

REINSPECTION REPORT

Positive Outcomes Limited Reinspection

03 December 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

POSITIVE OUTCOMES LIMITED REINSPECTION

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

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Positive Outcomes Limited Reinspection

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Positive Outcomes Ltd (Positive Outcomes) was established in 1997 as a private training organisation to offer mainly government-funded training to young people in Mansfield and the surrounding areas of Nottinghamshire. The company trains foundation and advanced modern apprentices in business administration and management, retailing, customer service and transportation, and information and communications technology (ICT). The company has offices in Mansfield but all of the training is provided on employers' premises. At the time of the previous inspection there were too few learners working towards qualifications in ICT and this area was not included in the reinspection.
2. The two managing directors who founded the company are jointly responsible for its day-to-day management. One managing director is responsible for the overall management of the company, while the other has responsibility for the co-ordination and development of training. In addition to the two directors, the company employs 17 members of staff including two full-time office staff and two business development managers. There are four full-time and seven part-time assessors. The assessors also carry out progress reviews with the learners every 12 weeks.
3. Positive Outcomes funds its training primarily through Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The economy of the district is dominated by the service industries, accounting for around 71 per cent of employment. The 2001 census shows that 1.7 per cent of the population in Mansfield are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. There are 94 advanced modern apprentices and 21 foundation modern apprentices, most of whom are on business administration programmes. There are 30 advanced modern apprentices working towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3 in management and seven advanced modern apprentices working towards an NVQ at level 4 in management. All learners are employed at the time of their recruitment to the training programmes. All of the training and assessment takes place in the workplace. Positive Outcomes' staff visit learners in the workplace to provide off-the-job training and carry out the assessments. All assessors hold, or are working towards, appropriate assessor qualifications. Positive Outcomes reviews each learner's progress every 12 weeks.

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Retailing, customer service & transportation

5. There are 57 advanced modern apprentices and 39 foundation modern apprentices, most of whom are on customer service programmes. There are 11 advanced modern apprentices and seven foundation modern apprentices on call handling programmes. There are also three advanced modern apprentices and seven foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs in warehousing and distribution. A further four advanced modern apprentices and two foundation modern apprentices are on retailing programmes. All learners are employed at the time of their recruitment to the training programmes. All of the training and assessments take place in the workplace. Positive Outcomes' staff visit learners in the workplace to provide off-the-job training and carry out the assessments. All assessors hold, or are working towards, appropriate qualifications. Positive Outcomes reviews each learner's progress every 12 weeks.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learner interviews	35
Number of staff interviews	22
Number of employer interviews	13
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of visits	14

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The ALL's inspection in December 2002 found that the training in business administration and management, and retailing, customer service and transportation was unsatisfactory. The leadership and management and the arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality assurance were also unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

GRADES

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

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

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	Inspection	Reinspection
Business administration, management & professional	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Inspection	Reinspection
Retailing, customer service & transportation	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. **Retention rates are good.** Of the 99 learners who started a modern apprenticeship in business administration or management since 2002-03, 89 per cent are still in learning. For learners on retailing, customer service and transportation programmes, 88 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 67 per cent of foundation modern apprentices are still in learning. Current learners are making steady progress.

8. Achievement rates are improving and are satisfactory. Of the advanced modern apprentices in retailing, customer service and transportation who started in 2001-02, 25 per cent have completed their framework, and a further 33 per cent are on target to complete shortly. Many of these are awaiting key skills external testing. Of the 13 business administration foundation modern apprentices who started in 2001-02, five have completed their framework and a further three are awaiting key skills external tests.

9. Overall, standards of training are satisfactory. Learners are working well to industry standards and produce good portfolios of evidence. Many learners have complex and responsible job roles. Learners often gain promotion during their learning programme.

Quality of education and training

10. **Workplace learning opportunities are good in business administration and management.** Workplace supervisors have a wide range of occupational experience. Employers are committed to helping the learners succeed, and they provide good training in the workplace. They also ensure that learners develop and practise a good range of skills.

11. **Off-the-job training is good in retailing and customer service.** Training advisers provide good individual coaching. They have strong vocational backgrounds and are well qualified. They draw extensively on their own experience to develop the learners'

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skills. Assessors give good guidance and detailed explanations about what evidence to collect.

12. **There is good additional support for learners.** Assessors give individual support in order to improve the learners' understanding of their course. Assessors spend whatever time is necessary for learners to make adequate progress with their portfolios, and provide further guidance and advice on evidence requirements. Assessors are flexible and will schedule appointments to suit individual learners' needs.

13. **Short-term action plans are used particularly well to help learners develop their skills.** Learners are visited at least every month for individual coaching, for assessment and to set targets for the next period. Targets are clear, realistic and promote the development and practice of new skills. Learners' targets are directly related to their job roles and responsibilities. The short-term action plans are complemented by quarterly progress reviews, which record overall progress towards achievement of learning goals.

14. **Learning resources are particularly good** and include paper-based, e-learning materials and CD-ROMs. The learning materials are attractive, well designed, easy to understand and make good use of graphics and technology. A website has been created as a base for learning resources and as a communication system so that all learners can share information. Learners are well motivated and work hard to achieve their learning goals. Training advisers encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and development.

15. **Key skills training is an integral part of the vocational training.** All learners have an initial assessment of their key skills, and training advisers provide support as necessary. Learners are given the opportunity to sit mock key skills external tests. Learners are making satisfactory progress towards the achievement of key skills and this has improved since the previous inspection.

16. **There are some weak assessment practices in business administration.** There is insufficient use of observations, professional discussions and witness testimonies. Supervisors are often not involved effectively in the assessment process. The assessments are not systematically planned for all learners.

17. Assessment in retailing, customer service and transportation has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. Assessment planning is clear and detailed. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods, including direct observation, assessment of product evidence, questioning and the use of pre-set written questions to confirm learners' knowledge and understanding.

18. **There is ineffective planning of individual learning for business administration learners.** The results of the initial assessment are not used effectively to plan an individualised programme of learning. Arrangements for training and assessment are not clearly identified in individual learning plans. Plans for most learners identify the target qualification and key skills but do not set clear milestones. Too many learners have difficulty in reflecting adequately on their overall progress.

19. **Progress reviews are weak in retailing and customer service.** Reviews are carried out with no input from the employer. Very few employers add comments to the review paperwork or make a contribution to evaluating the learners' progress. There is insufficient recording of the progress which learners have made in their job roles and activities, and insufficient linking of this to individual units of the NVQ.

20. **There is insufficient recording of learners' progress in retailing, customer service and transportation.** There is an holistic approach to assessment and often learners and assessors do not recognise units which are very close to completion. Learners are unable to identify what needs to be done to achieve their qualification.

Leadership and management

21. **The management style is very responsive and effective.** Managers take an active role in all aspects of the business. There is a strong focus on the needs of the learners throughout the company. Managers have strong vocational backgrounds and understand the issues faced by staff and learners. The directors maintain a range of appropriate external links. They have a particularly productive working relationship with another training provider in the area, and they meet to share ideas. Their working relationships with employers are positive and well managed.

22. **Appraisal is thorough and includes a detailed review of each member of staff's performance over the previous year.** The results of the appraisal process contribute to the business plan.

23. **Internal communication is very good.** There are monthly meetings which all staff attend. Part-time staff have these meetings included in their hours of work. The meetings have a comprehensive standard agenda and there is a good system for recording the minutes and monitoring the resulting actions.

24. **There is particularly thorough financial monitoring and planning.** Monthly cash flow and management reports are discussed at senior management meetings. Quarterly trial balances are calculated and Positive Outcomes always has accurate information about its financial position. There is careful monitoring of programme performance against financial expenditure to ensure value for money. The close financial monitoring has allowed carefully planned and successful expansion of the business. Particular attention is paid to ensuring that there are sufficient staff to meet the learners' needs.

25. **Resources are managed effectively.** Good resources are available in the areas of learning. Most staff are appropriately experienced and qualified to support learners in their practical and background knowledge work. There are annual checks on health and safety and equal opportunities in employers' workplaces.

26. **A clear strategic plan is shared with all staff** and staff take an active interest in the performance of the company. Marketing staff are set and achieve challenging targets for the recruitment of new employers.

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27. **The development of e-learning is particularly good.** Extensive use is made of research, including other providers' experiences and young people's views during the design stages. The website is particularly attractive, fun and easy to use. Assessors can make appointments to see learners by accessing their diaries online. The site contains well-designed and attractive learning materials which are linked to units of the NVQs.

28. Staff development is satisfactory. There is an annual learning plan and training events are held every month. Topics during 2003 have included equal opportunities, updating of assessor qualifications, technical certificates and standardisation of assessments. Part-time staff must attend training and this time is included in their working hours. Two of the most recently appointed business administration assessors do not have the vocational experience required by the awarding body.

29. The strategy for the support and development of learners' literacy, language and numeracy skills is satisfactory. The company has an agreement with a specialist company to provide this support. Assessors are working towards key skills qualifications and provide individual support to learners. Mock key skills tests are used effectively to prepare learners to take the external tests.

30. The management and promotion of equal opportunities has improved since the previous inspection. All learners receive equal opportunities information and individual training as part of their induction. All employers now sign a service level agreement which includes a commitment to promoting equal opportunities and meeting the requirements of legislation. Monitoring of equal opportunities at employers is carried out annually.

31. The marketing strategy effectively identifies a number of groups that are either under-represented on learning programmes or may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination. There is an imbalance of men and women on many of the learning programmes. Companies with large numbers of men or employees from minority ethnic groups are being actively targeted. Sponsorship of motorbike racing is being used to raise the profile of training activities among young men.

32. Monitoring of equal opportunities data is based on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. There is insufficient use of data to monitor trends in recruitment, achievement or retention.

33. Since the previous inspection the office manager has continued to develop the new quality assurance system with guidance from an external consultant. The new system has now been fully implemented, remedying the weakness found at the previous inspection. There is a well-designed system of quality assurance observations as well as file and paperwork audits. These are being used effectively, although it is too early to judge the full impact of the new quality assurance arrangements.

34. **Action plans are used effectively to improve the learning programmes.** Improved use of learner milestones and short-term targets has contributed to a better experience

for learners.

35. **The management information system is used effectively.** Appropriate and useful reports are produced monthly and quarterly for discussion at senior management meetings. The data are used to identify trends in recruitment and retention rates. The progress of all learners who have reached the end of their planned length of stay without achieving their full qualification is monitored monthly.

36. The internal verification systems and procedures have been revised since the previous inspection and these are now satisfactory. Internal verification takes place regularly and is adequately planned. It effectively identifies weaknesses in assessment practice and action plans are used to rectify these.

37. The system for the collection and use of feedback from employers and learners is now satisfactory. The company responds quickly and effectively to individual problems. So far insufficient data have been collected to allow identification of trends. The new questionnaires contain a good range of appropriate questions and learners and employers are given good opportunities to express their views freely.

38. **There is insufficient quality assurance of the planning of individual learners' training.** There is no quality assurance policy or procedure for the use of either the occupational skill scan or the key skills diagnostic test during initial assessment. Too often the individual learning plans do not include information about how the gaps in knowledge and competence identified by initial assessment will be filled during the training programme. There is insufficient matching of the training provided by employers to the requirements of the NVQ.

39. **There is no systematic monitoring of learners' achievements.** There are no targets for achievement for groups of learners following the different learning programmes. There has been insufficient evaluation of the improvements made in achievement. There is no system for the monitoring of the progress of different intakes across different programmes of learning. The performance of assessors in helping learners to achieve their qualification is not measured.

40. The self-assessment report is based on the previous inspection. It was updated shortly before inspection. It did not identify some of the key weaknesses found at inspection.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very responsive and effective management style
- particularly thorough financial management and planning
- good development of e-learning

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- very effective action to improve the quality of training programmes
- good use of management information system

Weaknesses

- insufficient quality assurance of planned individual learning
- insufficient systematic monitoring of achievements

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good and improving retention rates
- good learning opportunities in the workplace
- particularly good learning resources
- very effective short-term action-planning

Weaknesses

- some weak assessment practices
- ineffective planning of individual learning

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good and improving retention rates
- good off-the-job training
- good additional support for learners

Weaknesses

- weak review process
- insufficient recording of learner progress

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

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

Strengths

- very responsive and effective management style
- particularly thorough financial management and planning
- good development of e-learning
- very effective action to improve the quality of training programmes
- good use of management information system

Weaknesses

- insufficient quality assurance of planned individual learning
- insufficient systematic monitoring of achievements

41. The senior managers have a relaxed and informal management style. Managers take an active role in all aspects of the business. The managing directors have performed nearly all roles within the company and both have a small caseload of learners to assess. If, as a result of staff turnover, a learner has to have a change of assessor, senior managers take over the assessment. This ensures that no learner ever has more than one change of assessor during their training. Great care is taken to ensure good working relationships between assessors and learners. There is a strong focus on the needs of the learners throughout the company. Managers have strong vocational backgrounds and understand the issues faced by staff and learners. Staff appreciate the support and guidance they receive from the senior managers and their ideas and suggestions for improvement are always taken seriously. There are particularly good working relationships between staff at all levels. Staff are well motivated and enthusiastic about their work. There is a well-established appraisal system. Appraisal is thorough and includes a detailed review of each member of staff's performance over the previous year. Positive Outcomes has recently altered the timing of appraisal so that the results can more easily contribute to the business plan. Internal communication is very good. There are monthly meetings which all staff attend. Part-time staff have these meetings included in their hours of work. The meetings have a comprehensive standard agenda and there is a good system for recording the minutes and monitoring the resulting actions. Positive Outcomes' directors maintain a range of appropriate external links. They regularly attend events run by the local LSC and meetings of the local provider network. They have a particularly productive working relationship with another training provider in the area, and they meet to share ideas. Their relationships with employers are positive and well managed.

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42. There is particularly thorough financial monitoring and planning. Monthly cash flow and management reports are discussed at senior management meetings. Cash flow reports are produced to cover the period of funding and these are comprehensive and detailed. Quarterly trial balances are calculated and Positive Outcomes always has accurate information about its financial position. There is careful monitoring of programme performance against financial expenditure to ensure value for money. The close financial monitoring has allowed carefully planned and successful expansion of the business. Particular attention is paid to ensuring that there are sufficient staff to meet the learners' needs. The financial monitoring is linked to a clear strategic plan. Strategic planning has improved since the previous inspection when it was a weakness. The strategic plan is shared with all staff and staff take an active interest in the performance of the company. Good resources are available in the areas of learning. Marketing staff are set and achieve challenging targets for the recruitment of new employers. These successes are celebrated within the company. Positive Outcomes has been particularly accurate in predicting recruitment and achievement and last year achieved 87 per cent of its contract. It is currently exceeding its contract requirements for 2003-04.

43. Positive Outcomes is developing a particularly good e-learning website. It allows learners to create their own personalised virtual office space. The company has taken a particularly well-planned approach to the development of the website. Extensive use was made of research, including other providers' experiences and young people's views during the design stages. The website is particularly attractive, fun and easy to use. It is currently being piloted with a small group of learners to gain feedback to contribute to further development. Learners can access a message board, send messages, keep a journal, keep a diary and visit chat rooms to share information and concerns. They can also listen to music and get the latest news online. Assessors can make appointments to see learners by accessing their diaries online. The site contains well-designed and attractive learning materials which are linked to units of the NVQs. The use of the website is monitored and there is a caretaker system to ensure that there is no posting of offensive material.

44. Staff development is satisfactory. There is an annual learning plan and training events are held every month. Topics during 2003 have included equal opportunities, updating of assessor qualifications, technical certificates and standardisation of assessments. Part-time staff must attend training and this time is included in their working hours. New staff have a mentor and are appraised at three and six months before entering the cycle of annual appraisal. Positive Outcomes has designed a chart which identifies the training required for any role within the company. However, two of the most recently appointed business administration assessors do not have the vocational experience required by the awarding body. These staff were assessing learners but in both cases internal verification had identified problems with their interpretation of the NVQ standards, and action is planned to remedy this situation.

45. Positive Outcomes has a satisfactory strategy for the support and development of learners' literacy, language and numeracy skills. Currently, none of the learners have additional learning needs. However, the company has an agreement with a specialist company to provide support should the need arise. Assessors are working towards key

skills qualifications and provide individual support for learners. All learners have an initial assessment of their key skills. The company uses mock key skills test effectively to prepare learners to take the external tests. It has taken part in a pilot scheme to provide online key skills testing and this has been greatly appreciated by learners.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

46. Positive Outcomes has an equal opportunities statement, policies and a marketing strategy which includes action to widen participation. The policies were last updated in September 2003 and now include a policy which has been written to meet the specific needs of learners. The policies are clear and easy to understand. A new leaflet explains learners' rights and responsibilities. All staff have received recent equal opportunities training. The company now has an equal opportunities champion with responsibility for developing employees', learners' and employers' knowledge and understanding of the issues involved.

47. Positive Outcomes has taken action to improve the management and promotion of equal opportunities in its learning programmes and these are now satisfactory. The company used an external consultancy to help them to draw up an action plan to remedy the weaknesses found at the previous inspection. All learners receive equal opportunities information and individual training as part of their induction, and some training advisers make excellent use of learning materials and assignments to raise learners' awareness. They also receive information about grievance and disciplinary procedures, as well as how to make a complaint or appeal against an assessment decision. However, some learners still have only a superficial understanding of their rights and responsibilities. All employers now sign a service level agreement which includes a commitment to promoting equal opportunities and meeting the requirements of legislation. A new review process and recording paperwork has been introduced as part of the pastoral reviews carried out by training advisers. There is separate paperwork for recording equal opportunities concerns raised by learners to ensure confidentiality. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this new procedure. Monitoring of equal opportunities at employers is carried out annually. In one example, where a company did not have its own equal opportunities policy, the learner was encouraged and supported by the training adviser to draw up a suitable policy as a project to produce evidence for their NVQ.

48. The company's marketing strategy effectively identifies a number of groups that are either under-represented on its learning programmes or may be particularly vulnerable to discrimination. It expresses a strong commitment to the promotion of equal opportunity. Positive Outcomes recognises that many of its learning programmes have an imbalance of men and women. It has set targets to attempt to rectify this and has redesigned its marketing material to show positive images of men in retailing and administration. Positive Outcomes is effectively targeting companies that have large numbers of men or employees from minority ethnic groups. It is also using sponsorship of motorbike racing to raise the profile of its training activities among young men. The company is also in the process of bidding for European Social Funding to enable it to provide management training to small businesses in areas of rural deprivation. The

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company monitors equal opportunities data based on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. However, there has been insufficient use of data to monitor trends in recruitment, achievement or retention.

49. Positive Outcomes has changed its own recruitment practices to ensure that they reflect best practice. Candidates are selected for interview on the basis of an application form which does not include their gender, age, ethnicity or any other personal details.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

50. One of the managing directors has overall responsibility for quality assurance. Since the previous inspection the office manager has continued to develop the new quality assurance system with guidance from an external consultant. The new system has now been fully implemented, remedying the weakness found at the previous inspection. There is a quality assurance statement and a set of policies and procedures which cover the key stages of the training programmes. Positive Outcomes has taken a particularly measured and thoughtful approach to the development of the procedures, which are clearly written and based on the specific needs of the company. The policies include an outline of their purpose and their impact on the learner. The procedures have been carefully designed so that they can be easily and effectively audited. They include identified performance indicators. The policies and procedures are available to all staff on the company website. There is a well-designed system of quality assurance observations as well as file and paperwork audits, which are being used effectively. However, it is too early to judge the full impact of the new quality assurance arrangements.

51. Positive Outcomes has used action plans effectively to improve its learning programmes. Retention and achievement rates have improved significantly since the previous inspection and retention, in particular, is now good on all programmes. The time taken by learners to achieve their full qualification has reduced and current learners are making satisfactory progress. Fewer learners now are still in learning past the end of their planned length of stay. Positive Outcomes has improved its recruitment practices to ensure that learners and employers are given sufficient and accurate information about the learning programmes. Induction is now a more thorough process and learners are better prepared to start training. The company has developed closer working relationships with its employers and has identified key account holders. These are contacted each month by the marketing department to promote exchange of information and improve communication. Improved use of learner milestones and short-term targets has contributed to a better experience for learners. The company has developed new learning materials which are attractive, easy to use and appreciated by learners. All early leavers have an exit interview, and in many cases this has been used effectively to identify problems, suggest solutions and bring learners back into training.

52. Positive Outcomes has a good management information system which it uses effectively to monitor many aspects of the learning programmes. Appropriate and useful reports are produced monthly and quarterly for discussion at senior management meetings. Many of these reports are displayed in the main office and are used by

assessors and the marketing team. Data are input accurately and there is a very low rate of errors in reports produced for the LSC. Staff have a good understanding of how the system works and are able to produce data quickly and efficiently. The company uses the data to identify trends in recruitment and retention. The progress of all learners who have reached the end of their planned length of stay without achieving their full qualification is monitored monthly. Assessors' caseloads are monitored monthly and the report identifies which assessors have spare capacity. Another report identifies each visit made by the assessor and monitors the activities which take place. There is careful monitoring of quarterly progress reviews to ensure that they take place on time. The company also monitors the number of learners who take key skills external tests and their success rates.

53. Positive Outcomes has revised its internal verification systems and procedures since the previous inspection and these are now satisfactory. Internal verification takes place regularly and is adequately planned. It now focuses on the quality of assessment and includes detailed and evaluative written feedback on the assessor's performance. Internal verification effectively identifies weaknesses in assessment practice, and action plans are used to rectify these.

54. The company's system for the collection and use of feedback from employers and learners is now satisfactory. This remedies a weakness found at the previous inspection. Feedback is collected from employers and learners every 12 weeks, at the end of training programmes and following off-the-job training. The company responds quickly and effectively to individual problems. However, as the system is new, insufficient data have been collected so far to allow identification of trends. The new questionnaires contain a good range of appropriate questions, and learners and employers are given good opportunities to express their views freely.

55. There is insufficient quality assurance of the planning of individual learners' training. There is no quality assurance policy or procedure for the use of either the occupational skill scan or the key skills diagnostic test during initial assessment. There are no performance indicators for the completion of individual learning plans and these are not audited effectively. Too often the individual learning plans do not include information about how the gaps in knowledge and competence identified by initial assessment will be filled during the training programme. There is insufficient matching of the training provided by employers to the requirements of the NVQ.

56. Positive Outcomes does not systematically monitor the achievements of its learners. The company does not routinely compare the achievement rates for the different programmes or areas of learning. It has not set targets for achievement for groups of learners following the different learning programmes. It is not always able to recognise or quantify the improvements made in achievement. For example, before inspection it had not identified the improvement in the time taken for learners to achieve their qualification. Although assessors monitor the progress of individual learners, there is no system for the monitoring of the progress of different intakes across different programmes of learning. The company does not measure the performance of its assessors in helping learners to achieve their qualification.

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57. The directors, in consultation with other staff members, wrote the company's self-assessment report based on the previous inspection. It was updated shortly before reinspection. The report is detailed, and provides useful background information about the company, the way it operates and the rationale behind its judgements. However, it did not identify some of the key weaknesses found at reinspection.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	115	3

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

Strengths

- good and improving retention rates
- good learning opportunities in the workplace
- particularly good learning resources
- very effective short-term action-planning

Weaknesses

- some weak assessment practices
- ineffective planning of individual learning

Achievement and standards

58. Since the previous inspection, considerable effort has been made to improve the retention and achievement rates. Retention rates are good and improving and there is now better monitoring to identify learners who are near to completing their qualification. Of the 99 learners who have started since 2002-03, 89 per cent are still in learning and are making steady progress. Retention rates have improved steadily since 2000-01, when only 53 per cent of modern apprentices stayed for their planned duration.

59. Achievement rates are also improving and are currently satisfactory. Of the 13 foundation modern apprentices who started in 2001-02, five have completed their framework and a further three are awaiting key skills external tests. Since the previous inspection, 21 learners have achieved all the targets on their learning plans.

60. Learners gain good practical skills and work effectively. Learners produce good projects for health and safety and equal opportunities. Learners have good research skills and most are competent users of information technology (IT). Many learners have responsible job roles and work with complex specialist software. Portfolios are well structured, but there is an over-reliance on paper-based work documents and descriptive explanatory reports. The monitoring of learners' progress has been improved by the introduction of a traffic light system which identifies slow progress. The rate at which learners complete their frameworks has improved since the previous inspection, when

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few learners completed their framework within the planned training period. Many learners progress to higher level qualifications or qualifications in a related occupational area.

Quality of education and training

61. Workplace learning opportunities are good. Workplace supervisors have a wide range of occupational experience. Employers are committed to helping the learners to succeed. They provide them with good training in the workplace and ensure that they develop and practise a good range of skills. Most employers give learners good opportunities to progress. Learners regularly gain promotion and are valued members of staff. Many have complex and responsible job roles. One management learner has recently been promoted in his company and has been recognised as the sales manager of the year in this region.

62. There are particularly good learning resources. These include paper-based e-learning materials and CD-ROMs. Positive Outcomes' training advisers provide good individual coaching and help learners to make the best use of the resources available. The learning materials are attractive, well designed, easy to understand and make good use of graphics and technology. The company has also recently developed a website as a base for learning resources and as a communication system so that all learners can share information. This is an excellent resource with great potential to enhance the development of new skills and abilities. Learners are well motivated and work hard to achieve their learning goals. Training advisers encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning and development.

63. There is very effective use of short-term action-planning. Learners are visited at least each month for individual coaching, for assessment and to set targets for the next period. Many learners are visited fortnightly and extra visits are arranged to suit individual learners' needs and workloads. A new feedback report sheet has been developed and this provides the basis for recording progress and for setting new targets. The targets are clear, realistic and promote the development and practice of new skills. Learners' targets are directly related to their job roles and responsibilities. The short-term action plans are complemented by quarterly progress reviews, which record overall progress towards achievement of learning goals. The progress reviews have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. Learning advisers who carry out the reviews, evaluate and monitor learners' progress against their individual learning plan.

64. Key skills training is an integral part of the vocational training. All learners have an initial assessment of their key skills and training advisers provide support as necessary. Learners are given the opportunity to sit mock key skills external tests and this greatly improves their confidence and achievement. Positive Outcomes has been involved in a pilot scheme to allow learners to take the tests online. Learners are making satisfactory progress towards the achievement of key skills and this has improved since the previous inspection. None of the learners have been identified as needing additional support with

literacy and numeracy. Almost all have particularly good general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results. However, Positive Outcomes has an arrangement with a specialist company to provide additional support should the need arise.

65. There are some weak assessment practices. A narrow range of assessment methods is used and there is insufficient use of observations, professional discussions and witness testimonies. Supervisors are often not involved effectively in the assessment process. The assessments are not systematically planned for all learners. Some have assessment plans but often they are not sufficiently detailed. However, learners receive detailed feedback after assessment and have a good understanding of their progress. Internal verification is satisfactory and accurately identifies poor assessment practice in portfolios. However, observation of assessors is not sufficiently thorough for newly qualified or non-qualified assessors. The weakness in assessment practice remains from the previous inspection.

66. There is ineffective planning of individual learning. This weakness remains from the previous inspection. Initial assessment is carried out using a vocational skill scan, a learning styles assessment and a key skills diagnostic test. However, the results of the initial assessment are not used effectively to plan an individualised programme of learning. Arrangements for training and assessment are not clearly identified in individual learning plans. Plans for most learners identify the target qualification and key skills, but do not set clear milestones. Too many learners have difficulty in reflecting adequately on their overall progress. A system has recently been developed to update learning plans if there are significant changes in learning needs or in achievements. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of this on the quality of the plans.

Leadership and management

67. Management of the learning programme has improved since the previous inspection. Positive Outcomes has succeeded in resolving many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection and has further developed its strengths. Communications are effective between management and staff. Regular meetings take place and part-time staff are paid for attendance at these meetings. There are arrangements for continuous professional updating of assessors, but there is an over-reliance on in-house training and there are insufficient opportunities for staff to update their commercial experience. Two recently appointed members of staff do not have the appropriate vocational experience. Internal verification is now satisfactory and is co-ordinated by a lead internal verifier. There has been good development of the learning programmes to meet the needs of the new technical certificate. This has included a substantial investment in the development of new learning resources. Some of the new systems recently introduced, such as the collection and analysis of learners' feedback, are too new to have had any significant effect on learners' achievements. However, the company recognises the need to monitor and evaluate the improvements it has made to its training programmes.

68. Learners receive equal opportunities training as part of their induction and this is

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reinforced during reviews. There is a good range of resources for assessors to use and learners are encouraged to research information and to carry out workplace audits. For example, one learner has carried out a disability audit of their employer's premises and as a result, access has been improved for wheelchair users.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	96	3

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

Strengths

- good and improving retention rates
- good off-the-job training
- good additional support for learners

Weaknesses

- weak review process
- insufficient recording of learner progress

Achievement and standards

69. Since the previous inspection considerable effort has been made to improve the retention and achievement rates. Retention rates are good and improving and there is now better monitoring to identify learners who are near to completing their qualification. Of the 58 advanced modern apprentices who have started since 2002-03, 88 per cent are still in learning and are making steady progress. Of the 57 foundation modern apprentices who have started training since 2002-03, 67 per cent are still in learning and most of these are near to completion. Retention rates have improved steadily since 2000-01 when only 41 per cent of foundation modern apprentices stayed for their planned duration.

70. Achievement rates are also improving and are currently satisfactory. Of the advanced modern apprentices who started in 2001-02, 25 per cent have completed their framework and a further 33 per cent are on target to complete shortly. Many of these are awaiting key skills external testing.

71. Learners gain good practical skills and work effectively in a wide range of complex job roles. They produce good projects on health and safety and equal opportunities. Portfolios are well structured and contain a wide range of good evidence. Learners take pride in the quality and presentation of their work and all portfolio evidence is well referenced. The monitoring of learners' progress has been improved by the introduction of a traffic light system which identifies slow progress. The rate at which learners complete their frameworks has improved since the previous inspection when few learners completed their framework within the planned training period.

72. Many learners achieve promotion during their learning programme. They are well

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motivated to achieve their qualification, as employers often use it as a prerequisite for further promotion or future employment opportunities. At one employer's premises learners' modern apprenticeship certificates are displayed on the wall.

Quality of education and training

73. There is good additional support for learners. This strength has been maintained and developed since the previous inspection. Assessors give individual support to improve the learners' understanding of their course. All learners have a good recall of their induction and know their rights and responsibilities. Additional material has been prepared to help learners understand the requirements of the awarding bodies. In two particularly good workplaces, an assessor, with the support of the employer, is available one day each week where a number of learners are carrying out a variety of awards at different levels. Assessors provide learners with contact telephone numbers to ensure that queries can be resolved between scheduled visits. The learners value this arrangement. Many learners receive fortnightly visits from their training adviser who is also their assessor. Assessors spend whatever time is necessary for learners to make adequate progress with their portfolios of evidence, and they provide further guidance and advice on evidence requirements. Assessors are flexible and will schedule appointments to suit individual learners' needs. Learners appreciate how frequently and easily they can gain access to assessment.

74. There is good off-the-job training. Learners are able to use a wide range of e-learning materials online, CD-ROMs and distance learning packs. All of the learning materials are good, attractive, well designed and easy to use. One employer has installed the learning materials on to their staff intranet so that all of their employees can use them.

75. The planning of learning has improved greatly since the previous inspection. Some learners have individual timetables for their off-the-job training to ensure that they work at a steady pace. Training advisers provide good individual coaching. They have strong vocational backgrounds and are well qualified. They draw extensively on their own experience to develop the learners' skills. Assessors give good guidance and detailed explanations about what evidence to collect. There is particularly good use of short-term action plans to help learners develop their skills. Learning advisers carry out 12-weekly reviews of progress, which are used effectively to monitor learners' progress. All workplaces reflect current industrial standards. Learners' job roles are effectively matched to the NVQ using skill scans in conjunction with their assessor and supervisor.

76. Assessment has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory. Assessment planning is clear and detailed. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods including direct observation, assessment of product evidence, questioning and the use of preset written questions to confirm learners' knowledge and understanding. Learners are given good and detailed feedback following assessment and this is recorded on the action plans, which are also used effectively to set targets and plan learners' work.

77. Key skills training is an integral part of the vocational training. All learners have an initial assessment of their key skills and training advisers provide support as necessary. Learners are given the opportunity to take mock key skills external tests. This greatly improves their confidence and achievement. Positive Outcomes has been involved in a pilot scheme to allow learners to take the tests online. Learners are making satisfactory progress towards the achievement of key skills and this has improved since the previous inspection. None of the learners have been identified as needing additional support with literacy and numeracy. Almost all have particularly good GCSE results. However, Positive Outcomes has an arrangement with a specialist company to provide additional support should the need arise.

78. Progress reviews are weak. Although employers are offered an update of the learners' progress, too often the review is carried out with no involvement of the employer. Very few employers add comments to the review paperwork or make any contribution to evaluating the learners' progress. Some employers are unclear about learners' achievement of specific parts of the apprenticeship framework. There is insufficient recording of the learners' progress in their job roles and activities and insufficient linking of this with individual units of the NVQ.

79. There is insufficient recording of learners' progress. Too often individual learning plans are not updated to show learners' achievements. There is an holistic approach to assessment and often learners and assessors do not recognise units which are very close to completion. This gives a false picture of achievement for the learner and many learners are unable to identify what needs to be done to achieve their qualification. For example, one learner who started in September 2002 has achieved two units in a 12-month period. However, there is enough evidence in the portfolio to satisfy the evidence requirements for several other units. At the time of the inspection, Positive Outcomes was developing a system to resolve this problem.

Leadership and management

80. Management of the learning programme has improved since the previous inspection. Positive Outcomes has succeeded in resolving most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Communications are effective between management and staff. Regular meetings take place and part-time staff are paid for attendance at these meetings. All staff have opportunities for further staff development and have appropriate recent vocational experience. All staff have, or are working towards, appropriate assessor qualifications. Internal verification is now satisfactory and is co-ordinated by a lead internal verifier. New assessors are monitored closely and effectively.

81. There has been good development of the learning programmes to meet the needs of the new technical certificate. This has included a substantial investment in the development of new learning resources. Some of the new systems recently introduced, such as the collection and analysis of learners' feedback, are too new to have had any significant effect on learners' achievements. However, the company recognises the need

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to monitor and evaluate the improvements it has made to its training programmes.

82. Learners receive equal opportunities training as part of their induction and this is reinforced during reviews. There is a good range of resources for assessors to use and learners are encouraged to research information and to carry out workplace audits. One learner has produced an excellent electronic presentation on equal opportunities that has also been used as evidence for the keys skills in communication and IT.