

INSPECTION REPORT

Darlington Borough Council

11 September 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

INSPECTION REPORT

Darlington Borough Council

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Darlington Borough Council (DBC) has been training young people since 1982. Darlington Borough Council Training Unit (DBCTU) is part of the corporate division of DBC, and comes under the remit of the human resource management section. It provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, health, social care and public services (early years care and education), engineering (motor vehicle), construction (wood occupations), sports and recreation. Learners follow national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 1, 2 or 3 and modern apprenticeship frameworks at foundation or advanced level. There were too few sports and recreation learners for this area to be inspected separately. DBCTU also offers qualifications in adult literacy and numeracy and has recently gained a contract to deliver Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes. These areas were not inspected.
2. DBCTU currently has 77 learners on work-based learning programmes, recruited mainly from schools via Connexions. The programmes are managed and delivered by a team of eight staff: one training manager, one training co-ordinator, five trainers/assessors and one administrative assistant. Off-the-job training for business administration, motor vehicles and wood occupations is delivered in-house by DBCTU at Darlington Arts Centre. Training for early years care and education, and sports and recreation is subcontracted to two colleges of further education.
3. DBCTU funds its programmes through Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Some funding contributions are received from the work-placement providers and any shortfall is covered by DBC.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Construction

4. Seventeen learners are following programmes in wood occupations. Ten learners are working towards a site carpentry qualification, eight at foundation modern apprenticeship level and two at NVQ level 2. Four learners are working towards a fitted interiors qualification, one at foundation modern apprenticeship level and three doing an NVQ at level 2. Three learners are working towards wood occupations NVQs at level 1. Learners attend DBCTU's premises one day each week for their off-the-job training. All evidence for assessment of practical competence is generated and collected in the workplace.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

5. Twenty-three learners are on motor vehicle training programmes. Six are advanced modern apprentices and seven are foundation modern apprentices in motor vehicle repair. Five learners are working towards a fast-fit NVQ at level 2, and five at level 1. Local companies employ most learners, who attend off-the-job training at DBCTU for one day a week. All practical assessments take place in the workplace.

Business administration, management & professional

6. Twenty-eight learners are on business administration programmes. Seven are working towards an NVQ at level 1, and 11 learners are following NVQs at level 2. Nine learners are foundation modern apprentices and one is an advanced modern apprentice. Learners are employed by the local authority and private companies. Off-the-job training is provided at DBCTU.

Health, social care & public services

7. Ten learners are following early years care and education programmes, five as foundation modern apprentices and five as advanced modern apprentices. Learners are either employed, or have work placements in the three council-run nurseries in Darlington. Learners alternate between the nurseries to gain experience of working with babies and children of all ages. Learners' registration with awarding bodies, off-the-job training, and key skills assessments are subcontracted to a local college of further education, as is internal verification. Foundation modern apprentices attend off-the-job training for one day each week, and advanced modern apprentices attend for one evening each week.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	22
Number of learner interviews	55
Number of staff interviews	21
Number of employer interviews	17
Number of subcontractor interviews	8
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	24

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

8. The quality of provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, DBCTU's leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Its approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory, but its quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. The quality of work-based learning is satisfactory in engineering, technology and manufacturing, and good in business administration, management and professional. However, the quality of work-based learning is unsatisfactory in construction and very weak in health, social care and public services.

GRADES

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

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

Construction	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

Health, social care & public services	5
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	5

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

9. **Retention and achievement rates for construction NVQ learners are poor**, having been no higher than 23 per cent for the past two years. Progress by some learners is slow and work-based evidence is not always gathered for assessment. Learners acquire the practical skills to carry out a wide variety of work activities independently and to the standard required by employers.

10. **Achievement rates are satisfactory for business administration learners.** Nearly half of the 2000-01 intake of learners successfully achieved their NVQ at level 1, and just over half successfully completed their foundation modern apprenticeship. Most of the recent starters are making satisfactory progress. Learners gain good skills in their work placements and doing off-the-job training.

11. **All motor vehicles modern apprentices have remained on their programme** from the

2002-03 intake. **Retention and achievement rates for NVQ learners are poor**, at only 18 per cent for 2000-01. However, the trend is improving. Learners develop new skills, although progress is slow.

12. **Retention and achievement rates are good for early years care and education advanced modern apprentices**, with 100 per cent of 2000-01 learners retained, and 83 per cent successfully completing their modern apprenticeship frameworks. There was no intake of learners for 2001-02. All modern apprentices who began learning in 2002-03 have remained on their programmes, but there is some delay in learners' progress and achievement. Portfolio evidence is to the required standard.

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
Construction	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	4
Health, social care & public services	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	6	4	0	0	0	10

13. **Work placements are good on construction, motor vehicle and business administration programmes.** They provide a wide range of learning and assessment opportunities effectively to meet learners' needs.

14. **Assessment practices in motor vehicle programmes are good.** They are well developed and understood by staff. Support is good for motor vehicle NVQ learners. Weekly support sessions help learners to understand the requirements of the qualification.

15. **The co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training in motor vehicle is inadequate.** Employers are not sufficiently informed about the programme to be able to support learners with the training and assessment requirements.

16. **Very good individual support is provided to business administration learners.** Staff encourage learners to develop and are responsive to their needs.

17. **Progress reviews in business administration are good.** Regular contact is maintained and clear, time-related targets are set and agreed with learners and employers. Assessment practices are effective and make the best use of work-related opportunities.

18. **Resources and facilities are poor for off-the-job training in construction** and learners are unable to practise the skills needed.

19. **Some health and safety practices are poor in some construction workplaces.**

Monitoring of health and safety does take place regularly, but does not adequately ensure compliance.

20. **Some assessment practices are weak in construction.** Learners' competence is based on insufficient and infrequently collected evidence. **Progress reviews are ineffective.** They do not provide sufficient detail of how and when learners can achieve targets. Employers are not adequately involved in the review process.

21. **Co-ordination of subcontracted training in early years care and education is poor.** No links are made between off-the-job training sessions and the training provided by employers. Work-based supervisors are not aware of what learners do during off-the-job training sessions.

22. **Progress reviews in early years care and education are weak.** Workplace supervisors and subcontracted tutors are not involved in the process. The reviews do not include setting of specific and measurable targets, or information regarding learners' attendance, achievement and progression at off-the-job training.

23. **Some assessment practices are weak in early years care and education,** and assessment is not always carried out. Written evidence is relied on too much. Assessments carried out at work and at off-the-job training are not linked.

24. **Some internal verification practices are poor in early years care and education.** The production and assessment of learners' work is not internally verified until completed portfolios are submitted. Assessors are not observed during assessments and the practices of work-based assessors are not sufficiently standardised.

25. **Support for literacy and numeracy skills development is effective in most areas.** Thorough initial assessment and diagnostic testing ensure that learners are placed on appropriate programmes. **However, arrangements are poor for supporting those early years care and education learners who have additional learning needs.**

Leadership and management

26. **DBCTU's strategic management is good,** and is supported by clearly defined aims and objectives.

27. **DBCTU has a clear and documented strategy for the development and implementation of literacy, numeracy and key skills training and support.** Key skills training is effectively integrated with vocational training.

28. **Support for staff development is good.** All staff have a personal development review which identifies appropriate qualifications and training needs.

29. Internal communications are satisfactory, and the provision of management information is adequate.

30. **The management of practical training is inadequate in construction and motor vehicle.** Resources are insufficient to support the practise and demonstration of skills.

31. **The management of subcontracted training is poor in early years care and education.** Communication between DBCTU, the college and employers is inadequate.

32. **Promotion and monitoring of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.** However, staff do not take part in formal training in equality of opportunity.

33. Quality assurance procedures are well established and have a clear focus on training. **However, some quality assurance procedures are not effectively implemented.**

34. Internal verification is satisfactory in construction, motor vehicle and business administration, but **poor in early years care and education.**

35. DBCTU's self-assessment report was not accurate and did not adequately focus on achievement and standards, or the quality of education and training.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic management
- effective implementation of literacy, numeracy and key skills strategy
- good support for staff development

Weaknesses

- inadequate management of practical training in construction and engineering
- poor management of subcontracted training in early years care and education
- ineffective implementation of some quality assurance procedures

Construction

Strengths

- many good work placements

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates for NVQ learners
- poor resources for off-the-job practical training
- poor health and safety practices in some workplaces
- some weak assessment practices
- ineffective progress reviews

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good retention rates for modern apprentices
- good work placements
- well-developed assessment practices
- good support for NVQ learners

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates for NVQ learners
- inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- particularly good individual support for learners
- good workplace experiences
- good progress reviews
- effective assessment practices

Weaknesses

- no weaknesses identified

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates for modern apprentices

Weaknesses

- poor arrangements for the support of learners with additional needs
- poor co-ordination of on-the-job and subcontracted training
- weak progress reviews
- some weak assessment practices
- some poor internal verification practices

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL:

- the good work placements
- the approachable and friendly staff
- the good support - 'if I need help someone is always available'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of practical training
- the training allowance

KEY CHALLENGES FOR DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL:

- improve retention and achievement rates
- improve the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- establish effective practical training in construction and engineering
- ensure quality assurance arrangements are effective
- manage subcontracted provision effectively
- share good practice across all areas of learning

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good strategic management
- effective implementation of literacy, numeracy and key skills strategy
- good support for staff development

Weaknesses

- inadequate management of practical training in construction and engineering
- poor management of subcontracted training in early years care and education
- ineffective implementation of some quality assurance procedures

36. DBCTU's strategic management is good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The organisation has a clearly defined mission that supports the key lifelong learning objectives of the borough council's community plan. Four of the five areas of learning offered by DBCTU have been identified as areas of occupational skills shortage in Darlington. Many of the level 1 NVQ learners have additional learning needs and, to provide a more appropriate curriculum, DBCTU has been successful in gaining an E2E contract with the local LSC.

37. DBCTU is well represented by its training manager at local strategic partnerships, including the Tees Valley provider network, Darlington Strategic Area Review group, and the Darlington Learning Partnership. The organisation's present business plan covers the period from 2001 to 2004 and has clearly stated aims and objectives. However, the business plan does not have a detailed action plan showing timescales and costs.

38. DBCTU's strategy for the development of learners' key skills and literacy and numeracy support is clear and documented. The implementation of this strategy is the responsibility of a designated skills trainer. Learners receive thorough initial assessments and diagnostic testing during their interviews, to enable DBCTU to place them on the most appropriate learning programme. Learners are prepared for the external key skills tests by the skills trainer, and achievement rates for the tests are good. The key skills training portfolio is well developed and integrated with vocational training. Learners who need literacy or numeracy support receive this from the key skills trainer and from the vocational trainers as an integral part of their vocational studies. Vocational trainers have achieved, or are working towards, literacy, numeracy and/or key skills training qualifications. Achievement rates for adult literacy and numeracy qualifications are good.

39. All staff receive an annual personal development review with an interim update

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

every six months. The review is based on a generic competence model operated across the council, and focuses on the identification of training needs. DBCTU has a clear requirement for all training staff to achieve appropriate qualifications in training, assessment, key skills, and literacy and numeracy support. Support for staff development is good, they are allowed day release and time to complete assignments and coursework where necessary. The borough council has a wide range of in-house training courses and seminars. Although staff receive regular informal guidance in equality of opportunity, they have not recently attended any formal structured training to update their knowledge.

40. Internal communications are satisfactory. A good deal of communication is informal, which is appropriate given the size of the team. There are regular meetings for internal verifiers and verification standardisation, also meetings regarding literacy, numeracy and key skills. However, there is insufficient recording of actions and timescales in the minutes of these meetings. Full staff meetings are held every six months. Team development days are held two or three times a year for staff to work on activities such as the self-assessment report, programme design and delivery, and revising procedures and documents.

41. The provision of management information is adequate. A new management information system is operational, although familiarisation training is still taking place. The system is producing basic reports for management, but its full potential has not yet been used. Each occupational area uses a variety of different systems to hold a lot of information about learners' progress. During the inspection, there were some difficulties in reconciling achievement and retention rate data held in the system with staff-maintained records.

42. The management of practical training is inadequate in construction and motor vehicle programmes. Resources are inadequate for the practical training of learners while on day release at DBCTU; for example, there are no workshops. Not enough practical training takes place in classrooms. The rooms used for joinery do not allow the satisfactory demonstration or practise of required skills, training and assessment rigs are not provided and insufficient timber is available. No motor vehicles are provided for demonstration or practise. Employers have a poor awareness of NVQ standards and framework requirements. An information pack is given to employers, but supervisors often do not see it. Work-placement providers do not receive copies of the off-the-job training schemes.

43. Management of the subcontracted early years care and education training is poor. The subcontractor delivers off-the-job vocational and key skills training and internal verification. DBCTU does not hold copies of the curriculum vitae of the subcontractor's staff. Communication between the subcontractor and the employers is inadequate. Employers are not aware of the off-the-job training arrangements and are not issued with a copy of the timetable or schemes of work by the subcontractor. Assessment is carried out by appropriately qualified work-based assessors in local nurseries. The subcontractor is responsible for internal verification, but work-based assessment sessions have not been observed. DBCTU was unaware of sanctions imposed on the subcontractor at the beginning of June by the awarding body, until the week before the inspection. New

learners are initially tested by DBCTU. The subcontractor is not aware of this and conducts its own initial tests. DBCTU does not routinely or regularly receive feedback from the subcontractor regarding learners' attendance, progress or achievement.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

44. A range of comprehensive equal opportunities policies and procedures are in place. These are corporate documents produced by DBC and clearly state its commitment to equal opportunities. The training manager of DBCTU is responsible for ensuring that these policies and procedures are implemented and monitored.

45. DBCTU promotes equality of opportunity through the use of appropriate recruitment literature, job advertisements and participation in careers events. Publicity materials such as the Race Equality Scheme are accessible on the council's website and available in large print, on tape and in several languages. Advertisements are designed to attract a range of applicants which reflects the social mix of the local population. DBCTU recognises the need to widen participation and attempts to break down the barriers surrounding stereotypical views.

46. DBCTU carries out some monitoring of equality of opportunity data. For example, information about applications, early leavers and learners on programme is analysed, in relation to identification and support of additional learning needs. Any data available from the management information system are used to monitor trends and support decision-making. However, the progression and achievement rates of different groups of learners are not monitored.

47. Learners are made aware of equality issues during the induction process and by the learners' handbook, which contains a simplified version of the equal opportunities policy. Equality of opportunity awareness is thoroughly pursued during progress reviews for business administration, and early years care and education learners, but engineering and construction learners are less able to discuss their rights and responsibilities, and how to deal with issues such as bullying and harassment in the workplace. Some employers have a good understanding of equality of opportunity and can recall the issue being covered by DBCTU. However, employers in engineering and construction do not have a clear understanding, even though guidelines are distributed and monitoring forms are used to assess their compliance.

48. Staff do not receive sufficient formal equal opportunities training. In-house corporate training is available, but is not accessed by staff from DBCTU because of a current emphasis on staff gaining additional training qualifications. Staff are updated about equality issues through NVQ units, information from awarding bodies and more informal mechanisms, but these are not recorded in any formal way or linked to staff appraisal and development. Equality of opportunity does appear as a regular agenda item for some minuted meetings, including internal verifiers' meetings and literacy, numeracy and key skills meetings.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

49. DBCTU has a well-established set of quality assurance procedures, most of which are clearly focused on the training process. The procedures are well written and clear, and are audited each year by the training manager. Observation of training does take place, but it does not form part of the quality assurance procedures. The views of learners and employers are systematically collected and analysed, learners' questionnaires are used at induction, during the programme, and on exit. Construction and motor vehicle resourcing issues were identified during 2001-02 and included in the self-assessment report, but have not been satisfactorily resolved.

50. The implementation of some quality assurance procedures is ineffective. For example, the procedure for monitoring health and safety in work placements is comprehensive, but it does not identify the health and safety concerns raised during the inspection; for example, the regular unsupervised use of a power tool that is on the prohibition list. The procedure for the control and evaluation of subcontractors did not identify significant issues regarding the management of one of the subcontractors. For example, employers do not receive timetables or schemes of work, work-based assessors are not observed and the subcontractor and DBCTU do not communicate regularly regarding learners' attendance, progress or achievement rates.

51. DBCTU has different internal verification arrangements to meet each programme's particular needs. Business administration verification is done internally by appropriately qualified staff. In construction and motor vehicle programmes, it is subcontracted out. For early years care and education, verification is the responsibility of the subcontractor which carries out the training. Internal verification meets awarding body requirements in business administration, construction and motor vehicle programmes. However, the awarding body for early years care and education has identified inadequacies in internal verification arrangements. A sanction, the removal of direct claims status, was imposed three months before the inspection.

52. DBCTU's self-assessment process did not accurately identify many of the strengths and weaknesses identified during the inspection. The self-assessment report did not adequately focus on achievement and standards, or the quality of education and training, and did not make sufficient use of quantitative evidence.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	17	4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- many good work placements

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates for NVQ learners
- poor resources for off-the-job practical training
- poor health and safety practices in some workplaces
- some weak assessment practices
- ineffective progress reviews

Achievement and standards

53. The standard of learners' practical work is satisfactory and in most instances meets the expectations of the employers. All practical training is carried out in the workplace. Learners acquire the practical skills to carry out a wide variety of work activities independently and to the standard expected by employers. Learners' assessment portfolios are neatly presented and well organised. However, portfolios do not include diverse sources of evidence. The evidence is made up of mostly witness testimonies with small amounts of photographic evidence.

54. Retention and achievement rates are poor on NVQ programmes. The retention rate for wood occupations NVQ learners for the past two years has been no higher than 23 per cent. Forty-five per cent of 2002-03 learners currently remain on the programme. Achievement rates on NVQ programmes for the past two years have also been no higher than 23 per cent. Achievement rates for the 2002-03 intake can be no higher than 45 per cent. The number of learners on foundation modern apprenticeships over the past two years has been too low to make valid judgements about retention and achievement rates. All nine learners who started on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes in 2002-03 remain in learning. However, most of these learners have only been on programme for four or five weeks.

55. Some learners make slow progress towards the achievement of their NVQs. Two learners working towards a level 2 NVQ have been on programme for 12 months, but have achieved only two units. These learners have generated insufficient evidence for other NVQ units.

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

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	9		4		3											
Retained*	0		0		1	33										
Successfully completed	0		0		1	33										
Still in learning	9		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											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	11		23		13											
Retained*	0		3		3	23										
Successfully completed	0		3		3	23										
Still in learning	5		3		0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

56. There are many good work placements in construction. Employers are mostly selected to meet the learners' NVQ requirements. Most employers offer a wide range of learning and assessment opportunities and encourage learners to work independently once they have acquired the necessary practical skills. A number of employers will accommodate learners who are not covering a sufficient range of work activities with their existing employer. This enables learners to gain experience in all appropriate work activities. Learners value the experience and training they receive in the workplace and quickly develop the confidence to carry out tasks.

57. Learners are given the opportunity to enhance their range of practical skills by adding units to their NVQ. This enables them to experience additional work activities carried out by their employer and become a more valued member of the workforce.

58. The standard of training and learning in construction is generally satisfactory. Trainers have up-to-date technical knowledge and use a variety of training methods and styles to stimulate learners. Learners are able to confirm their understanding through discussion, and written and practical demonstrations. In one training session, learners

were shown how to sharpen chisels and plane blades by the instructor and most were able to repeat this process satisfactorily without intervention from the trainer. All learners are actively involved during training sessions.

59. Arrangements to assess the learners' literacy and numeracy skills are adequate. Learners' support needs are identified and they are placed on programmes to reflect their level of literacy and, in particular, numeracy. Those learners identified as in need receive additional support, which they value. Although the delivery of this support has not been well planned in the past and has tended to be given on an informal basis, learners are now provided with attendance schedules.

60. Resources and facilities for off-the-job practical training are poor. The area provided at DBCTU's premises for practical demonstrations and simulated work activities is very small and will only accommodate individual learning sessions of limited content. Materials and equipment are also inadequate to meet the training needs of the learner. Learners are unable to practise the skills needed to meet industry and NVQ requirements. Although employers offer a wide range of work activities, learners do not always get the opportunity to cover all the required activities sufficiently in the workplace. Learners can move between employers to gain additional experience. However, this facility is limited and is dependent on employers' ability to accommodate additional learners and their work-experience requirements at the right time.

61. A number of workplaces have some poor health and safety practices. Some learners use power tools without appropriate training. One learner was allowed to use a powered circular saw unsupervised, having received training only from the employer. No record exists of this training having taken place. The machinery was listed on a health and safety appraisal form completed by DBCTU, as an item of machinery not to be used by learners. Health and safety monitoring in work placements for learners and employers is carried out every 10 weeks, but does not adequately ensure compliance with prohibitions on the use of power tools.

62. Some assessment practices in construction are weak. Most assessment decisions are based on witness testimonies. Site visits are planned for eight-week intervals, but some learners have not been visited in the workplace for three or four months. In one instance, a learner has only been visited on site for assessment once in the past 12 months. Some assessment records have been signed off by the assessor as having sufficient evidence to prove practical competence, even though there was no evidence for a number of practical tasks required for the NVQ. Other completed assessment records do not show the full range of specific activities required for the NVQ. Learners are not actively encouraged to continuously gather or record work-based evidence. Most do not record evidence of work activities. Learners are carrying out some work tasks competently and regularly, but this evidence is not assessed or acknowledged by assessors.

63. Learners' progress reviews are ineffective. Some learners do not consider the reviews helpful to their progress with the qualification. There are no agreed times for learners to achieve set targets. Reviews ask for the completion of two or three units by

the next review, but do not give details of what is required to complete these units. Reviews do not generally comment on how evidence can be generated from various sources and who should be involved. Although previously set targets are discussed, learners are not challenged if these have not been completed. Employers' involvement in the progress review is poor. Although the employer is asked to comment on the performance and attitude of the learner, they are not invited to record comments on the review sheet. Employers are not generally included in the review process until the review sheet has been completed, but are then asked to sign in agreement.

Leadership and management

64. Internal verification is satisfactory. Sampling plans and sampling records show adequate coverage of various aspects of sampling, including assessor observation. Documents used in the internal verification process do not currently meet all the new awarding body guidelines for internal verification. A new assessor in wood occupations has had training support needs identified and processed, but has no staff development plan yet.

65. Some detailed procedures exist for the quality assurance of health and safety, but these are not effectively implemented to ensure that good health and safety practices are maintained and reinforced in all work placements.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing**Grade 3**

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

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates for modern apprentices
- good work placements
- well-developed assessment practices
- good support for NVQ learners

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates for NVQ learners
- inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

Achievement and standards

66. The advanced modern apprenticeship programme in engineering is a recent addition to the provision at DBCTU and it is too early in the programme for learners to have completed any frameworks. Of the 2002-03 starters, all are still in training. A good proportion of learners also remain on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme. Since the 2000-01 learners began their programme, 86 per cent have successfully completed their frameworks or are still in learning. Learners develop new skills. However, progress towards NVQs and key skills qualifications is slow and no learners have achieved their technical certificate. The retention and achievement rates for learners working towards level 1 and level 2 NVQ fast-fit programmes are poor. There is an improving trend in retention and achievement rates on these programmes, with the retention rate increasing from 18 per cent in 2001 to 46 per cent in 2002 and with 73 per cent of the 2002-03 intake remaining on the programme so far. Achievement rates are following a very similar pattern.

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

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											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	6		1													
Retained*	0		0													
Successfully completed	0		0													
Still in learning	6		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	4		7		3											
Retained*	0		3		2	67										
Successfully completed	0		1		1	33										
Still in learning	4		2		1	33										

*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											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	11		28		17											
Retained*	0		13		3	18										
Successfully completed	0		12		3	18										
Still in learning	8		2		0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

67. DBCTU finds good work placements for its learners. The work placements are well resourced, provide training in new skills and give learners a wide range of assessment opportunities. Training and assessment opportunities in these work placements cover the requirements of the modern apprenticeship programmes.

68. There are good employment prospects for the learners. Sixty-six per cent of learners

who have been on motor vehicle programmes for more than three months are already employed. DBCTU has a formal arrangement with one employer to provide premises to help support practical training sessions. Some learners have access to their employers' incentive schemes through which they can earn extra money for the work they complete satisfactorily in the workshop. Learners have good health and safety awareness and follow the strict health and safety regulations in their work placements. Health and safety knowledge and awareness are an integral part of every NVQ assessment.

69. Assessment practices are well developed and of a very good standard. Staff understand the assessment process, which follows awarding body and NVQ assessment requirements. Learners also understand the assessment process and are assessed at appropriate stages in their training. Their progress is clearly displayed by the comprehensive records kept by the assessor. Records of successful background knowledge assessments, practical assessments and NVQ unit completion help them target any remaining work to be completed. The assessment records are so comprehensive that if a learner lost their portfolio, accreditation could still be claimed.

70. Support for NVQ learners is good. A weekly support session for all learners at DBCTU helps them to understand the requirements of their NVQ. The sessions include help with completing job cards, making the most of evidence from assessed tasks presented by witness testimony. They also cover action-planning and target-setting for future assessments and help with portfolio-building.

71. Arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills during their induction are satisfactory. Learners' support needs are identified and they are enrolled on the correct level of NVQ. Individual support for learners who have difficulty with literacy and numeracy helps them to compile their evidence and produce their portfolios. This action by DBCTU has resulted in a very good standard of portfolios being produced. The training programmes are designed to provide the opportunity, and the support needed, to progress from one level to the next. One learner who started on a level 1 NVQ programme progressed to a level 2 NVQ and now has just started an advanced modern apprenticeship.

72. If a learner cannot be trained or assessed for a particular NVQ unit at their current workplace, DBCTU will arrange to move them to another placement for a short period where they can complete that unit. When learners are near to the end of their training they can contact DBCTU if an assessment opportunity arises that needs to be observed by the assessor. The assessor will make every effort to observe the assessment.

73. Learners' progress reviews are regular and involve the learner, employer and DBCTU assessor. Progress is discussed and future action agreed. However, no specific timescales or targets are recorded, and the review does not record what action was agreed at the previous meeting.

74. Background knowledge sessions during off-the-job training are satisfactory, or good. The trainer shows knowledge, technical competence and up-to-date expertise, and promotes good working relationships which encourage learning. In some lessons,

learners are stimulated and show interest in the work, with good interaction between the group and trainer. However, in other lessons, learners have to copy large amounts of information from the overhead projector into their workbooks. The information is relevant and useful, but learners are not always stimulated by this method of delivery and some have expressed a wish for more practical off-the-job training. The range and quality of specialist training equipment and the space available for practical training at DBCTU are not adequate. DBCTU relies on the employers to provide most of the practical training.

75. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is inadequate. Employers are not given copies of the learners' training and assessment plans, and so are unable to organise work that would provide development and assessment opportunities. Employers are not aware of what is being taught at DBCTU and so cannot reinforce in the workplace what has been learnt off the job. The background knowledge being taught is not supported by any structured form of practical training that could be done in the workplace.

Leadership and management

76. Internal verification is thorough. The internal verification plan covers all aspects of the assessment process, and all learners and all the NVQ units are sampled. DBCTU has received very good external verifier reports, the most recent congratulating the assessor for thoroughness.

77. Most employers have a poor awareness of equality of opportunity and some employers do not have an equal opportunities policy. The learners' awareness of equality of opportunity is poor. DBCTU does not reinforce the employers' or learners' understanding of equality issues. Some training staff are not sufficiently informed about equality of opportunity and are not enthusiastic about discussing issues with employers or learners.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	28	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- particularly good individual support for learners
- good workplace experiences
- good progress reviews
- effective assessment practices

Weaknesses

- no weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

78. Business administration learners acquire good skills in their work placements and during their off-the-job training. Employers welcome learners from DBCTU because of the good record of success that has been established over the past few years. Employers encourage learners to become confident and skilful in a wide range of activities, and most learners respond to this very positively. Learners are quickly able to do basic, supervised administrative duties and most move on to work under their own initiative on a range of more complex tasks. For example, one foundation modern apprentice demonstrated organisational skills and the ability to communicate with council officers and councillors so effectively that they were offered a full-time position in the department after six weeks, and were nominated for a champion modern apprentice prize. Learners produce good-quality portfolios which are well organised and cross-referenced appropriately to NVQ units and key skills.

79. Achievement rates for NVQ learners are satisfactory. Of the 21 learners starting NVQs in 2000-01, 11 successfully completed their programmes. Five of the nine learners beginning foundation modern apprenticeships in 2000-01 successfully completed their frameworks. Many of the current learners have additional learning needs and receive extra support during their day release from work. Most of the more recent starters are making satisfactory progress with their units. Learners have regular portfolio-building sessions included in their off-the-job training, and these help them to achieve NVQ units more quickly. A recent notable development has been the successful introduction of additional qualifications, such as word-processing accreditation. Retention rates are satisfactory for modern apprenticeship and NVQ programmes.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		1													
Retained*	0		0													
Successfully completed	0		0													
Still in learning	1		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	10		9		9											
Retained*	0		1		6	67										
Successfully completed	0		1		5	56										
Still in learning	6		3		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											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	31		30		21											
Retained*	3		8		13	62										
Successfully completed	3		7		11	52										
Still in learning	12		6		0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

80. Very good individual support is provided for learners. Staff encourage learners to develop their personal and occupational skills, are very responsive to learners' needs and establish good relationships with them. Learners are confident enough to approach staff with personal issues. Learners highlight the supportive and non-judgmental attitudes of their trainers as being key factors which have motivated them to carry on and try to achieve their aims, often during difficult personal circumstances.

81. DBCTU organises good-quality work placements. Employers make learners feel welcome and valued in their jobs, and give them a range of duties and responsibilities to

broaden their experiences. Learners comment very favourably on their work placements. Learners make significant contributions to their employers' working practices, as well as developing their own skills and confidence. Several learners have gained permanent posts, particularly administrative posts, within local government offices. Employers are also aware of NVQ processes and portfolio requirements, and provide learners with a range of activities to enable them to gather required evidence. Trainers keep close contact with employers to help learners fulfil their potential and resolve any problems which might arise.

82. Learners receive good progress reviews. Trainers maintain regular weekly contact with their learners, checking and recording their incremental progress. Clear, time-related targets are set and agreed with learners and employers are routinely informed of any issues which may need workplace support. More formal, three-way reviews with trainers, learners and employers take place every three months. Previous targets are discussed, learners are asked to account for their progress, and realistic action plans are agreed. The interviewed learners said that the progress reviews encourage them to succeed.

83. Assessment practices are effective. Trainers plan assessment times carefully with learners and employers to make best use of work-related opportunities. A level 2 NVQ learner, for example, was observed being assessed while checking stationery requests from office staff, as part of regular weekly work duties. This learner attended off-the-job training two days later to complete elements of the unit which had not been completed at the work placement. Trainers regularly check their learners' understanding of work by observation and detailed questioning. Learners' progress is carefully monitored and recorded and trainers keep good, secure records. Internal verification procedures are in place and fully understood by staff. Trainers working towards their own assessor awards are observed assessing by experienced staff as a requisite for accreditation. External verification is carried out and recommendations are followed through as required.

84. Learners' needs are assessed during their induction. Their literacy and numeracy skills levels are established and matched to their course and level requirements. Additional support needs, such as for dyslexia or hearing impairment, are also identified at this stage. These needs are either met by the trainers themselves, or passed to the training manager for specialist support. Every learner has a private interview where an individual learning plan is agreed.

85. Learners receive satisfactory off-the-job training. Trainers are aware of their learners' needs and plan their sessions accordingly. Sessions are well structured and well resourced, and trainers use a variety of methods to engage their learners and stimulate their interest. Observed sessions were lively and well paced, with trainers varying activities to suit individual needs. Learners interviewed said they enjoy these sessions and find them worthwhile and relevant to their work. Learners say they benefit from peer support in group work during their off-the-job training, as well as the individual attention from the trainers. Arrangements for key skills development and assessment are effective, and key skills issues are regularly discussed between the business administration trainers and the key skills specialist.

86. Staff are vocationally experienced, with business-related backgrounds, and are qualified to assess learners' progress and portfolios. They are supported through staff development to acquire professional teacher training and assessor qualifications. Accommodation is generally satisfactory. Off-the-job training facilities have been updated with current, industry-standard software. All employers offer learners very realistic working environments. Monitoring of health and safety arrangements is inconsistent in some premises, but issues and concerns are given the utmost priority when they arise.

87. DBCTU provides educational and occupational opportunities for many learners who have poor academic achievement grades, or who have particular social needs. The business administration area gives such learners the opportunity to develop and achieve in a small, supportive environment. Learners are currently able to progress through three NVQ levels, or from foundation to advanced modern apprenticeship programmes. They are also able to acquire additional text and word-processing qualifications. Some learners progress through the NVQ levels, while others find opportunities for full-time employment while in their work placements.

Leadership and management

88. Business administration staff work well together and with other partners involved in programme delivery. Several quality assurance processes are well established, including internal and external verification and standardisation meetings. Feedback on learners and employers is also regularly sought, although some of these procedures are not formalised. A systematic peer observation scheme does not operate for all trainers, but new assessors are observed and given guidance and support. Trainers are aware of the progress made by their learners, but do not regularly use quantitative management information data to analyse, monitor and improve performance.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 5**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	10	5

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates for modern apprentices

Weaknesses

- poor arrangements for the support of learners with additional needs
- poor co-ordination of on-the-job and subcontracted training
- weak progress reviews
- some weak assessment practices
- some poor internal verification practices

Achievement and standards

89. Retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices in early years care and education have been good, at 100 per cent and 83 per cent, respectively, for 2000-01. All six learners from this intake remained on programme and five learners completed their frameworks. There was no intake of learners in 2001-02. The proportion of current foundation and advanced modern apprentices remaining on programme is likewise good at 100 per cent, although four of the 10 learners have only been on programme for a few weeks. Portfolio evidence is of the required standard.

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											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5				1											
Retained*	0				0											
Successfully completed	0				0											
Still in learning	5				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	5				6											
Retained*	0				6	100										
Successfully completed	0				5	83										
Still in learning	5				0	100										

*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

90. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. Learners' induction consists of three phases. DBCTU provides a five-day induction with a varied programme that includes health and safety, first aid, equal opportunities, an outline of the requirements of the learners' qualifications and a session on financial management. Learners find the financial management session particularly helpful. Employers provide learners with an induction to the workplace, during which they are familiarised with the routines of the nurseries in which they work, and given a clear explanation of their roles and responsibilities and fire evacuation arrangements. Induction at the college is particularly well planned and well delivered, and effectively uses a range of teaching methods and visual aids. Learners are attentive, actively engaged and confident enough to ask questions and contribute to discussions. Tutors skilfully and effectively reinforce important information and check learners' understanding.

91. Learners' progress and completion of frameworks has been delayed. Learners are aware of the requirements of their qualifications, but there are insufficient target-setting and assessment opportunities in some work placements. Learners are set realistic targets for the completion of activities during off-the-job training sessions and for the completion

of written evidence for their portfolios. There are no links between the targets set at off-the-job training sessions and work and assessment opportunities set by work-based assessors. This has led to a delay in learners' achievement.

92. DBCTU issues each learner with a textbook at the start of their training programme. Learners find that the textbook provides some useful information and supports their learning. All learners are aware of their roles and responsibilities and are clear about what is expected of them. However, many learners are not aware of the NVQ appeals procedures.

93. Work placements are satisfactory. Experienced and appropriately qualified staff support learners and supervise their activities and tasks.

94. Support is poor for learners with additional learning needs. No arrangements currently exist for the support of learners with additional learning needs. Where such needs are identified there is no record of any initiatives on individual learning plans. The training team does not have a clear understanding of who provides support to learners with additional learning needs.

95. Some co-ordination of training is poor, with employers not made aware of learners' off-the-job training arrangements. Employers do not receive copies of individual learning plans, or off-the-job training timetables. They cannot plan for learners to practise the new skills that they have learnt in off-the-job training. Employers do not receive feedback regarding learners' attendance, progress or achievements, and can only assume that learners are attending training when they are released from work, and that they are progressing satisfactorily.

96. Some assessment practices are weak. Too much reliance is placed on written evidence. Learners spend considerable amounts of time completing assignments, and find this a burden. They are not given time while at work to produce evidence for their portfolios. There is insufficient assessment in the workplace. For example, one learner working towards a level 3 NVQ in early years care and education who has been on programme for 13 months has not yet been assessed at work, and another level 2 learner has only been observed five times in 13 months. Assessments made by a trainee are not countersigned by a qualified assessor.

97. The college's internal verification system is effective for the written work and assignments, but its internal verification of work-based evidence and assessment is poor. There is no ongoing internal verification of learners' work-based evidence. Internal verification takes place only when portfolios are complete, so assessors and learners receive no feedback on the appropriateness and sufficiency of the evidence until a completed portfolio is submitted. No arrangements exist to support trainee assessors, or for the observation of work-based assessors. The awarding body has identified inadequacies in internal verification arrangements and imposed a sanction of the removal of subcontractor's direct claims status three months before the inspection.

98. Learners are required to complete a number of initial assessment tests at both

DBCTU and the college before they start their training programme. This is a burden for learners and presents a risk of repetition and unnecessary duplication. Before learners start a training programme they receive half a day of occupational testing which requires them to work in a nursery alongside qualified staff. Staff give verbal feedback on the performance of each learner, but there are no set criteria for staff to base their judgements on. This feedback is not shared with the subcontractor, or used to aid the design of individual learning plans.

Leadership and management

99. Learners benefit from well-planned, off-the-job training which is delivered by well-qualified occupationally competent staff. Trainers organise training so that information is delivered in a logical way. Learners are clear about what they are required to do to complete their framework and qualifications. They are supervised at work by well-qualified staff. There is insufficient communication between those involved in supporting learners, and the co-ordination of support is poor.

100. The management of the provision of additional support is unsatisfactory. No formal arrangements exist to support learners who have additional learning needs.

101. The management of progress reviews is weak. Progress review meetings do take place regularly, but workplace supervisors are not involved. Discussions take place between learners and the reviewer, who is not occupationally competent. Workplace supervisors are asked to read and sign a review sheet that details the discussions, but their views, comments and suggestions are not canvassed. There have been occasions when supervisors have not agreed with the comments written on the review sheet, but they have not felt able to challenge them. The review sheet has no space for learners' or supervisors' comments. Learners are not set specific and measurable targets for achievement. Progress reviews make no reference to health and safety. Information and feedback relating to learners' attendance, achievement and progression at off-the-job training are not considered during progress reviews.

102. The management of assessment is weak. Assessment is often not carried out when appropriate, and opportunities for learners to demonstrate their vocational competence are insufficient. No links are made between the subcontractor's assessment of a learner's background knowledge and understanding, and their performance at work as assessed by work-based assessors. Written evidence is relied on too much.

103. Management of the target-setting process is unsatisfactory. Learners are set measurable targets by their trainers during off-the-job training, but progress reviews do not contain enough target-setting. Workplace supervisors are not included in learners' progress reviews.

104. Arrangements for internal verification are poor. Internal verifiers do not visit work placements. Work generated by learners in their work placements and assessments carried out by work-based assessors are not internally verified until a completed portfolio is submitted.

