

REINSPECTION REPORT

The Vocational College Limited (formerly Taurus Training Limited) Reinspection

16 July 2004



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. 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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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Since the previous inspection, the provider has changed its name from Taurus Training to The Vocational College Limited (TVC). TVC is a private company that employs 168 staff of whom 104 are directly involved in training. TVC has a training centre in Manchester, in addition to its main training and administrative centre which is based in Bootle. The company has contracts with Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Greater Merseyside LSC to provide work-based learning programmes.
2. A managing director is supported by three directors who have a financial, operational or company secretary roles. Since the previous inspection a restructured senior management team has been established which has responsibility for fulfilling the company's three-year development plan. A training manager, who is a member of this team, has responsibility for work-based learning programmes. The training manager reports directly to the managing director. Quality assurance and key skills are the responsibility of one of two co-ordinators who report to the training manager. In addition, a retention officer monitors and supports learners. Nine vocational co-ordinators support the work of the training manager and supervise 98 trainers.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Retailing, customer service & transportation

3. There are 189 learners on customer service, retailing and warehouse training programmes. Most learners are on customer service or retailing training programmes. There are 155 foundation modern apprentices and 33 advanced modern apprentices. One learner is working towards an national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 in retailing. Most learners are referred to TVC by their employers. All learners are employed in a range of shops, offices, cafes and fast food outlets. Learners can join the training programme at any time. TVC interviews all learners and conducts an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and key skills. Learners receive an induction that is carried out over three months. Training is provided at two training centres and to individual learners in the workplace. Trainers carry out regular assessment and review learners' progress in the workplace every two or four weeks.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

4. There are 170 learners on hospitality, catering and sport training programmes. There are 82 foundation modern apprentices and 44 advanced modern apprentices on hospitality or catering training programmes. All of the 44 sports learners are foundation modern apprentices. Most learners are referred to TVC by their employers. All learners are employed in a range of leisure centres, hotels, restaurants and public houses. Learners can join the training programme at any time. TVC interviews all learners and conducts an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and key skills. Learners receive an induction that is carried out over three months. Training is provided at two training centres and to individual learners in the workplace. Trainers carry out regular assessment and review learners' progress in the workplace every two or four weeks.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	10
Number of inspection days	37
Number of learner interviews	107
Number of staff interviews	34
Number of employer interviews	33
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	2
Number of visits	62

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. TVC was originally inspected in March 2003. Training in retailing, customer service and transportation, and hospitality, sport, leisure and travel were unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection, training in both areas of learning was judged to be satisfactory.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

Land-based provision	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Construction	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

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

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

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

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	189	3

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

Strengths

- particularly frequent and effective short-term action-planning
- good learning and personal support

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners

Achievement and standards

6. Learners achieve an appropriate industry standard of work during their training programme. Good experience is gained from a wide range of work opportunities. Learners develop satisfactory practical skills in the workplace. Motivation and confidence is effectively promoted. Portfolios are well structured and learners are confident in their use. Many learners who have been employed for some time value the opportunity to gain accreditation that reflects their competence at work. Learners currently in training are encouraged to progress into supervisory roles. In a number of cases learners have achieved promotion at their place of work.

7. Retention of learners shows an improving trend from 2002-03 to the current year. The improvement of the retention rate for learners on NVQ programmes is good. However, the number of learners is small. At reinspection a significant number of learners were still in training. Many learners are close to completing their frameworks, but many still have to achieve the key skills qualifications. While most learners are achieving at a satisfactory rate, some learners are making slow progress. Of the 152 customer service learners, 60 have reached the end of their planned learning programme without completing all aspects of their framework. Similarly, 27 of the 33 retailing learners are still in learning beyond their target completion date. Progress to introduce the technical certificate to eight retailing learners has been slow. TVC has recognised slow progress as a weakness in their self-assessment report. All learners are being appropriately supported to complete the outstanding aspects of their training programme.

Quality of education and training

8. Learners benefit from particularly frequent and effective short-term action-planning.

Visits to learners' workplaces take place at least twice every month and in some cases, every week. These visits are planned carefully to fit in with learners' job roles and responsibilities. Assessors plan visits out of normal office hours or at weekends if better opportunities can be found for assessment during these times. Visits last a sufficient time to cover assessment, feedback, discussion and short-term action-planning. On each occasion, clear and suitably achievable short-term targets are set. Action-planning for assessment always takes place in advance of the activity and is reinforced before starting the assessment. Effective feedback on their progress against targets aids learners' development. Learners are clear what their short-term targets are and report that the process helps to improve personal motivation. Individual learning plans include long-term targets that are updated to reflect progress. Where necessary, activities are carried forward to the next visit. Individual learning plans are appropriately updated. Employers are not involved in action-planning but do receive written feedback on the outcome of the process. They have a satisfactory understanding of learners' progress. One employer, a major fast-food retailer receives written updates every month on each learner's activities and the progress they have made. This accounts for 85 per cent of learners on customer service programmes. In some instances, employers' in-house training programmes have been linked to the requirements of the NVQ. For example one company's training courses in food safety, and health and safety, are used to support learners in completing optional units. This strength was partially recognised in the self-assessment report and at the previous inspection.

9. Learning and personal support is good. This strength has been maintained since the previous inspection but was not identified in the self-assessment report. Learners have a good rapport with their assessors and value the support they receive. Laptop computers are made available for learners who do not have access to suitable computer facilities at work. All learners are provided with a mobile phone number for their assessor and are encouraged to make contact to resolve any problems or deal with any queries they may have between visits. Trainers are particularly effective at identifying learners who may be unsure about the value of their learning programme or where personal issues are affecting their commitment to the programme. Early intervention by TVC's retention officer provides a wide range of appropriate support for these learners, many of whom continue on their learning programmes. For example three learners on maternity leave received home visits during their absence to allow them to continue on their training programmes. Where learners move to another employer they are encouraged and supported to complete their programme. Employers are not always involved in learners' progress reviews, although a summary of assessment activities and action-planning is given to them. Employers speak highly of the support they receive from TVC. They report that their queries are answered promptly. Employers are supportive of the time learners spend with their trainers during the frequent workplace visits. Some employers allocate time to their learners to work on their action points.

10. Resources to support learners during assessment and learning are satisfactory. Photocopies of some learning materials is of poor quality. Trainers make satisfactory use of the available data and information held in paper form and on TVC's intranet. Staff are occupationally competent and up to date with current work practices in their vocational area. Some newly appointed staff do not have experience in assessment but are suitably

supported by more experienced colleagues.

11. Initial assessment is now satisfactory. It was judged to be a weakness at the previous inspection. Learners' programmes take into account learners' prior attainment of qualifications and experience which is identified at initial assessment. A co-ordinator with responsibility for literacy, numeracy and key skills support for learners was appointed last year. Adequate systems and learning materials are now in place to support learners. All learners receive an appropriate basic and key skills initial assessment. Learners receive the results of the initial assessment. Effective individual support is provided by trainers to help those learners who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Learners are placed on training programmes that are at an appropriate level and that match their job roles. Planned activities over the first four visits by TVC's trainers help the learner understand the components of the qualifications. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessors are sensitive to employers' business needs when planning visits and conducting assessment activity. However, assessors rely too heavily on observations and formal questioning during assessment.

Leadership and management

12. Management of the area of learning is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection there has been a number of staff changes. New staff complete a thorough induction and those new to the assessor role are supported while working towards appropriate qualifications. Staff appraisal and performance management is effective. There are good opportunities for staff to maintain their continuing professional development. Line managers ensure that the work of trainers is regularly monitored.

13. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. A part-time co-ordinator has overall responsibility for the introduction and use of TVC's equal opportunities strategies. Learners have a satisfactory appreciation of the appeals and complaints process and what action they can take if they have any problems. They feel protected in the workplace and are confident that any issues raised with their employer or TVC will be dealt with quickly and confidentially. Equality of opportunity is discussed at learners' frequent progress reviews, but this does not always adequately promote understanding. The induction workbook used by learners is adequate but does not include reference to all current equal opportunities legislation.

14. Quality assurance is adequate. A full-time co-ordinator has responsibility for it. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets the requirements of the awarding body. Trainers are observed in the workplace carrying out assessment activities. Constructive feedback is provided and used to support their personal development plans. There are regular standardisation meetings across teams and feedback meetings within teams. Assessors use management information to monitor learners' progress but this has not yet fully impacted on achievement rates. Staff contributed to the most recent self-assessment report. They have a satisfactory understanding of progress against the report's action plan. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. However, the report did identify fully the company's key weakness, as well as partially identifying one of the two

strengths, identified by inspectors.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	170	3

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

Strengths

- good attainment of skills and knowledge
- good learning support

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners

Achievement and standards

15. Learners attain good skills and knowledge. In hospitality, most learners display abilities above those required by their training programme. They have a good understanding of the knowledge required for their programme and apply this knowledge confidently in the workplace. Many learners have been promoted to more senior positions while on their training programme. Learners on sport and leisure programmes develop a good understanding of the principles and components of fitness. For example learners can plan a good range of activities on fitness machines for clients. In addition learners gain additional qualifications and develop skills that improve their employability. Learners can work towards additional qualifications that interest them, including those in first aid, coaching and lifeguard skills. Appropriate technical certificates are being satisfactorily achieved during learners’ programmes.

16. Since the previous inspection retention rates have significantly improved; currently the average retention rate is 73 per cent. Attendance rates are satisfactory. Achievement rates for key skills has improved since the previous inspection. In 2000-01 between 3 per cent and 7 per cent of advanced modern apprentices completed the full framework, this proportion has now improved to 33 per cent. In 2000-01, 19 per cent of foundation modern apprentices completed the framework and this has now improved to 50 per cent. Across the provision there is an improving trend in the achievement rates. In hospitality, the achievement rate for 2003-04 is currently 41 per cent and in sport it is good at 70 per cent.

17. There is slow progress for some learners. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. In sport, a significant number of learners complete the framework after their planned completion date. In some cases there is insufficient focus on providing opportunities for more able learners to complete the framework more quickly. In hospitality, a small number of the most able or experienced learners are working

below their potential. Learners sometimes complete far more work than is planned at their progress review. However, the amount of work planned for the next period does not always reflect this. Learners who have not completed the planned learning programme in the target timescale, are supported by TVC to complete their modern apprenticeship framework.

Quality of education and training

18. All learners receive good learning support. This strength remains from the previous inspection. Learners receive particularly effective support during visits by trainers to the workplace. In hospitality, learners are usually visited every two weeks, and in sport learners are visited every month. Where necessary, learners can be visited every week. The visits are arranged at suitable times to take account of learners' work shift patterns. Where appropriate, visits are arranged outside the normal working week. Progress reviews take place at every visit and are well planned. Employers are usually included at all stages of the review. All parties receive their own copies of the written record of the progress review. Employers use the progress reviews to support the learner in their development. Foundation modern apprentices are encouraged to progress onto advanced modern apprenticeships. There is effective integration of all aspects of the modern apprenticeship framework. All learners receive appropriate and effective individual training in the workplace. Any barriers to learning encountered by learners are quickly remedied. Where necessary, additional learning materials and equipment are made available. If a learner misses two planned visits or leaves their workplace, one of TVC's retention officers is alerted. Systems are well used to try and trace the learner and get them back on the programme. Training is satisfactorily planned and uses an appropriate range of teaching methods. In hospitality, the learners state how much they enjoy the teaching on the technical certificate training provided by TVC. Trainers have a good rapport with learners.

19. The induction of learners, which was a weakness at the previous inspection, is now satisfactory. Learners have a planned three-month induction period during which there is a comprehensive explanation of the programme and of the individual qualifications. Initial assessment for key skills in hospitality was also identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. This is now effective in all vocational areas. Key skills assessment is satisfactorily carried out with all learners. Literacy and numeracy needs are also satisfactorily assessed at induction. The results of initial assessment are shared with learners and recorded on their individual learning plans. Individual support is provided in the workplace. Learning materials used are at an appropriate level for the learner. Progress is suitably monitored at progress review meetings. Learners are involved in negotiating future objectives and identifying their progress.

20. All trainers have appropriate experience and qualifications. At the previous inspection, some trainers were found to be assessing learners in areas beyond their specialism. This is no longer the case. All workplaces have adequate resources. Learners receive appropriate detailed learning materials to support their study. At the previous inspection insufficiencies in learning materials to support independent study in

sport was identified as weaknesses. This weakness has now been remedied. There is sufficient computer equipment which is adequately used to support learning. Some trainers and learners in sport are issued with appropriate clothing to portray a professional image. However, these are not routinely worn in the workplace.

21. Assessment practices are now satisfactory. They were identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. Portfolios are well organised and contain a good range of evidence. Visits are planned to coincide with effective assessment opportunities. TVC's staff provide learners with effective feedback. Learners have a good understanding of when and how they will be assessed. Assessment effectively promotes learners' further understanding and learning.

22. In hospitality, all learners are employed in a range of suitable establishments. The training programmes meet the needs of employers and the learners. At the previous inspection it was identified that there was a delay in finding work placements for learners in sport. All sports learners are now quickly allocated appropriate work placements. For some sport learners, their work placements provide insufficient opportunities on day shifts for learners to gain real work experience that will assist in their development.

Leadership and management

23. Since the previous inspection, effective management strategies have been implemented to improve retention and achievement rates. The management of this area of learning has been restructured. The manager of the hospitality programme has identified two learning co-ordinators to support the management function. Progress made by learners is effectively monitored using detailed computer-based records. Formal and informal communication is satisfactory. Staff work closely to ensure the sharing of good practice. A regular schedule of meetings is used to keep all staff aware of problems and to manage the provision. Staff attend appropriate professional development and updating activities.

24. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. It is introduced to them at induction and satisfactorily monitored throughout their programme. Learners have an appropriate appreciation of how the law protects them and what to do if they want to complain. They state that they feel they are treated fairly. During their training, learners acquire a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Equality of opportunity is considered at progress reviews but learners' understanding is not always effectively developed.

25. Assessment and internal verification are now satisfactory. Internal verification processes are used effectively to ensure learners' work is assessed regularly. As part of the quality assurance process, learners' views are gathered at various stages of their programme. The results of this are collated and used to improve the training provision. Learners do not always receive feedback on the outcome of this exercise. All staff contributed to the content of the most recently produced self-assessment report. They are generally knowledgeable about its content and the progress made against the action plan. Inspectors identified the same weaknesses as those recorded in the self-assessment

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report, although they found many of the strengths in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice.