

REINSPECTION REPORT

Paragon Training (Dorset) Ltd Reinspection

10 June 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

PARAGON TRAINING (DORSET) LTD 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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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Paragon Training (Dorset) Ltd (Paragon) was formed in 1998 as a private limited company. Its operations now extend throughout the Southwest with most of its activities in Dorset and Somerset. Paragon has major delivery contracts with the two local Learning and Skills Councils in these areas and operates from centres in Weymouth, Bournemouth and Taunton. The Bournemouth centre relocated in 2003 and now operates from a newly converted facility near to the main town centre. The centre is on three floors, the ground floor housing the Entry to Employment programme learning areas, a dedicated hair salon and facilities for those with mobility difficulties. The second and third floors contain training rooms, information and communications technology (ICT) training resources, office accommodation and meeting rooms.

2. The Taunton offices are situated in the town centre and comprise ICT facilities, office accommodation and a hair salon. The Weymouth centre is the main base for the company's administrative and financial functions. It also has training rooms and workshop facilities. Additional premises in Connexions offices across the region are used for interviewing young people.

3. Paragon and its sister company, ITE Ltd, have a combined board of directors comprising three executive directors (chief executive, operations director and financial director), and two non-executive directors (human resources and corporate responsibilities). There is a senior management team that is responsible for daily operations and reports directly to the board. The team consists of five senior managers responsible for finance, recruitment and business development, Paragon operations and ITE operations. Paragon employs 85 staff, of whom 51 per cent are operational, with the balance in management, administration or recruitment/learner support roles. There are 583 learners on vocational training programmes, of whom 151 are in retailing, customer service and distribution and warehousing programmes. There is one learner following a national vocational qualification (NVQ) in customer service at level 2.

4. The Southwest unemployment rate is 3.5 per cent, compared with 5.6 per cent nationally, with Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole having a rate of generally less than 2 per cent.

5. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Dorset is 1.9 per cent, compared with 9.1 per cent nationally. The retail sector continues to employ a significant proportion of young people in the area. Paragon is currently working with the retail sector skills council to develop a 'skills shop' to raise the profile of the industry and provide skills training to meet identified skill gaps. In Somerset, minority ethnic groups account for 1.1 per cent of the population and 1.8 per cent are unemployed.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Retailing, customer service & transportation

6. Paragon provides training for 151 learners in retailing and customer service. Of these, 24 are advanced modern apprentices, with six in retailing and 18 in customer service. There are 126 foundation modern apprentices, with 89 in retailing, 34 in customer service and three in distribution and warehousing. One learner is on a customer service NVQ programme. Most of the learners are working in a retail environment in large stores or national retailers. Most are employed and the rest are in vocationally relevant work placements. Learners are recruited direct from employers and can join a training programme at any time. All learners receive an interview and an assessment for literacy and numeracy needs and vocational skills. An induction into the programme takes place in the workplace. Assessors normally visit every fortnight and there are quarterly reviews of progress. A programme manager has daily responsibility for learners and there are six assessors and three internal verifiers employed by Paragon. In addition there are learning support officers and specialist support for literacy and numeracy.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	19
Number of learner interviews	50
Number of staff interviews	19
Number of employer interviews	29
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	3
Number of visits	33

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. Paragon was previously inspected in March 2003. Retailing, customer service and transportation were unsatisfactory. At the reinspection process the quality of work-based learning in retailing, customer service and transportation 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

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

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

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

Health, social care & public services	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Foundation programmes	3
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	3
Programme centres	4

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

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	151	3

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

Strengths

- good development of learners' skills and knowledge
- good individual support
- good short-term action-planning for learners
- effective management action to secure improvements in assessment and verification

Weaknesses

- poor completion rates for the framework
- insufficient planning of training

Achievement and standards

8. Learners develop good occupational and personal skills, a strength identified at the previous inspection. The thorough initial assessment process ensures that there is a close match between the learners' jobs and the relevant NVQ. Learners develop a wide range of skills in retailing and customer service and they get effective on-the-job training from employers. In some cases this is formally structured and recorded, while at other workplaces it is more informal. Learners are given the opportunity to work in different sections of the workplace to broaden their skills and meet the NVQ requirements. These include till work, merchandising, stock handling and customer care. Learners also increase their knowledge through key skills projects covering sales of goods legislation and customer complaints surveys. Learners and employers confirm that the modern apprenticeship programme improves the understanding of the job role and the ability to work effectively. Many learners are given additional responsibilities and progress in the workplace during their training. Some learners have progressed from sales assistant to supervisor or above. Eight learners have progressed from a foundation modern apprenticeship to an advanced modern apprenticeship following promotion at work.

9. Completion of the framework is still poor. Although the strategies introduced since the previous inspection have started to have a positive impact on the learners' progress, there has been no improvement in framework completion. On the advanced modern apprenticeship, over the past three years, 66 learners have started and only one has completed the full framework. Twenty-six remain in learning. In 2001-02, 166 learners

started a foundation modern apprenticeship, 38 completed the framework and five are still in learning. In 2002-03, 161 learners started a foundation modern apprenticeship, 19 completed the framework and 29 are still in learning. In the current year, 111 started and 82 per cent are still in learning. These learners are making satisfactory progress towards their qualification. Units are being achieved and signed-off, and key skills assessment and examinations are now introduced much earlier in the programme.

Quality of education and training

10. Learners receive particularly good support. There are very good working relationships between assessors and learners. Assessors' visits are usually every two weeks, and additional visits are made to meet learners' individual needs. Learners feel it is easy to contact their assessors between visits to discuss any concerns and to plan for the forthcoming visit. Some learners are able to attend workshops for portfolio-building, key skills projects and support with literacy and numeracy. Assessors make referrals to support officers when they identify concerns such as slow progress around slow progress. These officers then provide effective additional support to keep learners' on programme and help them maintain progress. A support tutor for literacy and numeracy is now available and effective support is provided to learners when a need is identified. For example, one learner who had problems with literacy and numeracy attended the centre and also had additional visits to the workplace. Assessors take laptop computers to the workplace to provide support with key skills. Some learners receive particularly good support from their employers. They view learners' work and assist with evidence requirements, including witness testimonies. Some learners are given the opportunity to work on their portfolio at work. Most managers meet briefly with assessors to discuss progress and any concerns. However, contact with managers is sometimes insufficient to effectively involve them in the learners' programme.

11. Thorough action-planning and effective target-setting have taken place to deal with the weakness of slow progress from the previous inspection. At each assessor visit an action plan is completed which sets realistic and challenging short-term targets. This motivates the learners and they are aware of what they need to achieve and by when. Learners have a good understanding of targets for unit and NVQ achievement. All targets are reviewed at follow-up meetings. Learners are now making satisfactory or better progress.

12. Initial assessment is now satisfactory. In addition to an interview, all learners now complete a vocational initial assessment to identify competence against NVQ units, and appropriate optional units are selected. There is also a learning style initial assessment and tests for literacy and numeracy.

13. Induction takes place in the workplace and provides sufficient information to give the learners an understanding of the programme requirements and target dates. Information is provided on the NVQ requirements and on health and safety and equality of opportunity.

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14. Assessment is now satisfactory. Portfolios are well presented. Assessment records are detailed and a variety of assessment methods is used including observation, assignments, written and oral questioning, witness testimonies and product evidence. Assessors make good use of every opportunity in the workplace to carry out observations. These are well recorded and feedback to learners is effective.

15. There is insufficient planning of training. Initial assessment is used to identify initial training needs and an individual learning plan is produced. However, there is no overall schedule of training to ensure that learners attain the required skills and knowledge. Employers provide some training, but this is not always monitored or recorded. Training is often reactive, after mistakes. When employers do provide formal, structured training, Paragon has not used it to plan the learners' programmes. Reviews do not always sufficiently monitor all aspects of the learners' experience. They do not focus on training, but concentrate on the assessment and progress of the NVQ and key skills units. The introduction of the technical certificate has been delayed, and some learners and employers are unaware of this requirement. The current emphasis is on providing learners with an exemplar test to identify any shortfalls in knowledge rather than introducing structured training for the certificate. Awarding body approval for the certificate has not yet been confirmed.

Leadership and management

16. There has been very effective action-planning since the previous inspection to improve the learners' experience. The weaknesses of slow progress, ineffective initial assessment, and inconsistent assessment practices have now been resolved. Although there is still concern over learners' retention and achievement rates, learners are making satisfactory progress. The action plan is subject to ongoing review and all staff are aware of it. Progress against the action plan is reported at a monthly board meeting. A restructuring has taken place and a programme manager now has specific responsibility for internal verification, including the management of assessors. There has been increased internal verification activity, with more monitoring and support for assessors. Learners are interviewed to check their satisfaction and understanding of their programme. Internal verification is now satisfactory. There is now much more effective action-planning and target-setting for the assessors, aimed at improving the learners' achievements. Monthly assessor meetings focus on learners' progress. Assessors are asked to focus on unit achievement and they are set weekly targets for visits and unit achievement. Progress against these targets is monitored every week and targets are set for the following week. Learners' progress is well monitored with reasons and actions identified for slow progress. A colour coding system is used by assessors to highlight potential non-achievers so that support mechanisms can be implemented.