

INSPECTION REPORT

Smart Training

16 June 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

SMART TRAINING

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

Smart Training

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Smart Training was established in 1993 to provide work-based learning throughout England. It is a privately owned company, with its head office in Kingston-upon-Thames, and an office in Walsall. Smart Training trains foundation and advanced modern apprentices, and learners working solely towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs), in health, social care, and public services, and business administration, management and professional. Smart Training funds its training through South London, Berkshire, Central London, and Staffordshire Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), the European Social Fund (ESF), and commercial training fees. Learners attend off-the-job training on one Saturday each month in training rooms at the company's offices in Kingston-upon-Thames, or training rooms in hotels and other public buildings throughout the country.
2. The senior management team consists of three directors, each of whom is responsible for training, operations, or finance. Four managers support them and they are responsible for human resources, learner support, office management, and the northern region. There are eight training managers, each of whom are responsible for up to 100 learners. There are three lead internal verifiers who manage the work of a team of internal verifiers and tutors/assessors. Smart Training employs 27 permanent staff, of whom six are part time, and 31 self-employed staff.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

3. There are 181 learners working towards management qualifications, of whom 135 are advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3 and seven are working towards NVQs at level 4. There are 39 adults on programmes funded by the ESF, of whom 17 are working towards NVQs at level 3 and 22 towards NVQs at level 4. The ESF learners complete the certificate in management programme in addition to their NVQ. All learners are employed as team leaders, deputies, or managers in nurseries throughout the country. The company provides the learners with off-the-job training at regional venues on one Saturday each month. Learners who cannot attend these training sessions receive individual coaching from tutors/assessors who visit them in their workplace. Learners' progress reviews take place every three months.

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Health, social care & public services

4. There are 808 learners on early years care and education programmes. There are 539 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3, and 204 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2. Learners who started training on or after 1 March 2003 are completing the appropriate level of technical qualification. Those learners who require key skills qualifications receive individual and group teaching, either in the workplace or at study workshops. There are three learners working solely towards NVQs at level 2. The ESF funds 62 learners. All learners are employed in a variety of local childcare settings. The company provides the learners with off-the-job training once each month at Saturday workshops in locations convenient to the learners. Learners unable to attend a workshop receive individual coaching at a convenient location. Assessment visits are planned monthly and training managers carry out review visits every three months.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	47
Number of learner interviews	165
Number of staff interviews	53
Number of employer interviews	30
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	59

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, Smart Training's leadership and management, quality assurance, and equality of opportunity are outstanding. The quality of work-based learning in health, social care, and public services is outstanding, and in business administration, management and professional it is good.

GRADES

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

Leadership and management	1
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	1
Quality assurance	1

Business administration, management & professional	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
Other government-funded provision	2

Health, social care & public services	1
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	1
Other government-funded provision	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. Attendance at the off-the-job training on Saturdays is good. In early years care and education, the retention and achievement rates of foundation modern apprentices are good. In 2000-01, there has been a reversal of recent trends which showed a decline in the retention and achievement rates of advanced modern apprentices. Retention is now good and achievement in 2000-01, with some learners still in learning, is at least satisfactory at 54 per cent. In business administration, management and professional, a satisfactory number of learners achieve the modern apprenticeship framework and retention is improving. It is too early in the programme to make any judgement about the retention or achievement rates of ESF-funded learners, but they are making progress at the same rate as other learners.

7. Learners in business administration, management and professional gain good practical management skills, which they apply directly in their workplace through work-based projects. The learners' standard of work on early years care and education programmes is good.

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
Business administration, management & professional	0	2	6	3	0	0	0	11
Health, social care & public services	1	6	8	1	1	0	0	17
Total	1	8	14	4	1	0	0	28

8. Overall, 82 per cent of the learning sessions that the inspectors observed were graded good or better. There was one unsatisfactory learning session.

9. The off-the-job training on Saturdays is well planned and taught. Learners find the

SMART TRAINING

training useful and motivational. The sessions are highly practical and best use is made of the learners' workplace experience.

10. Smart Training has a good working relationship, and good communication, with employers in a variety of childcare settings. Their support enables learners to put their learning into action in the workplace. Learners produce excellent work-based projects that are of direct relevance to their development and benefit their nursery. Qualified and experienced tutors/assessors assess learners' portfolios of evidence regularly.

11. The training managers carry out learners' progress reviews thoroughly and regularly. Tutors/assessors and employers are also involved in the reviews, which record the learners' progress towards their qualification and set further challenging but realistic targets.

12. Learners receive very good support in all aspects of their training programme, particularly from training managers. Learners can access support easily through mobile telephones and e-mail. Additional needs are identified and met promptly.

Leadership and management

13. Management of the training programmes is good. Communication is good between staff, learners, and employers. Meeting arrangements are very comprehensive and ensure that the company shares information effectively with all staff. Staff understand their role within the company and understand the current issues facing the organisation.

14. Staff appraisals are thorough and effective, with good opportunities to pursue continuing professional development and maintain professional and assessors' qualifications. The company motivates staff and learners by recognising their success and achievement through the use of tokens, bonuses, and certificates of excellence. Smart Training recognises outstanding performance at its annual company day and through the 'Learner of the Year' award.

15. The company has a very effective quality assurance system that promotes continuous improvement and ensures good and consistent levels of training across the country. The filing system and paperwork is standard across the company, with detailed procedures for recording and checking data. There is no formal schedule for quality assurance review, although this does take place regularly at meetings. Learners, employers, and staff are all involved in Smart Training's self-assessment process. Inspectors found the self-assessment report to be accurate.

16. The company uses data from its management information system effectively and efficiently to inform management of learners' progress, retention and achievement rates, and other quality assurance measures. Internal verification is satisfactory and where poor assessment practice has occurred it has been identified and rectified.

17. Smart Training sets clear, challenging, but achievable performance targets across the company. Each year, the company sets targets for recruitment and the completion of

NVQs and the modern apprenticeship frameworks, which it then uses to set group and individual targets. Clear target-setting is also evident for learners to monitor progress and the completion of their units. The company monitors all of its targets closely.

18. Smart Training recently carried out a series of successful marketing activities to attract more learners, many of whom are from minority ethnic groups. There are clear, helpful, and comprehensive equal opportunities policies and related documents for learners, employers, and staff. Staff reinforce equal opportunities issues effectively during teaching and learning sessions, and monitor them effectively at learners' progress reviews. Employers' equal opportunities arrangements are satisfactory. The company has collected and analysed data and reported its findings since 1997.

19. Well-planned and managed individual learning plans identify the support that each learner will receive. The company uses these effectively to provide purposeful support and to monitor learners' progress, and reviews them regularly.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- excellent internal communications
- effective staff appraisal and development
- widespread celebration of achievement
- good induction for new staff
- effective use of the management information system
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- good strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners
- very effective quality assurance system that promotes continuous improvement
- clear target-setting to drive continuous improvement

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good development of interpersonal and practical management skills
- excellent liaison with employers
- motivational off-the-job training
- effective use of monitoring to support learners
- good assessment planning
- well-managed training programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient individual focus on key skills for management learners
- insufficient workplace support for learners working towards NVQs at level 4

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates on the foundation modern apprenticeships
- very good off-the-job training
- very good learners' progress reviews
- very good support for learners
- very good management of the training programmes

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SMART TRAINING:

- off-the-job training on Saturdays
- friendly individual support from tutors/assessors and training managers
- constant availability of tutors/assessors
- the use of incentives to provide motivation
- encouragement at progress reviews to complete their training programme

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SMART TRAINING COULD IMPROVE:

- preparation for the key skills tests
- more user-friendly workplace assessment collection plans
- greater access to workplace assessment
- faster return of assessed work
- separate study groups for learners working towards NVQs at levels 3 and 4
- cultural awareness

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SMART TRAINING:

- development and implementation of the management information system across the whole company
- continued development of the key skills support programme
- clearer strategies for action to achieve the targets identified in the strategic plan
- improvement of initial assessment to enable more effective support for those learners that need it
- development of a systematic review of the effectiveness of work procedures and practice
- more effective promotion of training to under-represented groups
- continued development of the effectiveness of meetings to improve learners' achievement
- maintain the existing standards

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 1

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- excellent internal communications
- effective staff appraisal and development
- widespread celebration of achievement
- good induction for new staff
- effective use of the management information system
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- good strategies to meet the diverse needs of learners
- very effective quality assurance system that promotes continuous improvement
- clear target-setting to drive continuous improvement

20. Smart Training has excellent internal communications, which help to ensure the consistency of practice across the company. There are monthly round table meetings, cluster and pre-cluster meetings, internal verifier meetings, and biannual days attended by both employed and self-employed staff. Communication is through the cluster meetings. Detailed minutes or action plans of meetings are available to all staff and there are tape recordings of some meetings for non-attendees. The company provides all of its staff with mobile telephones and encourages them to contact anyone in the company for help. Smart Training distributes regular, informative newsletters to employers and learners. Its staff are aware of the company's strategic plan, business plans, the purpose of the business, and current issues. All of its staff have clear job descriptions and a good understanding of their role in the organisation.

21. Staff appraisal and development is thorough and effective. The company carries out staff appraisals after completion of the three-month probationary period, nine months later, and then annually. The appraisal system is well documented and uses performance data on teaching, individual and group targets, and learners' feedback. There are funds available for staff development, which are used to update professional qualifications and teaching and assessors' qualifications. The company encourages staff to participate in continuing professional development and many staff do so. Tutors/assessors' training needs are discussed at round table meetings, as well as at individual annual appraisals. There is no training plan and no central record of staff training, although it is recorded in individual staff files.

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22. The celebration of learners' achievements is widespread. Learners receive vouchers for attending five consecutive study days and a cash award for completing their modern apprenticeship framework on time. The company awards certificates of excellence to learners for particular achievements and holds an awards ceremony to recognise learners' achievements and announce the 'Learner of the Year'. The company also awards certificates of excellence to staff and operates a staff bonus system for those clusters that achieve their targets.

23. The induction process for new staff is good and the company monitors it closely. New staff are well supported and receive three days' training in key skills, regular meetings with training managers, and 10 days' training in teaching over 10 months. The company assigns mentors to new staff, all of whom participate in work-shadowing during their probationary period. An experienced assessor re-assesses all new assessors' work.

24. Smart Training manages its resources well. The finance director sets and monitors the budgets and recent financial audits have been satisfactory. Resources for off-the-job training are satisfactory. The company has a policy which defines the minimum standards for training rooms and complies with it. Each learner is given the basic textbooks they require for their course of study and a detailed information pack. The company makes additional resources available wherever necessary. For example, Smart Training provided a training room with a closed-loop facility for a learner with impaired hearing, and later provided this learner with a signer.

25. The company's approach to supporting the development of learners' literacy, numeracy, and language skills is good. The company sends each of them a set of basic skills assessments, which they complete under supervision at the workplace. In some cases, employers have not complied with the instructions for these assessments. The results from these assessments are fed back to the learners and tutors so that they can meet any identified learning needs. The learning programme for learners with additional support needs is reviewed and updated regularly at round table meetings. The company provides support for the learners in a variety of ways, such as adapting teaching and learning materials and individual support from tutors, all of which are typically well integrated with the workplace.

26. The company uses its management information system effectively. It has a comprehensive custom-built database, which it is currently updating to meet new LSC requirements. The company uses data effectively and efficiently to inform management about targets, monitor NVQ units, course attendance, course assessments, staff appraisals, and health and safety assessments. Information from the database is presented at meetings and provides the basis for continuous improvement. There are laptops available for training managers to have remote access to the complete database when visiting learners in the workplace. Although there is no electronic database available in the northern office, the company uses identical systems in each of its offices and the paperwork is satisfactory.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 1**

27. There is good promotion of equality of opportunity. Smart Training recently carried out a series of marketing events to promote training in the early years care and education industry. This promotional activity attracted 175 employers, of which one third were not familiar with NVQs. Since November 2002, Smart Training has successfully recruited 104 of a targeted 120 learners aged 25 or older working in nurseries in London, onto ESF and government-funded NVQs. Forty-five per cent of these learners are from minority ethnic groups. Smart Training is successful in securing government funding for learners with additional learning needs to work solely towards NVQs at level 3 in early years care and education.

28. There is a clear, helpful, and comprehensive equal opportunities policy and related documents for learners, employers, and staff. The policy covers a wide range of issues, including an explanation of entitlement to training, stereotyping, teaching, learning and learning materials, learner and staff recruitment, harassment, and monitoring arrangements. The learners' handbook and the employers' consent form emphasise equality of opportunity and contain procedural information relating to discipline, grievance, appeals, and complaints. Smart Training has dealt effectively and efficiently with the few complaints that it has received from learners and employers. Staff explain the importance of equality of opportunity carefully to learners during their induction. Learners also watch a video, which deals effectively with the issue of discrimination in the workplace. The company has a good programme of in-house training in equality of opportunity and diversity, and in the provision of support for learners.

29. Learners, staff, and employers have a good understanding of equality of opportunity. Learners are clear as to what they should do in the event of problems with other learners, employers, or staff. Staff effectively integrate equal opportunities issues into their teaching. Revised paperwork has ensured that there are effective arrangements for monitoring and reinforcing equality of opportunity issues with learners and their employers at learners' progress reviews, but staff use these forms inconsistently.

30. The monitoring of employers' equal opportunities arrangements is satisfactory. Smart Training's equal opportunities monitoring arrangements are described in the equal opportunities policy and the strategic plan. The company has collected and analysed data and reported its findings since 1997. The reports cover ethnicity, gender, disability, learners' achievements and additional support needs, and the age, ethnicity, and gender of staff. The 2003-06 strategic plan includes diversity targets, which match the recruitment of learners to local area profiles in terms of ethnicity and disability, and industry norms for gender. The plan does not include clear strategies for action, and monitoring arrangements do not identify how effectively the company achieves the local area diversity targets.

31. Smart Training has good strategies to meet the diverse needs of its learners. The company has a programme of monthly round table meetings, at which staff review the diverse needs of all new and existing learners, identify the necessary support, and agree well-planned individual learning plans, which identify all of the learners' support arrangements, including support to improve their literacy, numeracy, and language skills.

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The company uses these plans effectively to monitor learners' progress and provide them with purposeful support, such as individual support from tutors, adaptation of teaching and learning materials, revised arrangements for completing portfolios of evidence, maintaining personal dignity, and transport arrangements for study days. Staff review these plans regularly and the company responds quickly to the learners' changing needs.

32. Full access to the training facilities for learners with disabilities are a requirement at all external training locations. The company takes effective action to secure appropriate environments for learners requiring additional support. However, full access to the training rooms in the office complex in Kingston-upon-Thames is not yet available.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 1

33. The company has a very effective quality assurance system that promotes continuous improvement and meets the standards required by ISO 9000, which is an international quality assurance standard. The company has a very detailed quality assurance manual, which it updates annually. The quality assurance manager also updates it when issues are identified. Policies are up to date and cover all aspects of the provision of training. The company checks compliance with the policies and procedures through its various meetings, where quality issues are routinely on the agenda. Round table meetings are very effective in identifying problems and checking that everything is functioning well. Since 1999, Smart Training has been accredited as an Investor in People, which is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

34. The company sets challenging but achievable targets at all levels, which drive continuous improvement. Each year, the company dedicates one day to providing clear direction for each contract. Achievements are reported from the previous year and then targets are set for recruitment, NVQs, and frameworks for each contract. The company sets bonus requirements for each cluster and determines the staff's personal and cluster targets, which it reviews at the quarterly cluster meetings.

35. There is extensive monitoring and analysis of the rates of progress for learners and learners' groups. This includes the analysis of units awarded against target completion dates for learners, learners' groups, and clusters. There is extensive feedback from learners after study days, progress reviews, annual questionnaires, and sample interviews, and feedback from awarding bodies and other agencies such as the LSC.

36. The self-assessment process and the self-assessment report are good. The company issues questionnaires to all staff, employers, and learners, and allows time for late responses. The response rate is typically about 40 per cent. Interviews carried out by the training director with a sample of learners and employers complement the questionnaires. The company collates information from meetings and from other sources, analyses it carefully and uses it to help develop the self-assessment process. The training director produces the self-assessment report. All staff are aware of the self-assessment report and have the opportunity to contribute to it. The self-assessment report was thorough and matched many of the strengths found by inspectors. Some

strengths identified in the report were no more than normal practice.

37. The internal verification system is thorough. Internal verifiers monitor and observe assessments adequately. There are comprehensive sampling frameworks that ensure that the company monitors each member of staff, each learner, and each unit during the year. Internal verifiers observe new assessors twice each month for the duration of their probationary period and experienced assessors once every six months. There is a hierarchical sampling system, which ranges from sampling 100 per cent of new assessors' work to 10 per cent of experienced assessors' work. Standardisation takes place at the cluster meetings and there are also quarterly internal verifier meetings.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	142	2
Other government-funded provision	39	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good development of interpersonal and practical management skills
- excellent liaison with employers
- motivational off-the-job training
- effective use of monitoring to support learners
- good assessment planning
- well-managed training programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient individual focus on key skills for management learners
- insufficient workplace support for learners working towards NVQs at level 4

Achievement and standards

38. Learners make a significant contribution to their workplace, in addition to developing their self-confidence and practical management skills. For example, learners who have been on the training programme for several months have improved teamworking and communication skills. Employers are pleased with the range and quality of work which learners are able to carry out. For example, learners are able to delegate work to colleagues, give instructions, plan nursery activities, and deal with staff problems. Learners' portfolios of evidence contain good accounts of conflict resolution in the workplace. One learner managed a member of staff through poor performance, supported her into good practice, and re-motivated her. Learners are able to research information from different sources, demonstrate initiative, and have good computer skills. For example, one learner designed and sent a questionnaire to parents about resources, researched and costed the equipment suggested, and then presented her findings in a report to the employer, making proposals which are now being adopted. Employers value the learners highly and promote many of them to managerial positions during the course of their training programme. Some learners proceed to further management training. Retention and achievement rates for modern apprenticeships were low until 1999, but have since shown improving trends. Most learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. The company is supporting the few that are making slow progress through more frequent and effective monitoring and

action-planning.

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		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	67		87		90		136		34		16					
Retained*	0		4		47		64	47	19	56	10	62				
Successfully completed	0		4		42		53	39	14	41	5	31				
Still in learning	65		61		16		0	0	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

Other government-funded provision																
	2002-03															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	41															
Retained*	0															
Planned learning completed	0															
Gained job	0															
Still in training	39															

*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

39. Smart Training has a good working relationship and good communication with employers. Assessors brief workplace supervisors fully on the requirements of the modern apprenticeship frameworks, and employers are knowledgeable about their responsibilities towards learners. Most employers give learners a thorough induction to the workplace and offer good on-the-job training to develop new skills. Employers often supplement this with specialist off-the-job training in such areas as special needs, HIV, and cultural diversity. Tutors/assessors feed back information to employers on learners' attendance and the content of study days. Workplace supervisors are routinely involved in learners' progress reviews, take an active part in target-setting, and deal with any problems promptly.

40. Off-the-job training is highly motivational for the learners, who attend in their free time on one Saturday each month and often travel considerable distances to their nearest training location. The training staff are enthusiastic, experienced, and prepare

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sessions well, using a variety of teaching and learning techniques to suit individual learning styles. Good practice is consistent across the different regions. Learners gain a lot of useful theoretical knowledge, and particularly benefit from sharing their work experiences with the other members of the group. They return to their nurseries with many ideas on how to improve their own workplace practices. Tutors/assessors provide the learners with good individual coaching during off-the-job practical training sessions and visits to the workplace. They have a good understanding of the learners' abilities and take into account any additional learning needs. They are skilled at providing clear explanations and using different approaches to help the learners understand new techniques and motivate them to work independently. They provide good coaching on portfolio-building and have regular individual sessions with learners to explore ways in which they can use their jobs to generate the evidence required. Smart Training has designed a particularly well-structured management workbook, which is made specifically for learners employed in a nursery setting and links the NVQ to the knowledge requirements of the certificate in management. A range of reference books and relevant periodicals is available for research and laptop computers are available for information technology (IT) key skills study days. Accommodation is satisfactory. Study days are normally held in centrally located hotels, community halls, or schools.

41. Systematic monitoring and support is very effective in ensuring that the learners are on target. Tutors/assessors contact learners frequently at study days, and in the workplace, to support them and resolve promptly, any problems impeding their progress. Each month, the internal verifier, the operations manager, the tutor, and the training manager, review each learner's progress and take action to support them further if they are falling behind. The quarterly progress reviews which training managers carry out with the learners in the workplace are extremely effective. The review form is well designed and provides clear guidance on the aspects of progress covered. The form monitors learners' progress and attendance at study days accurately. Smart Training allocates a mentor in the workplace to each learner for support, but some learners working towards NVQs at level 4 do not have continuous access to a mentor.

42. Learners have a very good understanding of the various elements of their modern apprenticeship frameworks and have a clear idea of how they will be assessed. Assessment planning is particularly good and provides clear details of the evidence to be collected, and how assessment will take place. The assessment plan is revised according to each learner's individual need. Assessment practices are generally satisfactory, although learners are offered a narrow range of assessment opportunities, which include project work, written questions, and limited direct observation. Observation in the workplace is regular for those learners working towards NVQs at level 3, but infrequent for those at level 4. For those learners who do not progress as planned, Smart Training uses professional discussion to supplement their product evidence. Signatures and dates are sometimes missing in learners' portfolios of evidence. Internal verification systems are thorough, standardisation meetings are held regularly, observation of assessors is regular, and detailed feedback is provided to assessors on their assessment practices.

43. Until recently, arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills during induction have not been sufficiently thorough. Some learners have had no initial

assessment, while others have been given tests at induction, but have not had feedback for several months into the training programme. Smart Training accredits appropriate qualifications already achieved, especially for key skills. Once the company identifies the learners' support needs, it provides additional support through key skills workbooks, which learners work through individually at their own pace. Training workshops for key skills are held periodically, but differing abilities within the group are not always taken into consideration. The slower learners do not receive sufficient support and the more able learners are not challenged sufficiently. Few learners passed the external test in communications at level 3. Attendance at numeracy workshops is generally poor. Most off-the-job training tutors have no qualifications in key skills, although they are taking the same tests as the learners. Projects for key skills are set in a vocational context. There is insufficient feedback to learners on their key skills' progress and key skills evidence is often not cross-referenced and assessed until late into the training programme.

Leadership and management

44. The management of training is good. Teams work cohesively and communicate regularly to share good practice and discuss the learners' needs and progress. Meetings are recorded. Training and assessment is well planned, and forward planning is effective and meets the requirements of the new modern apprenticeship frameworks. Induction for learners and staff is comprehensive and pays particular attention to equality and diversity. New staff are well supported through mentoring, work-shadowing, and training. There is good use of the management information system to monitor achievement and retention rates and learners' progress. Laptops enable staff to access the management information system remotely. All staff participate in business planning and the self-assessment process. The self-assessment of the occupational area was broadly accurate, and staff are working effectively to remedy the weaknesses identified. There is a culture of continuous improvement within the management teams, which contributes to the learners' experiences.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 1**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	746	1
Other government-funded provision	62	1

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates on the foundation modern apprenticeships
- very good off-the-job training
- very good learners' progress reviews
- very good support for learners
- very good management of the training programmes

Achievement and standards

45. The retention and achievement rates on the foundation modern apprenticeships are good. In 2000-01, the retention rate was 75 per cent and the achievement rate was 63 per cent. The development of personal skills is satisfactory. Most learners are pleased with their increased confidence, which has improved their ability to talk to parents and colleagues in their workplace. Learners' progress is generally satisfactory and learners are set realistic and challenging learning targets. Learners are able to progress from level 2 to level 3 in early years care and education, as well as level 3 management programmes. Attendance at study days is good and monitored effectively. Non-attendance is immediately followed up by the training manager and employer, and Smart Training often takes the appropriate corrective action before the next study day. On the advanced modern apprenticeship, the retention and achievement rates declined until 1999-2000. In 2000-01, this trend was reversed, with a retention rate of 75 per cent and an achievement rate of 54 per cent.

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		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	259		290		322		327		231		189					
Retained*	0		7		242		192	59	144	62	132	70				
Successfully completed	0		7		173		162	50	111	48	106	56				
Still in learning	244		250		45		0	0	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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	122		138		104											
Retained*	0		29		78	75										
Successfully completed	0		26		66	63										
Still in learning	111		93		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															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3															
Retained*	0															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in learning	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

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Other government-funded provision																
	2002-03															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	63															
Retained*	0															
Planned learning completed	0															
Gained job	0															
Still in training	62															

*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

46. Off-the-job training is very good. There are very good study days held at venues convenient to groups of learners on one Saturday each month. Each study day is planned to cover essential background knowledge for the NVQ and information for the technical certificate. Key skills requirements are also introduced to the learners. They are prepared for tests at various stages throughout the programme. The content of the sessions is clearly linked to individual learning plans and effectively matches on-the-job training and employers' requirements. The standard of the teaching and learning experience is very good. Learners experience a wide range of activities, including large- and small-group work, quizzes, and individual support. Tutors use a good variety of text, media, IT, and information from external sources. They employ a good variety of teaching styles to accommodate the preferred learning styles of the learners. Sessions are very well planned and structured, and have developed recently to cover the new technical certificates. There is frequent checking of understanding with all learners, and tutors provide them with encouragement and praise. Learning is reinforced effectively. Learners are able to share good practice from on-the-job training and experience. There is a particularly good rapport between enthusiastic tutors/assessors and highly motivated learners.

47. The company's training managers carry out very good, regular, and impartial learners' progress reviews. These are usually three-monthly but more frequent if there are problems. The review process provides a comprehensive evaluation of learners' progress and informs all parties of training and learning needs. Learners value the reviews, which inform them of their progress and focus them on effective target-setting for completion of their work. Problems with assessment can be identified and remedied successfully and quickly. Reviews take place in the working environment and employers, mentors, tutors/assessors, and learners are involved in the review process. They are informed of any action required. Results of the reviews are discussed comprehensively at cluster meetings and round table meetings. Thorough quality assurance of the review process enables managers to have a good overview of progress and learners' needs.

48. Learners receive very good support in all aspects of their training programme. There is frequent contact with tutors/assessors at assessment visits and study days. If a need is identified, tutors/assessors have more frequent contact and respond at the learners' convenience. For example, a learner with impaired hearing receives a good level of support through a dedicated support assistant in sign language. Other learners are supported in their training by the use of tape recorders to record evidence for their portfolios. Tutors/assessors prepare good-quality, differentiated learning materials to support individual learners. Tutors/assessors are approachable and professional, and learners commented on the ease with which they can make contact with training managers and tutors/assessors by mobile telephone or e-mail. Learners receive a very good induction from the training managers, who give good-quality impartial advice and guidance. Learners identified with basic skills needs receive very good individual support from the tutors/assessors. This is very well planned and structured to meet individual needs, and learners value highly this level of support.

49. There is some good initial assessment. A small number of learners who have received an initial assessment have experienced late implementation of the planned support. Most assessment is holistic, but learners are only aware of the unit approach to their training and are not fully aware of the requirements of the full NVQ qualification. External verification reports indicate thorough assessment and verification processes.

50. There is a policy of open access to all early years' programmes. Learners' prior experience and learning is taken into account. Learners are on appropriate programmes to meet their level of ability and aspirations for the future. Smart Training is responsive to employers' and learners' needs and offers study days on Saturdays and key skills tests in the evenings. There are limited opportunities for learners to access a range of additional qualifications relevant to their career.

51. Smart Training has sufficient, appropriately qualified, and experienced staff with generally acceptable workloads. Their knowledge is frequently updated. The accommodation at community venues used for study days is satisfactory and includes libraries, hotels, and sports centres. There are adequate up-to-date learning materials, which include textbooks, journals, and other reference materials from recognised early years organisations. Learners have access to some resources for independent study between study workshops. On-the-job training is provided in childcare settings, including large national chains, private nurseries, schools, and a workplace nursery, all of which the company monitors regularly.

Leadership and management

52. There is very good operational management of the early years programmes. Communication between the learners, tutors/assessors, training manager, and employer are particularly effective. It is very frequent and verbal communication is usually supported by written confirmation. The management information system is very effective in providing information to support discussions between the staff and learners. Training managers effectively introduce the training manual to nursery managers before recruiting the learners to the training programme. Training managers are particularly skilful at

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providing the learners with very good inductions. Tutors/assessors and training managers respond promptly and effectively to learners' problems. Communication at cluster meetings and round table meetings, and assessment feedback, all contribute to good target-setting for successful outcomes for learners and staff. Very good communication allows good practice in training methods and the sharing and updating of knowledge. Staff at all levels have a good understanding of the company's policies and procedures, allowing the efficient, day-to-day operational management of training.