

INSPECTION REPORT

**The Bassetlaw Training Agency
Ltd**

08 August 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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

The Bassetlaw Training Agency Ltd

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Scope of provision	1
About the inspection	3
Overall judgement	3
Grades	4
Key findings	4
What learners like about The Bassetlaw Training Agency Ltd	8
What learners think The Bassetlaw Training Agency Ltd could improve	8
Key challenges for The Bassetlaw Training Agency Ltd	9

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	10
Equality of opportunity	12
Quality assurance	13
Business administration, management & professional	15
Retailing, customer service & transportation	20
Health, social care & public services	24
Foundation programmes	30

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Bassetlaw Training Agency Ltd (BTA) is located in Worksop, Nottinghamshire. It provides foundation programmes and work-based learning programmes for young people and adults in business administration, information technology (IT), retailing, customer service and transportation, and health, social care and public services. At the time of the inspection, there were too few learners in IT for this area to be inspected. BTA provides off-the-job training at its training centre in Worksop. There is no subcontracted learning provision, but the internal verification of childcare qualifications is subcontracted to a childcare consortium.

2. The managing director of BTA is responsible for the overall management of the training programmes, including equality of opportunity and quality assurance. She reports to a board which includes two other directors, and is supported by a team of seven training co-ordinators. The management team also includes an internal verification and training co-ordinator, a financial manager and a health and safety officer. There are 26 staff in total, of whom 17 work full time. BTA holds the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. BTA wrote its first annual self-assessment report in 1999. The most recent report was produced in July 2003 for the inspection.

3. BTA's learning provision is funded by Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Mansfield Jobcentre Plus. The provider recruits about a third of its learners from southeast Bassetlaw, where the average unemployment rate is just over 8 per cent. In June 2003, the unemployment rate for Bassetlaw as a whole was 2.1 per cent, compared with 1.9 per cent for Nottinghamshire and 2.5 per cent for England. The main areas of employment are the service industries, the production and construction industries, manufacturing and public administration, education and health. According to the 2001 census, Bassetlaw's minority ethnic communities make up 1.5 per cent of the local population, compared with 2.6 per cent for Nottinghamshire and 9 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Bassetlaw achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 43 per cent, compared with 46 per cent in Nottinghamshire and 47.9 per cent nationally.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. BTA offers advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in business administration for young people. It also offers a range of Jobcentre Plus programmes for adults, including New Deal 18-24, the voluntary sector option, short job-focused training (SJFT), longer occupational training (LOT) and intensive activity period (IAP) training in administration. There are 12 foundation and two advanced modern apprentices in business administration, all of whom are taking key skills

qualifications at an appropriate level. Two young people are working towards an NVQ at level 2. Three clients on New Deal programmes are working towards an NVQ at level 2 and one is working towards an NVQ at level 1. All learners and clients are in appropriate work placements. Staff visit the workplace once a month to carry out assessments and progress reviews. Off-the-job training is given weekly at the company's training centre. Learners who are unable to attend off-the-job training are supported by more frequent workplace visits.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

5. There are nine learners on work-based learning programmes for young people, two of whom are employed. Three are foundation modern apprentices, five are working towards NVQs at level 2 in retailing, and one is working towards an NVQ at level 1 in distributive operations. The 10 New Deal clients are on the voluntary sector option, the IAP or LOT. They are working towards units of NVQs at levels 1 and 2. The non-employed learners are in appropriate work placements. Staff from BTA visit learners in their workplaces every two weeks. Literacy, numeracy and language and key skills are taught in weekly sessions at the training centre. Learners who are unable to attend receive additional visits in their workplace.

Health, social care & public services

6. BTA offers training in early years care and education. There are 28 learners on work-based learning programmes for young people, of whom 13 are on advanced modern apprenticeships, eight are on foundation modern apprenticeships, and seven are working towards an NVQ at level 2. All learners are on work placements or employed in nurseries and schools in the Worksop area. Since April 2003, off-the-job training has been provided at BTA's training centre in Worksop. Learners attend for one morning a week for background knowledge sessions, portfolio development and tutorials. Additional individual tutorials can be arranged by the learner or assessor. Literacy, numeracy and key skills training are provided at the same site. Learners take a range of additional qualifications which are a requirement for the occupational area. Assessment is carried out by BTA's staff. Internal verification is subcontracted to a local childcare consortium. Formal progress reviews are carried out by the assessors every 12 weeks. More frequent informal meetings take place between the assessors and learners to set short-term targets.

Foundation programmes

7. The inspection took place during the first week of the introduction of Entry to Employment (E2E). Four learners on Life Skills programmes and one on preparatory training were transferred to the E2E programme.

8. Recruitment to the programme is almost exclusively through the local Connexions service. The new E2E programme lasts for up to 26 weeks with attendance of 16 hours each week. Learners receive an induction on their first day and complete an initial assessment and individual learning plan. E2E aims to develop motivation, self-confidence, personal effectiveness, vocational awareness, literacy, numeracy and key skills for young people who may have had negative experiences of learning, experience barriers to learning or be unclear about their future career aims. The programme also includes jobsearch skills and work experience. Learners can gain a national qualification that accredits their personal development.

9. There are two New Deal 18-24 clients on the two-week Gateway to Work programme. The programme is designed to support clients with particular social, learning and emotional needs. It provides intensive individual support during the first week and work tasters in the second.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	24
Number of learner interviews	51
Number of staff interviews	37
Number of employer interviews	13
Number of subcontractor interviews	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	5
Number of partner/external agency interviews	8
Number of visits	22

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

10. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, BTA's leadership and management are satisfactory. Its approach to equality of opportunity is good, but its quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. The quality of learning on business administration, retailing and foundation programmes is satisfactory, but it is unsatisfactory in childcare.

GRADES

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

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	4

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	None
New Deal 18-24	None

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3
New Deal 18-24	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	None

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

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3
New Deal 18-24	None

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

11. There is good attainment of technical and personal skills in business administration. Learners develop good vocational skills which are valued by their employers. Progression is good in retailing and foundation programmes. Learners progress from foundation programmes to NVQ programmes and employment. Many retailing learners achieve additional qualifications. The overall standard of learners' portfolios is satisfactory. **Achievement rates are poor in business administration, retailing and childcare. In childcare, retention rates are also poor.**

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	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Health, social care & public services	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	3
Foundation programmes	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	5
Total	0	1	3	9	1	0	0	14

12. **In business administration, training is good both on and off the job.** There is good support for learners. Resources and assessments are satisfactory. However, learners are insufficiently challenged. Target-setting is inadequate to drive assessment and achievement forward.

13. In retailing, assessors are well qualified. They have good vocational experience and additional qualifications. **Retailing learners receive good learning and pastoral support.** Training, resources and assessment practice are satisfactory, but short-term targets set for learners are insufficiently challenging.

14. **In childcare, there is thorough initial assessment and effective individual support for learners.** Learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities, which exceeds the requirements of their qualification. Training sessions and resources are satisfactory. Internal verification is provided by a subcontractor and is satisfactory, as is assessment practice. There is a suitable range of programmes and additional qualifications to meet the needs of learners. **However, there is insufficient co-ordination of training and action to improve achievements is not taken quickly enough.**

15. **There is good literacy and numeracy teaching and accommodation for foundation learners.** They receive good pastoral support. However, there is insufficient target-setting, and learners are not always appropriately challenged. The reinforcement of some key employment skills, such as punctuality, is weak.

Leadership and management

16. **BTA has effective measures in place to support disadvantaged groups of learners, and strategies to support the development of learners' literacy, numeracy and social needs.** Staff development is good. Many tutors have teaching qualifications and take specialist training to support learners. There is a good awareness of equality of opportunity in practice. Resources and communications are satisfactory. Self-assessment is also satisfactory, and staff have been appropriately involved in the process. Monitoring arrangements for subcontractors are satisfactory. However, there are no specific targets in business-planning, and the effectiveness of the equality of opportunity arrangements is not sufficiently monitored. Quality assurance arrangements are incomplete, and there is insufficient use of feedback to bring about continuous improvement.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- effective measures to support disadvantaged groups of learners
- effective strategies to support the development of learners' literacy, numeracy and social skills
- good staff development
- good awareness of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- insufficient specific targets in business-planning
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity
- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient use of feedback to support continuous improvement

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good attainment of technical and personal skills
- good training
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- insufficiently challenging targets

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good progression
- well-qualified assessors
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- insufficiently challenging short-term targets for learners

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- thorough initial assessment
- effective individual support for learners
- good learner awareness of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- poor achievement and retention rates
- weak target-setting
- insufficient co-ordination of training
- slow implementation of actions to improve achievement rate

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good progression
- good literacy and numeracy teaching
- good accommodation
- good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient target-setting
- learners not appropriately challenged
- weak reinforcement of some key employment skills

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE BASSETLAW TRAINING AGENCY LTD:

- the very approachable, helpful staff
- the high levels of support and encouragement
- the good social and basic skills development
- learning new skills, both in the workplace and off the job

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE BASSETLAW TRAINING AGENCY LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of time and support in open study sessions - there isn't enough
- the time given to portfolio-building in off-the-job training sessions - learners would like more
- the rewards for successful completion of a qualification

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE BASSETLAW TRAINING AGENCY LTD:

- improvement of achievement rates
- improvement of target-setting at all levels
- further development and maintenance of an appropriate quality assurance system
- further development of a culture of continuous improvement
- systematic collection and use of feedback

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective measures to support disadvantaged groups of learners
- effective strategies to support the development of learners' literacy, numeracy and social skills
- good staff development
- good awareness of equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- insufficient specific targets in business-planning
- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity
- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient use of feedback to support continuous improvement

17. There are effective measures to support disadvantaged groups of learners. This strength was partly identified in BTA's self-assessment report. BTA has good strategies for recruiting learners from areas of the local community with the highest levels of social and economic deprivation. More than one third of the learners currently in training come from one of the most disadvantaged areas in the country. Unemployment rates for this area are about four times higher than in Bassetlaw as a whole. Staff have a good understanding of the problems facing young people locally, and work well with a wide range of local organisations to help learners overcome barriers to learning and employment. The company has productive working relationships with its partner organisations in the community, including the local further education college, and has a good reputation for enrolling learners from particularly challenging backgrounds. BTA takes an active role in supporting local initiatives to keep young people in education and training, including the introduction of a new project for school pupils interested in studying childcare. Learners on the Life Skills programme have worked with Life Skills students at the local further education college to plan residential trips and evaluate the learning outcomes. Work placements are carefully selected to suit the needs of individual learners and allow them the flexibility to balance work with their personal circumstances.

18. BTA has a good approach to supporting the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. This strength was partly identified in the self-assessment report. BTA has a detailed literacy and numeracy strategy, and clear procedures for identifying additional learning and support needs. A good range of initial assessment tests is used to identify learning styles, employability skills and levels of literacy and numeracy. These tests are conducted before learners join the company and are used appropriately to assess

learners' suitability for the programme they wish to enrol on. A basic skills co-ordinator is responsible for the development of literacy and numeracy support, and all staff who provide literacy and numeracy training and support are competent and well qualified. A social skills tutor has recently been appointed to give learners useful training in how to improve their relationships with other people.

19. Staff at BTA receive good training and development, a strength not identified in the company's self-assessment report. Managers are highly committed to supporting staff and clearly recognise the importance of professional development. Detailed policies clearly identify the procedures for recruiting and interviewing staff, their induction, and how they are appraised. All staff have job descriptions but these are not always updated to reflect changes in the structure of the company. Newly appointed staff are carefully inducted into their company roles. BTA has a well-developed, annual staff appraisal system. Appraisal meetings are clearly documented and staff are encouraged to talk about their strengths and discuss their development needs. However, observation of training sessions is not used sufficiently as part of the appraisal process. Training requirements identified by staff from their appraisal are recorded accurately, and appropriate development is planned and carried out to meet the needs of the individual and the company. A detailed record is kept of the wide range of internal and external training events attended by staff. There is a particularly good emphasis given to training in equal opportunities, health and safety and supporting learners with additional learning needs.

20. Resources are satisfactory. BTA uses accommodation which is appropriate to the needs of learners and provides a welcoming environment. There are good facilities for learners on foundation programmes. Examples of learners' work and photographs of activities such as residential trips are on display and are used very effectively to create a caring atmosphere. All venues are accessible to learners with restricted mobility. Staff have an appropriate range of qualifications.

21. There are satisfactory arrangements for communications within the company. There is a range of regular, well-attended meetings involving all staff as well as individual programme teams. Minutes are taken but action points are not always recorded and followed up at subsequent meetings. Staff are clear about their own roles and responsibilities but do not have sufficient awareness of the future strategic direction of the company or any development plans.

22. There are insufficient specific targets used in business-planning. There is an annual planning cycle, but this does not link strategic and business objectives to target-setting, self-assessment and development-planning. There are separate development plans to support new initiatives such as the E2E programme. The business plan contains a self-analysis of BTA's reputation as a training provider which only identifies one strength and no weaknesses, opportunities or threats in terms of the delivery of training. BTA's staff are not sufficiently involved in business- or strategic-planning and are unclear about how their individual targets are related to business objectives. The business plan does, however, refer to each area and job title, giving broad objectives for each.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

23. BTA has a detailed and effective equal opportunities policy and clear procedures for complaints, appeals, harassment, bullying, discipline and grievances, both for learners and staff. The procedures are updated appropriately to take account of recent legislation. All staff are strongly committed to removing barriers to learning and enabling access to BTA's training programmes. Learners receive a statement that makes clear their rights and responsibilities, and a declaration of intent stating the company's attitude towards racism.

24. Learners and staff have a good awareness of equality of opportunity. This is identified as a strength in BTA's self-assessment report. Equal opportunities is a standing item on the agenda for staff meetings, and issues relating to individual learners are regularly discussed. Staff have attended a number of effective training events on equal opportunities. Equal opportunities statements are highly visible at all the centres. The induction that learners receive on joining their training programme has a strong emphasis on equality of opportunity, and includes imaginative exercises that challenge their perceptions of society. Learners are able to recall equal opportunities being covered during induction, and are encouraged to use their progress reviews to raise any issues regarding their treatment by employers or BTA. Any reported incidents of bullying or harassment are investigated fully by the company, and prompt action is taken to find appropriate solutions. Posters and artwork displayed in company premises challenge stereotypes and promote social inclusion. Learners have taken part in a competition to design posters to promote equality of opportunity, and a group of learners on the foundation programme has recently devised a play to present to staff and learners, based on their personal experiences of bullying.

25. There is insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity. This weakness is identified by BTA in its self-assessment report. There is no regular analysis of recruitment data to identify trends in learners' gender, ethnicity or additional learning needs. However, employers' recruitment practices are monitored to ensure that all learners have equal access to work placements. There are no learners from minority ethnic groups and very few men are on retailing or childcare programmes. The company's business and development plans contain no strategies to encourage members of these under-represented groups on to the training programmes, although staff have contacted local schools and the Connexions service to try and attract more men. There is very little monitoring of retention and achievement rates to identify performance indicators. BTA keeps records of its checks on employers' understanding of equal opportunities and their acknowledgement of BTA's equal opportunities policy. These have only recently been introduced and are incomplete.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

26. BTA's self-assessment is satisfactory. The report is detailed and identifies, in full or part, a number of the strengths and weaknesses that were identified by inspectors. However, some parts of the report are too descriptive. Staff have been involved in the self-assessment process and in identifying the strengths and weaknesses in their own areas, and they monitor progress against their team action plans. Progress against the

action plans is not always fully recorded.

27. Arrangements for monitoring contracts are mainly satisfactory. There is regular contact with work-placement providers and the subcontracted internal verification consortium. Relationships are good. Regular checks take place, and the monitoring records sampled are up to date. The generic contracts are clear about key training arrangements, health and safety and equality of opportunity, but do not specify the names of learners at the work placement or the programmes they are on. The internal verification contract has been renewed for each of the past three years. The requirement to formally review the effectiveness of this subcontract has been recently introduced. Subcontracted and in-house internal verification arrangements are satisfactory.

28. BTA's quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. Until its inspection by the ALI in 2001, the company had no quality assurance framework. It now has a framework, statement and strategy, and there are a number of related policy and procedural documents. All staff have good access to copies of the paperwork and understand their use. However, the quality assurance framework has not been kept sufficiently up to date and there are no policies or procedures for most aspects of the current quality assurance strategy. There is no overview of the whole quality assurance system to show clear links between its components. For example, there is no clear self-assessment and review cycle linked to business-planning. Although lesson observations have begun to take place to an annual schedule, observation records do not have objective criteria against which judgements can be made. There is no clear link between lesson observations and staff appraisal to help contribute to future staff development. Some aspects of practice are not well documented or monitored. For example, the company analyses recruitment by postcode but does not use these data to compare the achievement of the different groups. Effective measures to monitor and improve retention and achievement rates were not introduced promptly enough. There are quality assurance procedures for each learning programme and there are some organisational procedures, but most, including the complaints procedure, do not include indicators such as timescales for completion.

29. There is regular internal auditing of some areas of activity. For example, all learners' progress reviews are audited. However, sampling is not carried out systematically across the full quality assurance framework. The results of internal audit are fed back individually, and do not clearly identify trends. A new approach to internal audit sampling is to be introduced later in the year. This will increase staff responsibilities, and improve planning, but it does not extend the audit to other activities, or establish clear continuous improvement links.

30. Quality assurance and continuous improvement have recently been included as standing agenda items at staff meetings. Much discussion is simply sharing information, and records do not ensure that important points feed back into the quality assurance cycle. For example, in December 2002, retention and achievement rates were identified as key issues. Targets were to be set and the outcomes evaluated. There was no real progress for the next two months, and inspectors could find no record of the final outcome. Some action had, in fact been taken, but its impact was not reported on or monitored through the meetings. A quality assurance group meets occasionally, but its

remit and accountabilities are not clear, and the record-keeping for these meetings is weak.

31. Feedback is not used sufficiently to promote continuous improvement. Some feedback has been collected from learners and employers using questionnaires, the progress review process and telephone surveys of work-placement providers. However, feedback is not sought in a planned way. The number of respondents is insufficient to support clear judgements. The use of closed questions limits the value of responses. There has been some analysis of the feedback, but it is not clear whether trends are identified or the feedback is used to promote continuous improvement. The company responds to specific issues individually.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	16	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3	None
New Deal 18-24	1	None

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good attainment of technical and personal skills
- good training
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- insufficiently challenging targets

Achievement and standards

32. Learners develop good technical and personal skills. They improve their knowledge of IT and gain good telephone skills which their supervisors value. Learners grow in confidence and are able to work without supervision. Their increased background knowledge and understanding is reflected in well-structured portfolios.

33. All learners are taking additional qualifications in basic health and safety, food hygiene, first aid or manual handling.

34. Retention rates for foundation modern apprentices have improved from 11 per cent in 1998-99 to 75 per cent in 2001-02. Of those recruited in 2002, 64 per cent are still in training and their progress is satisfactory. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices was poor in the period 1997-98 to 1999-2000. No learners were recruited to this programme in 2000. One advanced modern apprentice recruited in 1999-2000 is still in training and making progress.

35. The achievement rate is poor. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. No modern apprentice has successfully achieved all the elements of their modern apprenticeship framework since 1997, although some have achieved an NVQ at level 2 or 3. In 1999, 25 per cent of advanced modern apprentices achieved an NVQ and in 2000, 22 per cent did so. No NVQ-only learner has achieved their qualification since 1999-2000.

THE BASSETLAW TRAINING AGENCY LTD

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		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1				4		4		7							
Retained*	0				2	50	0	0	2	29						
Successfully completed	0				0	0	0	0	0	0						
Still in learning	1				1	25	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		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	14		4		9		9		9							
Retained*	0		3	75	3	33	2	22	1	11						
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0						
Still in learning	9		3	75	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																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		2		6		12		33							
Retained*	1		0	0	0	0	3	25	13	39						
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0	2	17	13	39						
Still in learning	2		0	0	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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 18-24																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3				5		3									
Retained*	1				3	60	2	67								
Planned learning completed	0				0	0	0	0								
Gained job	1				1	20	0	0								
Still in training	1				0	0	0	0								

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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			7		2											
Retained*			2	29	2	100										
Planned learning completed			2	29	1	50										
Gained job			1	14	1	50										
Still in training			3	43	0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

36. BTA provides good training. Work-placement providers support learners and offer good on-the-job training. One workplace with three learners holds regular weekly sessions to update them on current systems and practice. Another workplace with four learners arranges interview training to help them find permanent jobs. Weekly off-the-job training is offered to all learners. Teaching is stimulating, and a variety of methods is used. Learners are able to develop their practical skills as well as their background knowledge, and made good use of the resources available, particularly the online computing facilities in the training room. Good use is made of question and answer techniques to check understanding. Learners are encouraged to work independently. Clear instructions are given about tasks, and frequent checks are made to ensure that learners understand what is expected of them. Staff produce good resource material. The self-assessment report recognised good training as a strength.

37. BTA's staff check that employers can provide work which will generate the evidence necessary to achieve NVOs. Communication between supervisors and workplace assessors is generally good. However, supervisors are not always aware of the training

being given off the job, so are unable to co-ordinate the workplace activities with it.

38. Key skills are an integral part of the training. Every opportunity is taken during training sessions to gather evidence for key skills qualifications. Learners are developing good work-based projects, on topics such as health and safety, which are used as evidence both for the NVQ and key skills. Few learners have yet taken the external assessment for key skills. The integration of key skills with vocational training was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

39. There is good support for learners. All applicants have an interview and an initial assessment of their general education, literacy and numeracy, and preferred learning styles. This initial assessment is used to place learners on appropriate programmes. Where learners are identified as having a literacy or numeracy need, weekly additional support is offered. Basic skills tutors liaise closely with assessors to ensure learners' needs are being met. If learners are unable to attend the training centre for help with literacy and numeracy, additional support is offered in the workplace. For example, one assessor is working with a workplace supervisor to improve a learner's language skills by covering 10 common spellings a day.

40. Resources are satisfactory. Rooms are appropriately equipped, furnished and well cared for. Learners have access to a dedicated training room with modern facilities and a good range of paper-based resources. Additional computing facilities are available as required. Staff are appropriately qualified and have taken the opportunity to update their experience by attending external events on key skills and the requirements of the technical certificate in administration.

41. BTA's staff visit workplaces regularly to carry out reviews and assessments. In almost all cases, learners' supervisors are involved in the progress review process and have a copy of the subsequent action plan. This enables them to help learners to complete any gaps identified in their evidence. BTA's staff are approachable and provide advice and guidance to learners with concerns and difficulties. Any problems are quickly resolved. Assessments are thorough, and all appropriate assessment methods are used. Constructive feedback is given after each assessment. However, learners reported that before March 2003 they had experienced frequent changes in assessor which they found confusing and demotivating.

42. Learners are not set sufficiently challenging targets. There is regular action-planning but the target-setting is inadequate to drive assessment and achievement forward. Action plans do not stretch learners, and targets are too easy to achieve.

Leadership and management

43. There has been a comprehensive review of provision, and systems and procedures have been put in place to deal with the problem of poor achievement. New paperwork has been developed to monitor learners' achievement and progress. Trainers have developed new programmes of off-the-job training. BTA has a comprehensive quality assurance manual with records of all procedures, staffing, verification information,

schemes of work and feedback questionnaires. Internal verification is thorough and includes monitoring of teaching and assessment. Feedback is obtained from learners and supervisors by interview. Assessors are given monthly feedback by the internal verifier. At present, there are no standardisation exercises.

44. Equality of opportunity is actively promoted during teaching sessions and reviews. There is a culture of valuing diversity, and learners' understanding of rights and responsibilities is checked regularly. Any form of oppressive behaviour is dealt with promptly.

45. The course team is cohesive and there is regular informal communication. Monthly meetings are well recorded with action points.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	9	3
New Deal 18-24	8	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2	None

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good progression
- well-qualified assessors
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- insufficiently challenging short-term targets for learners

Achievement and standards

46. Learners make good progress from foundation programmes onto the retailing programme. Some learners who have completed NVQs at level 1 have progressed to a level 2 NVQ, or into further education. Others progress into jobs. There is a range of short courses available to learners including health and safety, first aid and manual handling. Ninety per cent of learners in this occupational area have attained these extra qualifications. This helps to increase their employability. Achievement of additional qualifications was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Just over 20 per cent of New Deal 18-24 clients and 33 per cent of New Deal 25+ clients have gained employment over the past four years. A number of learners are in work placements where members of staff are former BTA learners and good role models. After six months on programme, learners with additional needs are retested on their basic skills. The results show that progress has been made and they are used to plan changes to the individual learning plan. Learners gain confidence from these improvements.

47. Learners compile satisfactory portfolios, which contain diverse sources of evidence. These include work products, witness testimonies, assignments, projects, personal statements, photographs and oral and written questions. Good use is made of projects to develop literacy, numeracy and social skills.

48. Overall achievement rates are poor. Only one advanced modern apprentice and two foundation modern apprentices have achieved their qualification since 1998-99. There are signs of improvement in NVQ achievements over the past six months. Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, the average rate of achievement for NVQ learners was just over 40 per cent. Three of the learners who started in 2002-03 have already

achieved their qualification, and a further five are close to completion. Adults on New Deal programmes work towards two units of an NVQ in retailing and are achieving satisfactorily. Retention rates for both New Deal programmes are satisfactory, but retention rates for foundation modern apprentices have been very poor every year apart from 2001-02.

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							2		4							
Retained*							1	50	3	75						
Successfully completed							0	0	1	25						
Still in learning							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		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		5		4		6		4							
Retained*	0		4	80	1	25	0	0	0	0						
Successfully completed	0		1	20	1	25	0	0	0	0						
Still in learning	0		3	60	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																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	13		25		28		16		2							
Retained*	3		10	40	17	61	8	50	0	0						
Successfully completed	3		10	40	13	46	6	38	0	0						
Still in learning	5		1	4	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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 18-24																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	29		45		37		47									
Retained*	9		25	56	23	62	22	47								
Planned learning completed	2		0	0	1	3	2	4								
Gained job	7		14	31	6	16	4	9								
Still in training	8		0	0	0	0	0	0								

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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			7		19											
Retained*			2	29	14	74										
Planned learning completed			2	29	4	21										
Gained job			2	29	6	32										
Still in training			2	29	0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

49. There is very good support for learners, both individually and in groups. Initial assessment is carried out at induction and identifies the correct level of qualification for learners, and any additional learning or social needs. There are specialist basic skills and social skill tutors. Literacy and numeracy are taught at BTA's premises and in the workplace. Learners attend BTA's training centre on one morning a week for a mixture of taught literacy and numeracy sessions and support. Learners with additional social needs meet every week and plan and cost activities such as tenpin bowling, swimming, cycling and barbecues, which improves their confidence and develop their other skills. There is good matching of learners to work placements. Learners are visited in the workplace at least every two weeks for pastoral support and assessment. They can also contact their assessor by telephone. BTA's staff and employers work together as a team to support individual learners. There are very good working relationships between those who are involved in the assessment and review of learners' progress. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

50. Assessors are well qualified, over and above their assessor qualifications. They have

a good range of occupational skills, often at senior level, that are updated regularly. Recent staff development has prepared them effectively for the introduction of the retailing technical certificates. Some have specialist training and qualifications, for example in dyslexia, which help them to work effectively with learners. There are adequate resources, including a good training room for literacy and numeracy tuition, and assessors have a range of materials on the background knowledge for NVQs and key skills qualifications.

51. Training is satisfactory. Most learning takes place on the job. Apart from literacy, numeracy and key skills there is no formal off-the-job training. Learners are part of workplace teams and are given challenging tasks and responsibilities that promote confidence and develop skills. Assessors give adequate coaching on the background knowledge and practical requirements of the NVQ during their visits to the workplace. Learners' induction to their learning programme is satisfactory. They have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities and of equal opportunities.

52. BTA's assessment processes are satisfactory. Assessment plans are discussed with learners before the assessment visit, and again immediately before the assessment to ensure that they understand the requirements of the NVQ. There is good use of observations. These are fully recorded and good verbal feedback is given to the learner. However, the feedback is not always recorded fully and it is the assessors who cross-reference the evidence for level 1 and 2 NVQs into portfolios.

53. Short-term targets are insufficiently challenging. At each visit to the workplace, the assessor will leave the learner a set of actions to complete. Targets are sometimes insufficiently specific and, in some cases, too easy. Examples of targets include 'attend basic skills lesson' and 'photocopy certificate and put in portfolio'. Staff at BTA have been considering this weakness, and targets set recently have been more challenging. Learners' rate of progress has improved.

Leadership and management

54. The self-assessment report accurately reflected the strengths and weaknesses identified at inspection. The assessors' team has worked closely for the past 15 months to identify barriers or problems that affect learners' retention and achievement rates. The team is now working to an action plan to rectify the weaknesses identified. There are regular meetings between assessors and the internal verifier, and improvements have been made over the past 12 months in assessment processes and documents. Changes have been made to literacy, numeracy and key skills learning sessions. Learners now attend in occupational groups so that examples and projects can be more closely related to their occupational area.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	28	4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- thorough initial assessment
- effective individual support for learners
- good learner awareness of equal opportunities

Weaknesses

- poor achievement and retention rates
- weak target-setting
- insufficient co-ordination of training
- slow implementation of actions to improve achievement rate

Achievement and standards

55. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory. Good NVQ and key skills evidence is produced by some learners. All learners develop satisfactory practical skills in their work placements.

56. Retention and achievement rates are poor, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Between 1997-98 and 2001-02, 18 advanced modern apprentices began programmes, but only six have been retained and none has achieved a qualification. Between 1999-2000 and 2001-02, 20 foundation modern apprentices began programmes, of whom two were retained, one completed the modern apprenticeship framework, and one achieved an NVQ. Several learners are not progressing as expected. Four advanced modern apprentices who started in 1999-2000 are still in learning, up to 12 months past their expected completion date.

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	10		8		2		5		2		1					
Retained*	0		0	0	0	0	4	80	2	100	0	0				
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				
Still in learning	6		2	25	1	50	4	80	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		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	14		4		4		12									
Retained*	0		1	25	0	0	1	8								
Successfully completed	0		1	25	0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	7		1	25	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																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	8		2				1		2							
Retained*	0		1	50			0		0							
Successfully completed	0		0	0			0		0							
Still in learning	5		2	100			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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 18-24																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts			2				1									
Retained*			1	50			0	0								
Planned learning completed			0	0			0	0								
Gained job			1	50			0	0								
Still in training			0	0			0	0								

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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts					6											
Retained*					3	50										
Planned learning completed					2	33										
Gained job					1	17										
Still in training					0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

57. Learners' initial assessment is thorough. It is completed before they join the programme, and effectively identifies their learning needs and the correct programme and level for them. Learners also attend an interview where their social skills and barriers to employment are discussed. Their literacy, numeracy and language skills are assessed, psychometric tests are carried out and their preferred learning style is identified. Applicants are offered a 'work taster' where they gain a useful insight into the role of a nursery assistant. A second interview is arranged to discuss the results of the assessments and agree the programme.

58. Learners receive effective individual support from BTA and their work-placement provider. They attend the training centre weekly for individual tutorials at which they discuss their progress and any personal issues, receive detailed guidance on portfolio development, or take part in open study sessions. Formal training sessions are also given at these times. Further individual sessions can be arranged if needed. Some learners feel that the open study days do not provide sufficient time for individual support because of the large number of learners attending. There is a support worker available to offer

additional support and guidance to learners and assessors.

59. Learners with literacy and numeracy needs attend basic skills sessions taught by well-qualified staff. Learners interviewed said they felt their literacy and numeracy skills were improving and they were gaining confidence. The assessor visits learners frequently in the workplace. These visits are flexible and are sometimes made in the early morning or evenings to observe activities occurring at these times.

60. Progress reviews are carried out every 12 weeks, or more frequently for learners with additional needs. Employers or supervisors take part in the review and contribute to the discussion of targets and training. Workplace colleagues help learners with their NVQ and background knowledge if they experience difficulties. The communication between the training centre and employers effectively enhances the support given to learners. BTA responds quickly to issues raised by learners or employers, and deals effectively with the problem. Some learners have been helped to find more suitable work placements, and an external counselling service has been used. Employers are interested in learners' progress. They discuss issues of non-attendance or poor performance with the provider and the learner. Employers receive regular feedback from the provider on learners' progress. One employer actively encourages learners to collect key skills evidence and provides a range of opportunities for them to do so.

61. Training for learners is satisfactory. Trainers are aware of the barriers to learning for individual learners and use this information effectively. They use a range of teaching methods. The early years care and education training sessions are linked well to the NVQ and to workplace activities. Equal opportunities and health and safety are satisfactorily incorporated. Learners show a satisfactory understanding of early years topics. Some handouts are starting to fade and are not clear. Lessons are evaluated by learners at the end of each session. Lesson plans in early years care and education are satisfactory but those used for key skills are very brief. Sessions are mostly informal and used for learners to work on their portfolios with support from the assessor. There have been some formal sessions on specific NVQ units or topics related to the workplace. A more structured training programme is planned for the next intake of learners. In key skills training sessions, evidence is generated which relates to the workplace and NVQ. However, this is not used to demonstrate background knowledge for specific NVQ units. Employers provide learners with the opportunity to attend a range of short training courses to further develop their skills and understanding.

62. Resources to support learning are satisfactory overall. There is a range of books and journals in the training room for independent learning, and most learners have access to additional information in the workplace. Computer and internet facilities are available at the training centre. The training room has a wide range of posters and information. A display of posters produced by learners clearly shows their good understanding of equal opportunities. The training room is also used as an office. A formal training session was interrupted several times by other staff. A video used for key skills training contained some material which was inappropriate for the specific group and the subject matter. The staff are suitably qualified and experienced, and occupationally up to date. Both have teaching qualifications.

63. Internal verification is provided by a subcontractor and is satisfactory. Assessors attend meetings regularly for awarding body updates and standardisation of assessment. There is a clear sampling plan and verification is monitored effectively. There are frequent internal verification visits. Feedback given to assessors is clear and accurately identifies weaknesses in the assessment process. Action plans are closely monitored and units are not signed off until all actions have been completed to a satisfactory standard.

64. Overall assessment practice is satisfactory. Learners often complete detailed assessment plans. Observation records are clear and informative. Learners receive detailed verbal and written feedback, but this is sometimes recorded on inappropriate documents, such as progress/action plans. Feedback and action plans are often difficult to find in the portfolio.

65. Target-setting is weak. There is insufficient assessment planning on the key skills programme, and target dates are sometimes left out or are not challenging enough. Records do not clearly identify which targets have been achieved. Some targets set at progress reviews are not specific or do not include deadlines. Some action plans do not set any targets for learners. Slow progress has been identified as a problem by assessors, and targets are now followed up in progress/action plans.

66. There is a suitable range of programmes to meet the needs of learners. A number of additional qualifications, which are mandatory for the sector, are provided by BTA. Learners also have access to courses specific to early years care and education through their workplaces.

67. There is insufficient co-ordination of training on the early years care and education programme. Learners attend the training centre weekly. Earlier this year a scheme of work was introduced for the level 2 programme. Over a four-week period, learners attend a formal NVQ-related learning session, a key skills session and open study sessions. The scheme of work is incomplete and only runs until September. A further plan is being prepared and will incorporate the technical certificate programme. Learners and employers are not aware of the content of the learning sessions until a week before they take place. Learners receive satisfactory training in the workplace and are supervised by qualified and experienced staff. Employers now receive an information sheet detailing the NVQ unit the learner is working on and their possible development and learning needs. Sometimes this is given out at short notice. There is range of useful external training opportunities for learners available through employers. Many learners do not attend these sessions as they want to concentrate on their NVQ. The full range of training activities available to the learners is not identified sufficiently clearly, agreed with the learner and employer, and recorded as part of the individual learning plan.

68. All learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities and some have a very good understanding, beyond that required for the qualification. Learners are able to discuss equality of opportunity in relation to themselves as learners and also to the workplace and their practice. Understanding is reinforced at progress reviews and study days.

Leadership and management

69. The leadership and management of the occupational area have improved. Training has been transferred from the nursery to the training centre, where there is a dedicated early years care and education training room. A co-ordinator and a tutor/assessor have been recruited to provide the training and assessment. Learners who make slow progress are now monitored effectively and given more challenging targets to achieve. Assessment practice has improved. The learners have now achieved units and most are close to completing the NVQ. The co-ordinator is well focused on improvements and staff are well motivated and reflect on practice. Improving learners' achievement has been identified as a priority, and there are early indications that learners are making better progress towards achieving NVQ units.

70. BTA has been slow to implement actions to improve the achievement rate. Slow progress and poor assessment practices were identified in the inspection of January 2000 and again in February 2001. Some of the learners on programme at that time are still in learning. One learner took a year to achieve an NVQ unit, and three learners took two years to achieve a unit. Action was not taken until September 2002 to change the structure of the early years care and education department.

Foundation programmes

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	5	3
New Deal 18-24	2	None

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good progression
- good literacy and numeracy teaching
- good accommodation
- good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient target-setting
- learners not appropriately challenged
- weak reinforcement of some key employment skills

Achievement and standards

71. Most Life Skills and preparatory training learners are disengaged young people, with few, if any, formal qualifications. However the progression rate for these learners is good. Between 2000-01 and 2001-02, 58 per cent of learners progressed into further training or employment. There are clear opportunities for learners to progress from foundation to vocational training. The support available from BTA enables these learners to succeed on vocational courses. The retention rate for clients on Gateway to Work programmes is good, exceeding 80 per cent in 2000-01 and 2001-02. More than 30 per cent of these clients progressed into employment.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Life Skills																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	29		34		23		2									
Retained*	14		22	65	11	48	1	50								
Successfully completed	12		20	59	1	7	0	0								
Still in learning	5		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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 18-24																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	147		413		246											
Retained*	109		352	85	216	88										
Planned learning completed	109		352	85	216	88										
Gained job	40		122	30	83	34										
Still in training	2		0	0	0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

72. There is good literacy and numeracy teaching. Most staff involved in teaching literacy and numeracy have been trained to support this area of work. In the good teaching sessions, literacy and numeracy were taught in a way which was relevant to individual needs and linked closely to initial assessment and literacy and numeracy milestones. In one session, learners received individual support and completed tasks that were differentiated according to their individual needs. A good range of initial assessment materials is used, including tests linked to the national core curriculum for literacy and numeracy. There is an attempt to link individual needs to national curriculum targets but this is still at an early stage. During the inspection, five teaching sessions were observed, all of which were judged to be satisfactory or good. Learning materials used for literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. However, some work in learners' portfolios is unmarked and inspectors saw evidence of one learner being given worksheets and handouts of an inappropriate level.

73. The Life Skills programme has recently acquired a house that will become its base

area. The accommodation provides extensive facilities. However, staff are preparing and decorating the accommodation, and learners are not being given a chance of involvement from the outset. The literacy and numeracy teaching accommodation is a dedicated room, which is conducive to learning. There are extensive resources. The accommodation for Gateway to Work clients is housed in a new community centre. There is a good dedicated training room with access to telephones, video and computers. These are used regularly to support jobsearch and curriculum vitae preparation. Learners have access to all the facilities in the centre and relate well to the other community groups that use the centre.

74. Staff provide particularly good pastoral support to help learners overcome barriers to successful learning. They provide sound practical guidance or refer learners to other agencies where appropriate. Good use is made of external agencies to deal with learners' personal and social needs, including homelessness or drug misuse. Regular visits from Connexions's personal advisers allow learners to discuss their general progress. Learners value the support they receive for their personal and social needs, but are less enthusiastic about the level of support they receive in achieving their vocational goals. There is a high staff-to-learner ratio. In the sessions observed during the inspection the lowest ratio was 1:4.

75. All learners on foundation training take part in work experience. Employers support the learners, participating in reviews and developing opportunities for them to broaden their experience at work.

76. Learners' progress is reviewed frequently, usually every two weeks but occasionally more often. Comprehensive paperwork is used, ensuring that the support is appropriate and can be reviewed and amended appropriately. However the targets agreed at progress reviews are not always specific enough. Some are vague and do not give learners a clear sense of direction. In one instance, review documents were completed before the review, identifying a range of targets and goals without any contribution from the learner.

77. Although learners' rate of progress to other programmes is good, many young people are not sufficiently challenged. Activities often relate to independent living, but tutors do not take into account that learners are already living independently. In a number of cases, the high level of staff support means that learners are given too much help with challenging situations. In one case, inspectors observed a tutor completing an activity for a learner. Learners' vocational choices and the problems identified in their learning plans are not routinely met. Learners have requested more specific vocational training, but are not always able to choose which activities they take part in.

78. Training records and lesson plans are available. Punctuality and reliability are regularly discussed as essential employment skills, but many late starts and long breaks in learning sessions were observed by inspectors. Some learning sessions lacked pace and there was no sense of urgency in learning activities.

Leadership and management

79. Staff meet regularly and are generally well informed about the company. All teaching staff in this area were involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report identified some of the strengths that were identified by inspectors, but not the weaknesses. One weakness in accommodation identified in the self-assessment report has been dealt with and is now a strength.

80. Work experience is a major aspect of learners' programmes. Employers are closely involved in learners' progress reviews, but some are unclear about the criteria by which achievement in the workplace will be judged.