Nova has a satisfactory quality assurance system. The company evaluated its previous system and concluded that it did not meet the needs of the learners, and did not improve quality on a continuing basis. Many of the procedures had been narrowly focused on processes, rather than the development of learners. The current quality assurance system was introduced in August 2003 to meet the needs of learners on the E2E programme. Nova has concluded that the new E2E quality assurance system is effectively meeting the needs of the learners. It is comprehensive and covers all aspects of the learners' experience, including teaching and learning. Internal verification is satisfactory in all relevant areas.

53. There are inconsistencies in the application of this system. In the past 12 months the provider has conducted comprehensive observations of staff performance. There is clear evidence of actions and guidance resulting from these observations. However, many of the teachers and assessors are new to the organisation and have not yet had their teaching sessions observed. Some tutors have not received a written report or feedback about their observation. There is no systematic process to ensure that all tutors offer a good standard of learning to all the learners.

54. Learners regularly evaluate their own learning, some of which is analysed. This has led to several improvements and modifications to training. However, not enough feedback is given to learners and they do not understand how their suggestions for improvement have been used. Managers do not always check what is included in the feedback from the learners. There is no strategic analysis of the feedback. Verbal planning for improvement is done at operational management level, but not recorded. Good practice is not shared sufficiently, particularly between outlying training centres.

55. Self-assessment at Nova is poor. The provider has produced self-assessment reports for the past six years. At the previous inspection, self-assessment and action-planning were highlighted as weaknesses. The current self-assessment report is still poor and not analytical enough. Feedback from learners, employers and staff is sought, but not systematically. How their views are to be included is not made clear. Some of the key staff did not contribute effectively to the self-assessment process. Some were able to identify further weaknesses to the inspectors during the inspection. The report was developed for the inspection, it did not have a corresponding development plan;

however, there has been an effective rolling development plan with clear targets. The self-assessment report did not identify some of the key weaknesses. Many of the strengths identified by Nova were considered to be normal practice by inspectors. There is no co-ordination between the quality assurance system and the self-assessment process.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	32	4

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

Strengths

- good learner progress reviews at work placements
- good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor management of health and safety

Achievement and standards

56. Retention and achievement rates have been improving. Historically, they have been poor on advanced and foundation modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes. The achievement of key skills qualifications has also been poor, but is now improving. Achievement rates for NVQs are better than for the frameworks: 15 per cent compared with no achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks. Job outcomes are satisfactory, or better. Between 30 and 50 per cent of the learners gain jobs on leaving the programmes.

57. Standards of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Lessons are planned well. Tutors make correct use of detailed information about learner's individual learning styles and preferences. Lesson plans now show a good awareness of equality and diversity. A good range of teaching methods and resources is used in the background knowledge sessions to deliver the subject matter. Learners develop a satisfactory level of the knowledge and skills required for the motor vehicle trade. Their attendance and punctuality is satisfactory and the standard of learners' work is also satisfactory. They produce good-quality evidence at appropriate levels.

Quality of education and training

58. Learners receive good progress reviews at their work placements. They are visited regularly, typically every six to eight weeks. Tutors check learners' progress accurately and set identifiable targets for the next visit, effectively motivating the learners. Employers contribute to the progress review process and give feedback about the learners' progress, although employers are not fully aware of their role in formal training,

or with the unit structure of the qualifications. Learners' assessments are satisfactory and suitable for the courses and programmes being followed. There is a clear monitoring document which helps to check on learners' progress and set targets.

59. Pastoral support is good. Learners feel well supported by staff and are confident that they can provide appropriate help when required. Learners are well informed and understand the content of their programmes. Induction is memorable and raises the learners' knowledge and understanding of health and safety and equal opportunities. The learners do not always use their health and safety knowledge at work and in the training centres.

60. Learning resources are satisfactory and used to good effect in background knowledge sessions and in developing key skills. Information and communications technology (ICT) is used effectively in the classrooms. Presentation of the sessions is satisfactory, many sessions use computer-generated presentations. Handouts and other learning materials use good colour diagrams and the text is clear and simple. The training centres have good-quality computers, but there are not enough to accommodate the engineering groups. Nova has access to a satisfactory range of vehicles on which the learners can practise their skills under tutor supervision. Other workshop tools and equipment are satisfactory. Tutors and assessors are appropriately qualified. Nova does not ensure that all the learners are following safe working practices.

Leadership and management

61. The level of tutor support and appraisal is satisfactory. There have been several changes in tutoring staff in the past months and the loss of a contract from one of the LSCs. The transfer of the learners was handled very sensitively and to their benefit.

62. Communications are satisfactory. The team meets regularly to discuss progress. Nova has effective links with outside organisations, which are used to good effect to ensure that each learner has a work placement. Target-setting is effective. The literacy and numeracy support for the learners is inconsistent. Internal verification is satisfactory and there is an effective strategic plan for the programme.

63. The management of health and safety is poor. There is a culture of complacency and acceptance of a high level of risk. Nova has good policies to manage health and safety, but these are not adhered to. Health and safety is not given priority in the training centre workshops and the monitoring of health and safety in the work placements is poor.

64. Some staff and learners do not always wear personal protective equipment. There are a number of other breaches of health and safety regulations in the training workshop. Some examples are: insufficient exhaust extraction; battery charging on metal benches without ventilation; and poor storage of components. There are no designated walkways, or work areas and there is insufficient work space between vehicles. Health and safety is not effectively monitored at the work placements and Nova's staff do not

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raise employers' awareness of health and safety matters. Work placements are vetted quite rigorously initially and all work placements are graded according to four levels of risk. Learners are appropriately placed in work placements with a manageable degree of risk. Assessors visit the work placements regularly, but do not check if health and safety is satisfactory or not. They do not promote safe working practices. Some of the staff set a poor example to the learners by not enforcing health and safety standards rigorously. Several E2E learners and 14-16 year old pupils are attending vocational tasters; these practices set a poor example for them and allow potentially dangerous situations to continue.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	18	3

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

Strengths

- improving retention and achievement rates
- particularly good assignment of learners to appropriate work placements

Weaknesses

- poor management of training

Achievement and standards

65. Retention and achievement rates have improved during the past six months. Poor retention and achievement rates were identified as a weakness in the previous inspection report. Strategies to improve retention and achievement rates are successful. Six foundation modern apprentices have achieved full frameworks, one learner has achieved an NVQ and two have achieved key skills qualifications. The proportion of learners achieving the foundation modern apprenticeship framework is steadily increasing, from 7 per cent in 1999, to 23 per cent in 2002. Thirty-eight per cent of modern apprentices recruited in 2002 are still in training and a further two are very close to completing their frameworks.

66. Learners acquire good skills that are appropriate to their workplace. The self-assessment report for the previous inspection recognised this strength, which has improved. Work-placement providers value learners' contributions to their organisations and usually employ learners when they complete their modern apprenticeships.

67. Learners produce well-constructed portfolios, with satisfactory evidence; but there is often no contents list, or cumulative record of their achievement in the portfolios. The standard of learners' work in key skills portfolios is satisfactory. Achievement of key skills is also satisfactory. Key skills are now introduced earlier in the programme than at the time of the previous inspection. The self-assessment report identified key skills training as a strength, but the inspectors judged it to be no more than satisfactory.

Quality of education and training

68. Nova's staff achieve very good matches between learners and work placements. Learners are given appropriate opportunities to apply for a work placement extremely

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quickly. One learner attended and secured a work placement the day after her initial interview at Nova. Work-placement providers are supportive and give learners effective practical training to develop in their jobs and to gain evidence towards business administration NVQs and key skills qualifications. A learner who wants a career specifically in retailing administration is working with an organisation which gives him a wide experience of it. All learners enjoy and value their work experience. Work-placement providers value learners' contributions to their organisations and usually employ learners when they complete the modern apprenticeships. Some learners are moved to better, or more appropriate, work placements to develop their potential. When this is necessary, the process is quick and effective.

69. Training is satisfactory. There are no formal group sessions for off-the-job training, assessors coach learners individually and effectively in the workplace. Learning resources are satisfactory. Staff take laptop computers to the work placements, to ensure that learners complete their assignments effectively. Health and safety is checked regularly at the work placements and learners are safeguarded. Specialist literacy and numeracy support is available for learners if necessary. None of the current learners use this support.

70. Nova has effective support strategies to keep learners in training. Only one learner has left before their completion date without gaining qualifications, in the past six months. The rates for foundation modern apprentices leaving before completing their frameworks has been rapidly reduced from 85 per cent in 1999, to 13 per cent in 2003.

71. Staff are well qualified as assessors and verifiers, they are studying the new standards of assessment and are competent in administration and key skills training at level 2. They arrange suitable assessment opportunities and use good, innovative work-based assignments when evidence is not available from the learners' workplace. These assignments are cross-referenced to key skills qualifications.

72. Initial assessment is used effectively to select applicants. The assessor and verifier are involved in the recruitment process. Initial assessment is effective in identifying aspects such as spoken communication and learning styles. However, there is not enough evidence to show that this is used effectively to plan training specifically for individual learners. Assessment practice is satisfactory and meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Learners are well prepared for their modern apprenticeships by a clear and memorable induction.

Leadership and management

73. Leadership and management are not managed effectively. Many learners make slow progress. Nova has a high turnover of assessors. Targets are often deferred during changes of assessor. Most learners' progress is delayed. Some learners are not visited frequently enough by their assessors. In one case, a learner had been visited four times in five months by three assessors. This learner, and others, do not have sufficient continuity of assessments. Each assessor has a different expectation of the evidence

collected. Visit reports show continuing targets and others that are carried over to the next visit because they have not been met. Many targets do not have a specific deadline, although some learners understand that targets set at one visit should be completed by the next. Some of the targets begin with the word 'start', others begin with 'continue' and finite timescales are rarely recorded for completion of evidence. Assessment planning is satisfactory and done by unit, but the assessment plans are not sufficiently linked with interim targets on visit reports and individual learning plans. Internal verification successfully identifies poor assessment practice and gives constructive feedback to assessors.

74. Learners are aware of harassment, bullying and grievance procedures, although less aware of appeals procedures. Equality of opportunity is part of the background knowledge required for administration NVQs and technical certificates. Comments recorded on progress reviews regarding equality are not sufficiently detailed.

75. Learners and workplace providers do not have copies of individual learning plans, assessment plans, visit reports and progress reviews to provide a comprehensive record of learners' progress. Individual learning plans are often incomplete. They do not detail how learning is planned and one example had no reference to key skills training. Individual learning plans are not updated sufficiently or reviewed at the eight-weekly progress reviews. Planned progress reviews are often cancelled when assessors attend training events, when there is a change of assessor, or if the learner is not at the planned location. If reviews are cancelled they are often not rescheduled. One learner has only had one review in eight months, and three assessors. Some employers are not involved in the review discussions and only add their comments to the form. It is difficult to identify exactly what progress is made by each learner from the various sources of information available.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	29	3

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

Strengths

- improving retention and achievement rates on foundation modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes
- very good skills development in the workplace
- good standard of learners' work
- good work-related key skills projects

Weaknesses

- poor planning of training

Achievement and standards

76. Achievement and retention rates are improving on foundation modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes. These were very poor at the previous inspection. From a very low rate of 5 per cent, achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices have risen significantly to 33 per cent. Retention rates have also improved significantly, from 12 per cent to 50 per cent in the same period. Retention and achievement rates have also improved significantly on NVQ programmes.

77. The number of advanced modern apprentices is declining. Not enough learners progress into suitable job roles. In the past two years, none of the six learners who started as advanced modern apprentices have completed their framework, or remained for the planned duration of the programme. There are good reasons for this, beyond the control of the provider. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report and identified at the previous inspection.

78. Learners' development of skills in the workplace is very good. Work placements are appropriate and provide learners with a good range of experiences. Good on-the-job training is provided by employers and some work-placement providers. Learners value the experience gained, they recognise their increased skills and confidence and many progress to employment within their work placements. This improvement since the previous inspection was not identified in the current self-assessment report.

79. Learners' work is of a good standard. Their portfolios are well-structured and they take pride in their work. Learners understand the structure of the qualifications they are following and produce a good range of evidence, using a variety of presentation

methods in their portfolios. Learners use opportunities in the workplace to work on their portfolios, some learners take part in additional activities to provide evidence to complete their portfolios. This situation was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Quality of education and training

80. Learners work on good, work-based key skills projects. They use the opportunities to improve their workplace, as well as gather very useful evidence for their portfolios and key skills qualifications. Learners devise and use appropriate questionnaires and other research methods with customers and colleagues. They make effective evaluations of the findings and make sound recommendations to bring about improvements in their workplaces. For example, one learner on a level 2 NVQ programme has redesigned the changing rooms in her retailing placement. The project gave her the opportunity to demonstrate her competence in all key skills areas. The store manager has found this project extremely useful in planning changes to the store. Key skills teaching was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection, but it has improved significantly.

81. Resources overall are satisfactory. Learners have good access to information technology (IT) equipment at Nova's premises, including internet and office applications. Assessors are adequately qualified to assess, but are not sufficiently qualified to meet the additional learning needs of learners. Some materials used to record assessment activity and progress reviews are poorly copied and difficult to read. Nova provides a satisfactory level of health and safety checks to protect all learners.

82. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Internal verification processes are clearly defined within the provider's quality assurance procedures, and followed. These meet the requirements of the awarding body satisfactorily. The internal verification process identifies slow progress which leads to the formation of a recovery plan. The internal verifier gives clear and supportive feedback to assessors. Assessment of learners' work is regular and appropriately timed. A variety of assessment methods is used. Assessors attend monthly assessor meetings, where new resources and ideas are shared and learners' progress is reviewed using the company's traffic-light management information system. Standardisation meetings are held regularly and standards are being maintained.

83. Learning is poorly planned. Learners do not have an individual learning plan in their portfolios and some are unable to assess their progress and future requirements. Progress reviews do not record details of the learners' progress sufficiently. They do not set challenging targets, or timescales, to ensure rapid progress for learners. Learners do not have copies of the progress review documents for their portfolios. Assessors' action plans, completed at each fortnightly visit, do not link agreed activities to the relevant unit, or element of the NVQ, learners have achieved more in some cases.

84. Support for learners with additional learning needs such as language, literacy and numeracy is inadequate. Assessors do not have the relevant qualifications to provide this support. Some learners do receive effective individual support in the workplace from a partner agency. In some cases, they are directed to appropriate support at the local

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college. Nova has no structured plan for the delivery of additional learning support. Learners are not positively encouraged to use the available support, it is left to their own initiative and they do not always use it. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

85. Staff have quarterly appraisals where training and development needs are identified. Staff are encouraged to take relevant training to support their continuing professional development. Personal development plans are reviewed quarterly, at appraisal. New staff members' performances are reviewed more frequently, on a monthly basis, and appropriate help is given.

86. Learners' work placements are effectively managed and employers are committed to training. If learners are not effectively supported by the employers, they are offered alternative work placements.

87. Learners', employers' and staff's understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity is satisfactory. All employers have a clear equal opportunities policy which is checked by Nova. Learners receive in-depth training about equal opportunities at their induction; learners recruited from Connexions also receive equal opportunities training before joining Nova. Learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities, including bullying and harassment procedures.

88. Some of the changes in staffing have been poorly managed. Both assessors for this area of learning left Nova in December. Some learners were not aware of the change and felt unsupported during this period, and some employers had not been made aware of the changes. Two new assessors began employment at the beginning of January.

89. The self-assessment report is poor. It detailed some of the strengths identified during the inspection, but the weaknesses identified by inspectors are not reflected in the report.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Entry to Employment	100	2
New Deal 25+	18	2

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

Strengths

- outstanding achievements by adult learners on literacy and numeracy programmes
- good achievement of personal objectives and short-course qualifications
- good initial assessments on E2E and adult literacy and numeracy programmes
- good progress reviews
- effective partnerships to support learners
- good understanding of equality and diversity topics by E2E learners

Weaknesses

- some weak teaching practice
- insufficiently flexible system for individual learning needs
- poor IAP programme
- inconsistent application of quality assurance framework

Achievement and standards

90. The achievement rate of qualifications is outstanding. Eighty-six per cent of clients starting the programme pass the level 1 national tests in literacy or numeracy, or both. Tutors on the SIBS programme give particularly close attention to helping clients achieve national basic skills tests at level 1.

91. Learners develop their personal skills well. Learners' work-related skills are effectively developed by tutors in most learning sessions and many learners benefit significantly from the SIBS and E2E programmes. The programme of non-vocational learning on the E2E programme builds learners' confidence and skills very well. A good variety of learning activities helps learners to develop skills in the manner which best suits them. Good peer support on the SIBS programmes is particularly effective in motivating adult learners, many of whom are not attending voluntarily. Communication and assertiveness skills are very well developed in drama sessions. Learners develop and practise their communication skills and can relate them very effectively to work and everyday situations.

92. Learners' achievements of short-course qualifications are also good, and provide effective motivation for learners. The 'Driving Ambitions' programme develops young

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peoples' driving skills; 60 per cent of learners who start the course pass the driving theory test. E2E learners have a comprehensive short-course programme. Since August 2003, 43 learners have achieved football coaching certificates, 47 have achieved a first-aid certificate and 12 learners have achieved a manual handling certificate. Seventy-six learners who have left the E2E programme, achieved milestones.

93. All learners' work is of a high standard. Those with low self-esteem develop good presentation skills in social and work situations, through effective drama and health and safety sessions.

Quality of education and training

94. The initial eight-week period of the E2E programme is well designed and includes a comprehensive and effective initial assessment. A good range of initial assessment tools is used on SIBS programmes which effectively identify specific learning needs. Good computer-based diagnostic assessment is used to identify learners' individual literacy, numeracy and language needs. This is well supported by tutor discussions and observation of learners during the very early stages of their programmes. Learners complete a learning style questionnaire to identify the best method of learning for them. Tutors also pay good attention to individual learning styles on the SIBS programme and, as a result, develop activities which are linked to clients' interests. This engages learners positively and has led to improved retention and achievement rates.

95. Tutors provide particularly effective individual learning support which takes good account of learners' preferred learning styles. Learners' progress is reviewed very regularly by staff, employers and personal advisers. Learners take part in well-structured weekly progress reviews which helps in their development and achievements. Formal reviews are well linked by tutors to the main aims set out in individual learning plans.

96. Many long-established partnerships effectively contribute to the range of support for learners at Nova. There are many examples of effective partnerships which provide specialist support for learners. These include specialist counselling for drug and alcohol misuse, benefits advice, anger management, sexual health, contraception and abortion advice. An outreach project is well used to help support and engage particularly vulnerable learners. The project has been successful with 25 hard-to-reach young people in the past year. Seventy-five per cent of these learners are still in training and are developing well. Employers contribute generously to learning programmes by providing jobs and work experience; they are carefully selected by good vetting and carefully monitored by Nova's staff. Nova has very good links with organisations that provide supported accommodation to help young people who are homeless or at risk at home. A local agency that organises support groups for young women is well-publicised in the training centres.

97. Accommodation is satisfactory. Access is limited for those with mobility difficulties at some locations, but this is managed satisfactorily by the provider. Recently the provider has invested in industry-standard IT resources. IT resources are sufficient to

meet the needs of learners at most locations. Some handouts used in learning sessions are of poor quality and contain language and text that is too complex. Classrooms are appropriately decorated and equipped with suitable tables and chairs.

98. Some of the teaching is weak. In some of the sessions, the tutors do most of the talking and answer the questions themselves, and do not allow sufficient opportunities for the learners to contribute effectively. In other sessions the tutors do not clearly identify the aims and objectives of the session, and manage their time poorly. Some teachers do not point out ways in which the learners can develop their skills in daily life. Some learners' written work on the E2E programme is not marked in sufficient detail to help them to improve. In many cases, lesson plans do not have individual targets and aims and objectives for learners. In the better sessions, learners are challenged by tutors, but this does not happen often enough. Training is not planned sufficiently, and opportunities to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills are not effectively identified by tutors. In one session learners repeated work they had already done. Tutors do not analyse their teaching sufficiently to continuously improve their teaching practice. A positive and productive learning environment is maintained by the tutors. There is particularly good classroom management on the E2E programme. Tutors provide good learning support and regularly challenge learners to achieve at higher levels.

99. The E2E course design is not flexible enough and does not make sufficient provision for learners' individual needs. There is no discrete literacy and numeracy teaching, or individual help to meet learners' needs. Activities take place on set days and there are not enough alternative activities for those learners who have already completed the activities. Most of the teaching is in groups and tutors do not offer alternative activities for individuals to progress more quickly. Some learners are put on courses that are available, rather than on programmes of their choice. For example, some learners who joined a bodywork course have been placed on a motor vehicle course. Hours of attendance are rigid and those learners travelling long distances by public transport find the times inconvenient. They are often late. Group literacy and numeracy teaching is effectively integrated with other activities. Life Skills and key skills projects are used effectively to improve generic skills. Nova has identified the need for extra literacy and numeracy teaching and is improving links with local colleges to help those learners assessed at entry level.

100. The IAP programme is poor. The focus of the programme is to find any job. The provider has met its Jobcentre Plus targets, but employability skills are not developed effectively. The work placements, curriculum vitae and jobsearch sessions do not develop jobsearch skills effectively. Some clients go into jobs well below their capability and aptitude levels. Clients make many job applications without success. The teaching of jobsearch skills is not effective; it is based primarily on newspaper advertisements, curriculum vitae development, speculative letters and internet-based research. Clients are not fully prepared for interviews. Progress reviews are meaningless; they do not focus on what the client has learnt, or could learn while applying for jobs. Many of the clients go into unsustainable jobs, without training. Clients do receive good support to help them into work placements, which helps them get references and to acquire working habits. Initial assessment does not take into account the life experiences of the

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client and their self-assessments vary in quality. Clients are referred to the programme from another provider. Information about the clients' achievements, or their work experience is rarely given on time to Nova. Tutors do not check the quality of the work done at the Gateway stage. For example, there were no comments about the curriculum vitae produced by the clients. Many of the clients and the employers do not understand the benefit of the training. Nova has a funding system to pay for any additional training, but it is time-consuming and frustrating for the clients to use.

Leadership and management

101. Learners have a good understanding of equality of opportunity, dignity and respect for others. Drama classes are used creatively on the E2E programme and learners explore situations effectively to help them better understand their own situations. This helps them to build confidence and self-esteem. Nova has well-publicised policies for harassment and bullying and an easily understood equality of opportunity policy. Tutors regularly check on learners' understanding and frequently integrate discussion of equality, fairness and dignity into group learning sessions. Prompt and effective action is taken by Nova to protect the dignity of all learners. Learners' misconduct is dealt with particularly well. Learners can easily relate their developing knowledge to work, life and citizenship.

102. Recently, there has been a high turnover of staff on the E2E programme. This situation has been managed successfully, to minimise the disruption to learners' programmes. Staff induction and development meets the needs of new, and established staff. Staff training is complemented by good supporting resources and courses are arranged to help new staff understand their roles. Communication is often informal, but effective. There are some formal methods such as meetings and the staff bulletin which help staff at the outlying centres to receive information. Staff appraisal is satisfactory and takes place regularly, it evaluates the effectiveness of the tutors. Significant and effective changes have been made to include the new E2E programme. The provider is working on a skills for life staff development initiative which is to be incorporated with the provider's training programmes.

103. The quality assurance framework is not applied consistently. Nova has recently introduced observations of teaching. However, new staff are not aware of the dates for their observations and some tutors have not received a written report, or feedback. There is not enough use of data to measure the success of projects. Staff do not receive sufficient collated data to help them set accurate targets for improvement. Learners regularly evaluate their own performances and some analysis takes place. This has led to several improvements and modifications to training. However, not enough feedback is given to learners and they do not understand how their suggestions for improvement have been used. Management planning for improvements does not take account of Nova's self-assessment report. Staff are not sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process and do not have copies of the development plan for foundation training. Good practice is not shared sufficiently, particularly among outlying centres. The company's most recent self-assessment report identifies one of the strengths, but none of the

weaknesses found by inspectors.