

INSPECTION REPORT

West Berkshire Training Consortium

24 October 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

West Berkshire Training Consortium

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. West Berkshire Training Consortium (WBTC) is a limited company, with charitable status which has provided work-based learning in the local community for the past 20 years. WBTC operates from an office in Newbury town centre. The company trains foundation and advanced modern apprentices, learners working on national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes, and foundation learners. At the time of inspection, there were too few learners in four areas of learning to be inspected. Areas under the scope of inspection were engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, and hairdressing.
2. WBTC has 22 permanent staff and three freelance staff members. There is a board of three directors, two of whom represent branches of the local Chambers of Commerce. The third, the operations director, has day-to-day responsibility for the company. The operations director has a management team of three senior programme managers, who are responsible for quality assurance and overseeing areas of learning. There are also two other programme managers who are responsible for training within areas of learning, as well as key skills training across the vocational sectors. These managers are supported by six full-time and three freelance training staff, a business development manager also responsible for recruitment, a health and safety officer and nine administration staff.
3. WBTC funds its training provision through Berkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and a European Social Fund (ESF) initiative. The area is mainly rural, and sparsely populated, although just over half the population reside in the principal towns of Newbury, Thatcham, Tilehurst and Calcot. The area is characterised by significant levels of prosperity, based on high incomes and low unemployment. Given the good availability of work, the unemployment rate is 1 per cent, compared with 1.7 per cent for the whole of Berkshire, and 1.5 per cent for the Southeast.
4. West Berkshire has a minority ethnic population of 1.6 per cent, compared with a national average of 9.1 per cent. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above, is 56.1 per cent, compared with a national average of 47.9 per cent.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

5. There are 16 learners on engineering and manufacturing training programmes. Ten advanced modern apprentices and two foundation modern apprentices are on mechanical and electrical engineering programmes. Two advanced modern apprentices and one foundation modern apprentice are on a handcrafted furniture programme and one advanced modern apprentice is on a vehicle body repair programme. Most learners are employed by companies in the West Berkshire area. Off-the-job training is provided

by four colleges and workplace assessments are carried out by college assessors, one workplace assessor and a subcontracted assessor.

Business administration, management & professional

6. WBTC has 11 foundation modern apprentices, 12 advanced modern apprentices and five NVQ learners on business administration and accounting programmes. Nineteen learners are on an ESF programme which aims to attract learners who currently are not involved in any form of training or education in the workplace. Most are following NVQ programmes at level 3 or 4 in management, others are following level 2 or 3 NVQs in administration, or NVQs at level 3 or 4 in accounts. All learners are employed. Learners are recruited from the local areas through promotions at local careers fairs, Connexions or directly from schools and employers. All the learners are employed with a variety of companies in the area, including garden centres, housing associations and accountants. Progress reviews are carried out every 12 weeks and the assessments take place in the workplace every four to six weeks. Learners on the foundation modern apprenticeship programmes attend the WBTC training centre for one day each week, every other week, for training and background knowledge for key skills and technical certificate.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

7. There are 20 learners on work-based learning programmes in retailing, sales, customer service and distribution and warehousing. There are 18 foundation modern apprentices and two NVQ learners. One NVQ learner is completing her training as part of an ESF initiative. Most learners are employed and are recruited to WBTC's training programmes directly through their employers. A small number of learners are recruited via Connexions, or through other contacts. These learners are not employed and are found appropriate work placements by WBTC, before beginning their learning programmes. In common with all programmes, the recruitment process includes an initial assessment and induction which are carried out by WBTC's staff. WBTC's assessors visit learners in the workplace every four to six weeks. During these visits the assessors carry out training, assessment of learners' NVQ and key skills units, action-planning and quarterly, formal progress reviews. All learners are also given the opportunity to attend fortnightly off-the-job training and workshop sessions at WBTC's training centre in Newbury.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

8. WBTC offers a satisfactory range of courses in hairdressing. There are 51 learners. Six learners are advanced modern apprentices, 35 are foundation modern apprentices and 10 are NVQ learners. All learners are employed, in a variety of salons. WBTC has 21 work-based assessors in the salons used for learning and assessment. There are two full-time assessors and a programme manager who is also the internal verifier.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	24
Number of learner interviews	90
Number of staff interviews	38
Number of employer interviews	20
Number of subcontractor interviews	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	12
Number of partner/external agency interviews	4
Number of visits	2

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

9. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, leadership and management, equal opportunities, engineering, business administration and retailing are good. Hairdressing, and the arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

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

Retailing, customer service & transportation	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

Hairdressing & beauty therapy	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

10. Retention rates are good for advanced and foundation modern apprentices in engineering. In 2001-02 the retention rate for advanced modern apprentices was 75 per cent and in 2002-03 the retention rate for all modern apprentices was 100 per cent.

11. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are good. In 2001-02, three of every four learners completed their full apprenticeship frameworks. All of the advanced modern apprentices who started in 2002-03 are still on programme. Many learners have the opportunity to achieve additional accredited qualifications which are outside the apprenticeship framework requirements, but which enhance their programme. Engineering learners acquire very good levels of practical skills.

12. Achievement rates are very good for the foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners in administration. In 2000-01 and 2001-02, 67 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, of foundation modern apprentices completed the full apprenticeship framework. Learners achieve a very good level of skills, and progress from modern apprentices to management roles with WBTC and their employers.

13. Learners' work is of a particularly good standard in retailing and customer service. Learners demonstrate a good level of literacy and numeracy. Their portfolios contain a wide range of assessment evidence, including verified workplace paperwork, case studies, personal statements, witness statements, work-based observations, and professional discussions. Employers report that learners are able to do their job better as a result of completing their learning programmes.

14. Hairdressing learners acquire a very good standard of practical work at NVQ at level 2, which prepares them for assessment. Learners' abilities are challenged in the salons. Employers provide learners with a wide variety of resources, for practical skills and for background knowledge work.

15. Most learners in retailing are making satisfactory progress towards their learning goals, but 20 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are making slow progress, and have passed their planned completion date. However, achievement is improving for 2002-03 learners. For NVQ learners starting their programmes in 2002-03, 53 per cent have already achieved their NVQ.

16. Retention and achievement rates for business administration advanced modern apprentices are poor, with only 13 per cent completing the whole framework in 2000-01

and none in 2001-02. WBTC identified this as a weakness in subcontracted provision and changed subcontractors for the delivery of the accountancy programme, with the intention of fully integrating and delivering the key skills at WBTC alongside nationally recognised qualifications. This has made a significant improvement in 2002-03 and the achievement rate is currently 11 per cent, with 55 per cent of learners still on programme.

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	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Total	0	0	4	1	1	0	0	6

17. The operational management of engineering/manufacturing training programmes is very good. Programmes are designed to meet the needs of learners and employers and allow a flexible approach to learning. WBTC has excellent relationships with employers and subcontractors. WBTC's staff ensure that the best training opportunities are provided for learners, both on and off the job. WBTC's staff are receptive to learners', employers' and subcontractors' views; improvements to training programmes have been made as a result of feedback and discussion.

18. Learners in engineering acquire excellent practical skills during their training. Many are working in companies which produce very good-quality products. Supervisors ensure that learners observe the demanding standards in all aspects of their work. Learners produce good-quality work of which they are very proud.

19. WBTC uses particularly good work placements for engineering. WBTC's staff have built excellent working relationships with these companies, many of which have been associated with the provider for many years. Placements are well matched to learners' needs and career aspirations. Employers are very supportive and demonstrate a very good commitment to good-quality training. Employers give learners the opportunity and encouragement to continue with their training after completion of their apprenticeships.

20. Assessment practices in engineering are very good. Assessments are planned and visits are regular. Supervisors are actively involved in the process. Learners have a good understanding and knowledge of the assessment process.

21. Engineering learners are not set sufficient, clear targets at progress reviews. Targets are not specific, manageable, assessable or realistic and are difficult to identify. The outcomes of previously recorded targets are difficult to identify at the following reviews. Targets are not written in a way which makes them clear for learners, and are usually contained within other text.

22. In business administration the assessors use a good range of assessment methods to

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meet the needs of the learners. The portfolios of evidence contain excellent examples of learners' work and the written work is of a very good standard. Trainers and assessors give good guidance and feedback to the learners. The key skills programmes delivered by WBTC are effectively integrated with the generation of NVQ evidence.

23. Effective interactions between employers, trainers and the business administration learners promotes learning and development. The lessons observed during inspection were effectively planned. The trainers' good, up-to-date knowledge and understanding enable all learners to further develop their knowledge, skills and understanding of both administration and accountancy.

24. Learners' support needs are accurately identified and learners are on the correct level of qualification. The training co-ordinators visit learners frequently and provide good support; in many cases they also provide a good level of support to employers. Most employers are very supportive of their learners and offer study and revision time to learners for nationally recognised accountancy examinations. WBTC pays for audio revision tapes and extra revision courses, to enable other accountancy learners to achieve their qualifications.

25. Individual training is planned effectively for retailing and customer service learners. Individual learning plans are comprehensive for all learners and contain detailed results from initial assessment. There is effective target-setting for learners. All targets are clearly linked to the NVQ and key skills training.

26. WBTC provides good-quality off-the-job training sessions for all learners. These are scheduled on a rolling programme, and learners can join at any time. All sessions are held at the WBTC training centre in the centre of Newbury, by qualified and experienced WBTC staff. These sessions include training topics relevant to the NVQ and key skills qualifications, and use a variety of teaching methods. If learners are unable to attend the off-the-job training for any reason then the assessors or trainers will visit them in the workplace to conduct the training.

27. Progress reviews for learners in retailing and customer service are particularly good. Reviews take place every three months. They are planned in advanced, detailed on each individual learning plan, and are conducted according to this schedule. Progress reviews are conducted in the workplace and involve the learner, their employer, and their WBTC assessor.

28. Learners value the support they receive from WBTC. They have a good rapport with WBTC's staff and are able to discuss personal matters. WBTC's staff have good working relationships with employers. They co-ordinate learner support well between them. Any learner with identified additional learning needs receives individualised additional support from WBTC's staff, which incorporates additional workplace visits and additional and appropriate learning materials. WBTC also offers a weekly evening drop-in workshop session for all learners.

29. WBTC has a satisfactory staff to learner ratio. All training, supervisory and

assessment staff are experienced, occupationally competent, and appropriately qualified. Learning materials are sufficient to meet learners' needs. The WBTC training centre in Newbury is suitable for the off-the-job training, with satisfactory resources, including 15 networked computers. Resources in all areas are satisfactory. In engineering the standard of available plant and machinery is variable.

30. Hairdressing learners are placed with a wide range of very good work-placement providers. The quality of salons ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Over 50 per cent of salons are of very good quality. WBTC has good links with the employers, which are appropriate to the learners' needs. Employers provide good support for learners in the workplace. They are committed and keen to see learners receive a very good standard of practical training.

31. Hairdressing learners have access to a wide range of good on-the-job training opportunities. Employers and assessors are very well qualified and experienced. Most employers have work-based assessors, many of whom are used for training. On-the-job training is not always formally planned, or linked to the background knowledge training from WBTC. Learners' self-confidence and practical skills benefit from attending regular training.

32. Hairdressing learners receive an effective and thorough induction. There is a well-planned programme of activities. Learners receive a clear overview of the training programme, a good introductory pack, a comprehensive training guide and details of how they may contact staff. The training programme, disciplinary and grievance procedures, health and safety, equal opportunities and learners' entitlements are all explained well. The learners interviewed found the induction day very interactive, informative and enjoyable.

33. Target-setting is poor in hairdressing. Short-term target-setting on action plans is ineffective. The progress review is carried out with the learner and their employer; it does not focus sufficiently on learners' achievements and progress. Reviews are not detailed enough and contain few constructive action points for learners. Reviews do not identify insufficient progress and targets not achieved.

34. Assessment practice is weak in hairdressing. WBTC has more than sufficient work-based assessors, but is not always able to carry out assessments when learners are ready. There is insufficient effective planning and assessment strategy. Observations carried out by assessors are rarely recorded and used as evidence. Learners receive feedback from assessors informally, but there is no formal record.

35. Many hairdressing learners make slow progress. A lot of assessment takes place towards the end of the programme. Not enough assessment is carried out, and learners are not always aware when formal assessment is taking place. Accreditation of prior learning is not used effectively to identify when learners are fully competent at tasks. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor.

36. Arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills are adequate. All

learners have a satisfactory initial assessment, which includes a skills scan. This initial assessment is used to ensure that learners start on a programme appropriate to their ability, experience, aspirations, and work placement. Two additional members of staff recently qualified to deliver literacy, numeracy and language skills support. This support is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

37. WBTC carries out good strategic planning, which involves all staff. Each year at the annual general meeting (AGM), staff review the previous year's business plan. The business aims and objectives are revised and rewritten during the day. All staff are well aware of their role in helping the company to achieve its objectives. Most organisational changes occur after extensive consultation with staff.

38. Staff are developed and deployed extremely well. WBTC has developed its management structure appropriately and effectively as the company has grown. The best use is made of the staff's skills and experience and they are given excellent support by the senior managers to adapt to their new roles and responsibilities. Each year there is a generous training budget and an overall training plan which includes all company staff.

39. WBTC has a satisfactory approach to the development of learners' key skills and their literacy and numeracy skills. All learners receive an initial assessment at the start of their training. A key skills co-ordinator has recently been appointed and a strategy for the provision of key skills training is being developed. There are now generic schemes of work for key skills training sessions to replace those of the vocational teams, and where possible these are linked to the vocational training. Individual support is provided where appropriate and a drop-in session is available for all learners at WBTC's premises one evening each week.

40. WBTC is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in all aspects of its work. It has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which all learners, staff, employers and subcontractors clearly understand. Staff are clearly aware of their individual roles and responsibilities in monitoring equal opportunities throughout the training programme. All staff have training about the implications of current legislation for the training environment. Good support is given to employers to uphold the WBTC policy.

41. WBTC is very effective in promoting equality and diversity throughout all programmes, training and partnerships. Learners and employers have a simplified version of the equal opportunities policy. Induction packs for learners are easy to understand and accessible. Learners have easy access to grievance and complaints support. The WBTC website has a confidential point of contact for learners' complaints. Learners access the website with an equality and diversity development card which has an email address. WBTC regularly uses marketing opportunities and collaborative projects to promote diversity.

42. WBTC makes reasonable arrangements to ensure physical access to the training

centre and work-placement providers. The ground floor of the training centre is fully accessible. WBTC liaised effectively with an employer to ensure that a learner with a wheelchair had full access to the building and workstation.

43. Strategic management of widening participation is very good. This is achieved through the WBTC equality and diversity action plan. The results of data analyses are used effectively to make decisions about recruitment, retention and achievement and the destination of leavers. The representation of learners with disabilities, learners from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the achievements of learners with additional needs are considered for all programmes. The action plan is reviewed annually and targets are set to improve a number of priority areas, including widening participation. The most recent marketing strategies for recruitment have resulted in a 50 per cent increase in male learners and a 4 per cent increase in learners from minority ethnic backgrounds.

44. WBTC has particularly clear, comprehensive and well-designed systems and procedures which cover all the key processes of the training programmes. For example, there are procedures for initial assessment, internal verification, and the observation of training. Copies of the procedures are held centrally in a manual, and in addition all staff have a personal company guide containing those policies and procedures which relate to their own particular job role.

45. WBTC reacts promptly and effectively to learners' feedback. The provider has a well-established formal system for collecting feedback from learners and employers. The questionnaire is particularly well designed, it is easy to complete and the response rate from learners is very good. A wide range of useful questions is asked.

46. Internal verification is satisfactory and includes the observation of assessors, as well as verification of learners' portfolios.

47. WBTC does not have a system which allows it to effectively evaluate the quality of subcontracted training. WBTC has a service level agreement with each subcontractor and an audit is used to check that each subcontractor has the necessary quality assurance mechanisms in place. This check is carried out by a personal visit from a WBTC manager. However, the audit does not allow WBTC to make judgements about the effectiveness of the subcontractors' quality assurance arrangements.

48. Although WBTC often takes effective action to improve the quality of its training programmes it does not use action-planning sufficiently. Strategies are often not accompanied by action plans to support their implementation. Not all aims of the business plan are action-planned. Although the provider has introduced many improvements to the provision of key skills training, there are no targets for the full implementation of the new key skills policies and procedures.

49. The most recent self-assessment report was compiled in October 2003. Staff, learners and employers were all involved in its production. It accurately identified some of the strengths and weaknesses found at inspection.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic planning involving all staff
- excellent development and deployment of staff
- very good implementation of equal opportunities policy
- particularly good promotion of equal opportunities
- effective strategies to widen participation
- particularly clear and well-designed systems and procedures
- good action taken in response to learners' feedback

Weaknesses

- no established system to quality assure subcontractors
- insufficient use of action-planning

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good retention rates for advanced modern apprentices
- good achievement and retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- good operational management of training
- excellent practical skills acquired by learners
- very good work placements
- good assessment practices

Weaknesses

- no clear targets set at progress reviews

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good achievement of NVQs and foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks
- good-quality assessments
- good training to meet the individual needs of learners and employers
- effective ongoing support

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- particularly good standard of learners' work
- effective planning of individual learning
- good off-the-job training
- particularly good progress reviews
- good additional support to meet individual needs

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Strengths

- very good standard of learners' practical work at level 2 of the NVQ
- good work placements
- good range of on-the-job training opportunities
- thorough induction

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting
- weak assessment practice
- slow progress by most learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT WEST BERKSHIRE TRAINING CONSORTIUM:

- 'the staff's positive attitude - 'they looked at my qualifications not my wheelchair'
- 'assessors and trainers are cool'
- good atmosphere at training centre
- being trained individually at work -'earning and learning will get me on in life'
- the very supportive staff -'the team go that extra mile'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK WEST BERKSHIRE TRAINING CONSORTIUM COULD IMPROVE:

- the time and space available to work quietly
- the number of drop-in sessions
- the time available for off-the-job training

KEY CHALLENGES FOR WEST BERKSHIRE TRAINING CONSORTIUM:

- continue to improve retention and achievement rates for all learners
- make more use of detailed action plans and target-setting
- improve the system to quality assure subcontracted provision

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good strategic planning involving all staff
- excellent development and deployment of staff
- very good implementation of equal opportunities policy
- particularly good promotion of equal opportunities
- effective strategies to widen participation
- particularly clear and well-designed systems and procedures
- good action taken in response to learners' feedback

Weaknesses

- no established system to quality assure subcontractors
- insufficient use of action-planning

50. WBTC carries out good strategic planning involving all staff. Each year at the AGM, staff review the previous year's business plan. The business aims and objectives are revised and rewritten during the day. All staff are well aware of their role in helping the company to achieve its objectives, and most organisational changes occur after extensive consultation with staff. The strategic plan is clear, well written and reflects the company's mission statement. It includes a thorough examination of the threats and opportunities over the forthcoming year. Short- and long-term goals are identified. The board of directors maintains close contact with the company's activities and one director is involved full time in the day-to-day management of the company. WBTC has made good use of the LSC and ESF funding to support its training programmes and enable investment in resources, such as new computers. Sound strategic planning ensures that WBTC manages its resources effectively. The directors set and monitor a realistic budget for the company. Financial reserves are used appropriately to support the company's cash flow when required.

51. Staff are developed and deployed very well. WBTC has created a supportive environment which encourages staff to develop existing and new skills. Each year there is a generous training budget and an overall learning plan which includes all company staff. Some of the training is also available free of charge to employers. The appraisal system is used effectively to identify staff's existing skills, areas for development and aspirations. Staff are continuously evaluating and improving the appraisal process. They are actively encouraged to gain new qualifications, and over 80 per cent of training staff have a nationally recognised teaching qualification.

52. WBTC has developed its management structure appropriately and effectively as the

company has grown. The best use is made of staff's skills and experience and they are given excellent support by the senior managers to adapt to their new roles and responsibilities. WBTC pays particular attention to staff welfare and workloads. There is excellent teamworking and good internal communication through formal and informal meetings. The board of directors meets every two months and there are also regular team and management meetings. The team meetings are also used as standardisation meetings for NVQ assessment.

53. WBTC has a satisfactory approach to the development of learners' key, literacy and numeracy skills. All learners receive an initial assessment at the start of their training. A key skills co-ordinator has recently been appointed and a strategy for the provision of key skills training is being developed. There are now schemes of work for key skills training sessions and, where possible, these are linked to the vocational training. Individual support is provided where appropriate and a drop-in session is available for all learners at WBTC's premises one evening a week. However, it is too early to judge the effect of these new initiatives on key skills achievement. Pass rates for key skills external tests are satisfactory for those learners whose key skills training is provided directly by WBTC. There are inconsistencies in the collection and analysis of pass rates for key skills. WBTC is working towards an integrated database which will collate data from the centre and the centre's subcontractors.

54. Management information and data are used satisfactorily by WBTC's managers. Programme managers present reports about achievement and retention at the regular management meetings. Data are used effectively to monitor WBTC's performance against its contractual targets.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

55. WBTC is committed to uphold and promote equal opportunities through all aspects of its work. All WBTC's staff share and practise this commitment. Equality of opportunity is the responsibility of the operations director and the board of directors, who provide strong leadership and management. The provider has a comprehensive well-implemented equal opportunities policy which all learners, staff, employers and subcontractors clearly understand. Staff are clearly aware of their individual roles and responsibilities in monitoring equal opportunities throughout the training programme, particularly through the progress review system.

56. Learners are very positive about their induction which is thorough, interactive and reflects all aspects of equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity is an agenda item on staff meetings at all levels and staff regularly share good practice in promoting equal opportunities. Staff are effectively involved in the equality and diversity action plan. They contribute to, and are updated on, performance against targets. All staff have training in the implications of current equal opportunities legislation for the training environment. WBTC has a committed training budget to support training in disability awareness. Good support is given to employers to uphold WBTC's policy or customise the model of practice for their own use.

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57. WBTC very effectively promotes equality and diversity in all programmes, training and partnership. Learners have a simplified version of the policy documents with clear explanations. Employers receive a similar, clearly written document. Induction packs for learners are similarly clearly written and accessible. Progress reviews ensure that all learners are being treated fairly and reinforce learners' knowledge of equality and diversity. The recently introduced complaints and harassment lifetime credit card gives learners the confidence to complain. WBTC's website has a confidential point of contact for learners' complaints. WBTC regularly uses marketing opportunities to promote diversity. A number of WBTC's learners are used in publicity materials for the LSC and WBTC bulletins to employers to demonstrate positive images in gender and disabilities.

58. The WBTC equality and diversity action plan allows very good strategic management of equal opportunities. It monitors the progress of the company's key performance indicators. Data are effectively used to make decisions about recruitment, retention and achievement and the destination of learners as well as disability and ethnicity issues and the achievements of learners with additional support needs in all programmes. This is reviewed annually and equality and diversity action plan targets are set to improve a number of priorities, including widening participation. Events are organised by WBTC to increase participation of under-represented groups. Recent recruitment figures have seen a 75 per cent increase in male learners. An analysis of learners' performance at interviews revealed that male learners were not performing so well as female learners. As a result, all prospective learners receive additional guidance materials. Within the past year the number of minority ethnic learners has risen to 6 per cent of total learners, compared with a Berkshire average of 1.9 per cent. WBTC effectively uses community networks to participate in collaborative projects to widen participation. Positive action is taken to ensure that learners with specific needs are supported, for example the health and safety examination is now available in oral format. The team has devised effective strategies to support male learners having difficulty writing narratives and case studies. There are numerous examples of positive action taken by WBTC to give personal and pastoral support to help learners access training programmes.

59. WBTC makes reasonable arrangements to ensure physical access to the training centre and work-placement providers. The ground floor of the training centre is fully accessible. WBTC liaised effectively with an employer to ensure that a learner with a wheelchair had full access to the building and workstation.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

60. A quality assurance manager has overall responsibility of the quality assurance of WBTC's training programmes, and another member of the senior management team is responsible for the subcontracted training. WBTC has particularly clear, comprehensive and well-designed systems, procedures and paperwork which cover all the key processes of the training programmes. Copies of the procedures are held centrally in a manual, but all staff have a personal company file which contains those policies and procedures which relate to their own particular job role. The procedures are very well written and filed in a logical sequence. The procedures are evaluated and updated annually, after consultation with staff. Clear and effective auditing arrangements ensure the quality of

learners' personal files.

61. WBTC reacts promptly and effectively to learners' feedback. It has a well-established formal system for collecting feedback from learners and employers. The questionnaire is particularly well designed so that it is easy to complete and the response rate from learners is very good. WBTC collects useful and meaningful data about the quality of its training programmes. WBTC also collects feedback following inductions, off-the-job training and from reviews and interviews with learners. There are many examples of improvements implemented as a result of this feedback. For example, changes to induction programmes, schemes of work and training rooms have all resulted from learners' requests.

62. Internal verification is satisfactory and includes observation of assessors as well as verification of learners' portfolios. Team meetings are used for standardisation activities, but until very recently, lead internal verifiers from different areas of learning did not meet to share good practice. Although there is a lead internal verifier for each programme area, there is no overall co-ordinator to take responsibility for improving the quality of assessment.

63. WBTC has no system to allow effective evaluation of the quality of subcontracted training. A service level agreement between WBTC and each subcontractor and an audit are used to check that each subcontractor has the necessary quality assurance mechanisms in place. However, the audit does not allow WBTC to make judgements about the effectiveness of these arrangements. Although WBTC reacts promptly to issues as they arise, there is an over-reliance on learners identifying problems, rather than these being prevented by routine monitoring. Data are not used sufficiently to compare the performance of the various subcontractors, or to identify trends. Subcontracted provision is not always discussed at the management meetings. Formal monitoring takes place twice a year, but is too superficial to effectively assure the quality of the training provided by the subcontractors. WBTC has recognised this weakness and is planning changes in its quality assurance arrangements. At the time of inspection new systems and procedures were still at the developmental stage.

64. Although WBTC often takes effective action to improve the quality of its training programmes, there is insufficient use of action-planning. Strategies are often not accompanied by action plans to support their implementation. Not all aims of the business plan are action-planned. The company has no targets for the full implementation of the new key skills policies and procedures. Areas for improvement are identified, but effective action is often delayed. WBTC recognised serious issues with the key skills training provided by some subcontractors, but action taken to resolve these was too slow. A few learners who had achieved their NVQ were still working towards their key skills qualifications up to a year later. Recently, programme areas have set targets to improve achievement and retention, but there is no action plan to help ensure that these targets are achieved.

65. The most recent self-assessment report was compiled in October 2003. Staff, learners and employers were all involved. The report accurately identified many of the

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strengths and weaknesses identified at inspection. WBTC has produced a very detailed annual development plan from the self-assessment report. The plan reports on the progress of actions taken to resolve previous weaknesses and action plans for the programme teams, and is reviewed every six months.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	16	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good retention rates for advanced modern apprentices
- good achievement and retention rates for foundation modern apprentices
- good operational management of training
- excellent practical skills acquired by learners
- very good work placements
- good assessment practices

Weaknesses

- no clear targets set at progress reviews

Achievement and standards

66. Retention rates are good for advanced and foundation modern apprentices. In 2001-02, the retention rate for advanced modern apprentices was 75 per cent and in 2002-03, the retention rate for all modern apprentices was 100 per cent. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are good. In 2001-02, 75 per cent of learners completed their modern apprenticeship framework. All of the advanced modern apprentices who started in 2002-03 are still in training.

67. Learners acquire excellent practical skills during their training. Many learners are working in companies which produce very good-quality products. Supervisors ensure that learners observe their demanding standards in all aspects of their work. Learners produce good-quality production and project work and take great pride in their work. Standards of teaching, training and learning are good, and learners make good progress. Learners are able to work with minimum supervision and demonstrate initiative. A significant number of learners from previous years are now employed by their former work placements, in supervisory positions.

68. Many learners have the opportunity to achieve additional accredited qualifications which are outside the apprenticeship framework requirements, but which enhance their programmes. In the past year, learners have achieved additional NVQs, and nationally recognised vocational qualifications.

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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		8		3											
Retained*	0		2		0												
Successfully completed	0		0		0												
Still in learning	6		6		1												

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

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

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

Quality of education and training

69. WBTC uses very good work placements. WBTC's staff have established excellent working relationships with these companies, many of which have been associated with the provider for many years. WBTC ensures that the programmes it offers meet individual learner's needs and those of the employers. Individual programmes are designed which cater for technician and craft learners. Subcontractors are chosen carefully to ensure up-to-date training, access to suitable resources and convenient

location. Employers are very supportive and demonstrate an excellent commitment to good-quality training. Learners are regularly reviewed at work and employers/supervisors routinely take part and contribute enthusiastically and effectively to the process. Employers give learners the opportunity and encouragement to continue with their training after completion of their apprenticeships. Some learners have progressed to much higher-level courses.

70. Assessment practices are good. WBTC recognised the weakness of workplace assessments, and introduced various initiatives to improve this aspect of their training programmes. WBTC has trained and accredited one supervisor to assessor standard who now effectively carries out all assessments, mainly by observation, for the seven learners at the company. WBTC has also employed a subcontract assessor from a partner provider and other assessments are carried out by college staff. Assessments are planned and regular. Supervisors are actively involved in the process and recognise that learners are now making good progress. Learners' have a good understanding and knowledge of the assessment process and are able to collect and match evidence to particular units and elements of their NVQs. Portfolios contain a good range of evidence including a good use of photographs.

71. Resources are satisfactory. The facilities at one college delivering the furniture course include machine workshops, a craft workshop and standard teaching rooms. Learners bring and use their own tools as part of their learning experience. In some cases learners have access to a range of good-quality machine tools, but others have access mainly to older plant and machinery. All trainers and supervisors have a wide range of industrial experience and assessors are suitably qualified.

72. No clear targets are set at progress reviews. Training co-ordinators carry out regular reviews of progress at the workplace. Targets are not specific, manageable, assessable or realistic, and are difficult to identify. The outcomes of previously recorded targets are difficult to identify at the next review. Targets are not written clearly for learners and are usually contained within other text. Target outcomes are also included in other text and in various sections of the progress review document. The current system does not encourage learners to take responsibility for their own improvement and progress, as they do not routinely refer to the review document. There is a reliance on the assessment process to identify progress.

73. Some engineering/manufacturing learners are identified as having literacy and numeracy needs. Currently, four learners need additional support. WBTC offers drop-in learning sessions one evening each week. Help is also given by arranging extra visits to learners at work, additional key skills support, and assistance with written work for NVQ portfolios.

Leadership and management

74. The operational management of engineering/manufacturing training programmes is very good. Programmes are designed to meet the needs of learners and employers and allow a flexible approach to learning. WBTC has excellent working relationships with

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employers and subcontractors. WBTC's staff regularly communicate with all parties both formally and informally. Many visits to employers and subcontractors are made in addition to contractual requirements. WBTC has also organised employer visits to subcontractors to discuss quality issues. WBTC has recently introduced a subcontract audit system that is now an integral part of the service level agreement. WBTC's staff ensure that the best training opportunities are provided for learners, both on and off the job. There are many examples of learners being transferred to other subcontractors which offer more relevant training. WBTC's staff are receptive to learners', employers' and subcontractors' views, and improvements to training programmes have been made as a result of feedback and discussion. WBTC's staff work extremely well as a team and routinely share good practice.

75. The self-assessment report did not identify many of this area's strengths as identified by inspectors. The weaknesses in the self-assessment report are historical and no longer have any effect on training. The self-assessment report did not comprehensively describe the provision and the strengths and weaknesses identified in it.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	47	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement of NVQs and foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks
- good-quality assessments
- good training to meet the individual needs of learners and employers
- effective ongoing support

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks

Achievement and standards

76. Achievement rates are very good for foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners in administration. In 2000-01 and 2001-02, 67 per cent and 60 per cent, respectively, of foundation modern apprentices completed the full foundation modern apprenticeship framework. For 2002-03, there are no completions to date. The retention rates on the foundation modern apprentices have also steadily increased over these three years. In 2001-02, 66 per cent of learners on NVQ programmes achieved the qualification; in 2002-03, 11 per cent have already achieved the NVQ and 69 per cent are still in training. Learners in administration produce a very good standard of work and are well motivated. They achieve very good skills and some progress from modern apprentice level to management roles within WBTC or their company.

77. The retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices are poor, with only 13 per cent completing the whole framework in 2000-01 and none completing in 2001-02. Advanced modern apprentices account for 32 per cent of all learners in administration. WBTC identified this weakness and changed subcontractors for the delivery of the accountancy programme, working towards fully integrating and delivering the key skills at WBTC, together with the vocational qualifications. This has made a significant improvement for 2002-03 and the completion rate is currently 11 per cent, with 55 per cent of learners still in training.

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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	20		3		15											
Retained*	9		2		4												
Successfully completed	3		0		2												
Still in learning	11		0		1												

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	13		10		18											
Retained*	3		9		12												
Successfully completed	0		6		12												
Still in learning	10		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																	
NVQ Training	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	35		3													
Retained*	9		2														
Successfully completed	4		2														
Still in learning	24		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

78. The assessors use a good range of assessment methods to meet the needs of learners, including direct observation, witness testimony, professional discussion and product evidence. The portfolios of evidence contain excellent examples of learners' work and written work is of a very good standard. Trainers and assessors give good guidance to the learners about how to structure portfolios and present evidence. The key skills programme delivered by WBTC is now effectively integrated with NVQ

evidence in administration and the portfolios of evidence are well presented. The assessors give detailed constructive feedback to the learners. Good progress charts are designed by the team of administration assessors to monitor all learners' progress with the NVQ, key skills and technical certificates. WBTC is up to date on all NVQ requirements, ensuring that all team members are fully informed of the relevant issues each month.

79. Effective interactions between the employers, trainers and learners promote learning and development. The lessons observed during inspection were effectively planned and the trainers demonstrated good, up-to-date knowledge and understanding of their subjects. The ratio of trainers to learners is good, and learners particularly value the individual coaching at the employers' offices. On- and off-the-job training sessions are logged on the learners' workshop report and short-term targets are set for every learner.

80. All learners on the business administration programmes are in good work placements. Learners are offered a wide range of work activities and plenty of opportunities to develop and practise the skills and competence required for their NVQ. The learners develop a very good level of office or accountancy skills and many progress from level 2 NVQs to level 4.

81. Initial assessment is used well in developing the comprehensive individual learning plan. The initial assessment identifies the learners' preferred learning style and work style, and trainers use this information effectively. Arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills are adequate. Prior learning and experience are used and recorded on the individual learning plan. The training co-ordinators complete workshop reports at the end of every training and coaching session.

82. Learners' support needs are accurately identified and they are allocated to the correct level of qualification. They remember the induction, and receive sufficient information to enable them to start their programmes efficiently and effectively. WBTC chooses employers carefully. The employers provide learners with challenging and stimulating learning experiences, and are actively involved in the progress review process. Training co-ordinators visit learners frequently and provide good support; in many cases they also provide a good level of support to employers. Most employers are very supportive to their learners and offer study and revision time to those taking vocational examinations. Two learners will have additional support at the end of their programme to enable them to achieve their key skills qualifications and complete their frameworks. The support is not limited to training and work-related matters, but extends to learners with personal problems.

83. The training resources and accommodation are satisfactory. However, depending on the number of learners attending off-the-job training, some accommodation is cramped and learners do not have sufficient desk areas to work effectively. The two training sessions observed were graded as good.

Leadership and management

84. Employers and WBTC's staff communicate well, ensuring that learners are given every opportunity to meet the requirements of their qualification in the workplace. Most aspects of the programme are well managed. Staff receive an annual and mid-term review of their training requirements. There are many examples of staff arranging specific training in response to learners' identified workplace development needs. The staff have good opportunities for development, they all attend relevant courses and many are working towards formal qualifications. All the staff have a detailed development plan. The internal verification processes are satisfactory. Good practice in assessment is shared frequently. Learners have a good awareness of equality of opportunity issues and WBTC's policies and procedures. Staff are effectively involved in the self-assessment process. WBTC accurately identified a strength and a weakness, but some strengths were over-emphasised. Good records are kept of where learners work and of their progress towards NVQs and key skills qualifications. WBTC does not systematically evaluate and initiate prompt action for the subcontracted provision of the programme.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	20	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- particularly good standard of learners' work
- effective planning of individual learning
- good off-the-job training
- particularly good progress reviews
- good additional support to meet individual needs

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners

Achievement and standards

85. Learners' work is of a particularly good standard. They demonstrate a good level of literacy and numeracy. Their portfolios contain a wide range of assessment evidence, including verified workplace paperwork, case studies, personal statements, witness statements, work-based observations, and professional discussions. All evidence is cross-referenced and clearly related to NVQ and key skills requirements. All portfolios are well organised. Employers report that learners are more efficient and competent at their jobs as a result of completing their learning programmes.

86. Some learners make slow progress. Most learners are making satisfactory progress and are on target to complete their qualification in the set time. However, 20 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are making slow progress, and have passed their planned learning end date. In all of these cases the learners remain on their programmes and have had their end date re-targeted, in one case up to six times.

87. Historically, modern apprenticeship completion rates were poor. Achievement rates have improved markedly over the past two years. For the 2000-01 starters, 32 per cent completed the advanced modern apprenticeship, 34 per cent completed the full foundation modern apprenticeship, and 36 per cent achieved their NVQs. All learners who remained on programme during this period achieved their qualification. There has been an improvement for 2001-02 starters: the achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices is currently 55 per cent and for NVQ learners, achievement rates have increased to 46 per cent. Fifty-three per cent of NVQ learners starting their programmes in 2002-03, have already achieved their NVQ.

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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					16											
Retained*					5											
Successfully completed					5											
Still in learning					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	18		20		15											
Retained*	4		15		5											
Successfully completed	2		11		5											
Still in learning	13		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																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	17		13		14											
Retained*	9		7		5											
Successfully completed	9		6		5											
Still in learning	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

88. Individual learning is effectively planned. Individual learning plans are comprehensive for all learners and contain detailed results from initial assessment. These results include previous qualifications, accreditation of prior learning, aspirations, details of identified working and learning style, and any support arrangements. Target-setting is effective for most learners. Medium- and long-term targets are detailed on the individual learning plan at the start of the programme, and these are updated and amended as the

learning progresses. Short-term targets are set throughout the learning programme at each assessor visit to the workplace and at each off-the-job training session. These short-term targets are then followed up at the learners' next meeting with their assessor. All targets are clearly linked to the NVQ and key skills qualifications.

89. WBTC provides good-quality off-the-job training sessions for all learners. These are scheduled on a rolling programme, and learners can join the cycle at any time. All sessions are held at the WBTC training centre in the centre of Newbury, and are conducted by qualified and experienced WBTC staff. Learners are required to attend every two weeks. These sessions include training topics relevant to the NVQ and key skills. Good-quality schemes of work are used to plan and conduct the training sessions, which involve a variety of teaching methods. Off-the-job portfolio-building workshops are also held, where assessors are able to provide additional coaching. If learners are unable to attend the off-the-job training for any reason then the assessors or trainers will visit them in the workplace to give training.

90. Progress reviews for learners are particularly good. Learner progress is reviewed formally every three months. The progress reviews are planned in advance, detailed on each individual learning plan, and are conducted according to this schedule. Reviews are conducted in the workplace and involve the learner, their employer, and their WBTC assessor. Learners' progress towards their qualification is discussed, together with their progress at work, and the practical skills that they are developing. Employers are made aware of learners' progress. Learning opportunities at work are identified during the formal progress review, and relevant projects are set. During reviews, on-the-job training is also co-ordinated between the learner, their employer and WBTC assessor, and linked back to the achievement of learning goals.

91. Learners value the support they receive from WBTC. There is a good rapport between learners and WBTC's staff, and learners are able to discuss personal matters. There are good working relationships between employers and WBTC's staff and employers and learner support is well co-ordinated between the two. Any learner with identified additional learning needs receives individual additional support from WBTC's staff, which incorporates additional workplace visits and additional and appropriate learning materials. WBTC offers a weekly evening drop-in workshop session for learners, where any aspect of their learning plan can be given attention.

92. The staff to learner ratio is satisfactory. All staff are occupationally competent, and relevantly qualified. Learning materials are sufficient to meet learners' needs. The WBTC training centre in Newbury provides a suitable setting for the off-the-job training, with satisfactory resources, including 15 networked computers.

93. Assessments are carried out satisfactorily. They are scheduled in advance, and learners and employers are aware of when assessment will be taking place. A wide range of assessment methods is used. Achievements towards individual NVQ units are accredited throughout learners' programmes as relevant work is completed.

94. Learners have access to an appropriate range of courses and programmes. All

learners have a satisfactory initial assessment, which includes a skills scan. This initial assessment is used to ensure that learners begin a programme appropriate to their ability, their experience, their aspirations, and to their job of work.

Leadership and management

95. Staff are given many opportunities for self-development. They are actively encouraged to obtain additional qualifications and to improve their knowledge. WBTC has an effective staff appraisal system. Staff members in this area of learning have been involved in the self-assessment process, and value the input that they have into WBTC's continuing improvement.

96. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of equal opportunities and how specific issues could affect them in the workplace. Equal opportunities issues are discussed in progress reviews, and WBTC has recently introduced a helpline and website which are available to all learners. Employers also confirm that WBTC's staff reinforce equal opportunities issues with them, during visits to the workplace.

97. A comprehensive internal verification strategy and programme, is being carried out to a satisfactory standard. Learners have a good understanding of the internal verification process and the role of their internal verifier. Standardisation meetings are planned and conducted regularly. WBTC regularly asks learners and employers for their feedback on programme quality.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	51	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good standard of learners' practical work at level 2 of the NVQ
- good work placements
- good range of on-the-job training opportunities
- thorough induction

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting
- weak assessment practice
- slow progress by most learners

Achievement and standards

98. Learners have a very good standard of practical work at level 2 of the NVQ. Their abilities are challenged in the salons. Employers provide them with a wide variety of resources for practical and background knowledge work. Learners develop very good levels of practical skills that prepare them for assessment, but assessment does not always take place when learners are ready. Learners produce good standards of work in assignments; they are thoroughly professional in their approach to their NVQ and the standard of practical work they carry out.

99. Historically, retention and achievement has been poor. However, WBTC has identified slow progress, and actions to improve retention and achievement have included a learners at risk scheme, one month's pre-work trial and improved key skills training support. This has resulted in an improvement in retention for 2002-03. Retention and achievement rates are now satisfactory.

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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		4		11											
Retained*	0		3		3												
Successfully completed	0		1		2												
Still in learning	4		2		0												

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	29		36		32											
Retained*	0		4		17												
Successfully completed	0		4		14												
Still in learning	20		12		3												

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
NVQ Training	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	12		7		9											
Retained*	0		2		5												
Successfully completed	0		0		4												
Still in learning	7		3		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

100. Learners are employed in a wide range of very good salons. The quality of salons ranges from satisfactory to excellent, and 50 per cent are of very good quality. WBTC has good links with employers. Employers are appropriate to suit learners' needs and provide good support for them in the workplace. Employers also provide learners with a thorough induction at the beginning of employment. Many employers have worked with WBTC to enable their staff to gain the skills assessor award.

101. Learners have access to a good range of on-the-job training opportunities. Employers and assessors are very well qualified and experienced. Most employers have work-based assessors, many of whom are used for training. Although learners receive very good training this is not always formally planned or linked to the background knowledge training provided by WBTC. Learners have access to a very wide range of training opportunities and training is often carried out weekly in the salons. Learners' self-confidence and practical skills are improved by attending regular training. Salons arrange regular visits from technical advisers concerning specific products. Good use is made of individual salons to cover specialist units of the NVQ.

102. Learners receive an effective and thorough induction. There is a well-planned programme of activities, including quizzes, exercises and general, open discussions. Learners receive a clear overview of the training programme, a good introductory pack, a comprehensive training guide and details of how they may contact staff. The training programme, disciplinary and grievance procedures, health and safety, equal opportunities and learners' entitlements are all explained well. Learners interviewed found the induction day very interactive, informative and enjoyable, and they have a good recall of their induction programme. Learners generally have a good comprehension of the requirements of their training programme and understand the training and support arrangements.

103. Resources are satisfactory. All staff have vocational and assessment qualifications and knowledge. Learners who have additional learning needs are identified and supported. One member of staff has recently qualified to deliver literacy, numeracy and language skills support. This support is good. Learners have access to individual support and evening drop-in workshops. There is good support for learners with dyslexia. WBTC has produced a range of learning materials for learners to use as self-study packs. However, there is insufficient progression from the level 2 NVQ to level 3.

104. Target-setting is poor. The short-term target-setting on action plans is ineffective. Learning plans do not fully reflect the individual training to be given by WBTC or employers. Learning plans are not always used as a basis for progress reviews, or further action-planning. WBTC's assessors carry out progress reviews on a quarterly basis. Some assessors' visits are more frequent, according to the learners' needs. The progress review is carried out with the learner and their employer. Progress reviews do not focus sufficiently on learners' achievements and progress. They are not sufficiently detailed and contain few constructive action points for learners. Reviews do not identify slow progress and targets which learners have failed to achieve. Most review information consists of statements, not recommended actions. In some instances, progress reviews are not used to update individual learning plans.

105. Assessment practice is weak. WBTC uses a significant number of work-based assessors, but they are not always able to carry out assessments when learners are ready. The provider has no effective assessment strategy. Assessment planning is inadequate. Records of observations carried out by assessors are rarely recorded and used as evidence. Learners receive feedback from assessors informally, but there is no

formal record of feedback to learners. Learners are not always aware of how much progress they have made towards their qualification, or when assessment is taking place.

106. Most learners make slow progress. Accreditation of prior learning is not used effectively to identify learners' competence. For example, some learners have been working part time with their employers for long periods and have carried out tasks competently, but assessment has not taken place until six months into the programme. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is poor in some instances.

Leadership and management

107. Leadership and management are satisfactory. WBTC has previously identified some of the weaknesses identified during inspection. Following programme evaluation there has been a number of recent changes, including improved induction and the work preparation programme, which allows learners to try out the programme. It is too early, however, to properly assess recent reversals in trends. WBTC supports salon owners to have appropriately qualified staff as assessors, who have recently been trained in the new standards. Communications within the programme area are satisfactory, regular meetings take place and are minuted. WBTC has a commitment to equality of opportunity; learning packs are produced on cream paper for those learners with dyslexia. Learners are fully aware of the NVQ appeals procedure and equal opportunities policy. Most internal verification is carried out in the workplace, both observation of assessments and portfolios are part of the internal verification process. Sampling plans are completed and updated regularly. However, internal verification has not identified the inconsistent assessment practices in NVQ programmes. Some assessors are unaware of the slow progress of some learners in completing NVQ units. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process. The process and the report did not identify all the weaknesses of the programme and overstated some of the strengths.