

INSPECTION REPORT

Access Training

23 October 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

ACCESS TRAINING

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

INSPECTION REPORT

Access Training

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Scope of provision	1
About the inspection	3
Overall judgement	3
Grades	3
Key findings	4
What learners like about Access Training	9
What learners think Access Training could improve	9
Key challenges for Access Training	10

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	11
Equality of opportunity	13
Quality assurance	14
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	16
Business administration, management & professional	20
Retailing, customer service & transportation	25

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Access Training Limited (Access) was formed in 1989 following a management buy out of English Estates Youth Training Scheme. It is now managed by the managing director and administration director, who with two other silent partners, own the company. Access has two main training centres. The main unit is on a trading estate in Team Valley, Gateshead. The second site is in Sunderland. Most of Access' learners are on business administration learning programmes and include a large co-financing initiative to run short programmes in business administration and management. Other learners are on learning programmes in manufacturing and security alarms, and retailing, customer service and warehousing. Access also has a small number of learners on hospitality programmes and on computer courses. There were too few learners on both of these courses to be inspected separately.

2. The management team comprises the managing director and administration director who are supported by a team of line managers who oversee occupational teams. The company has 23 staff. There are 11 full- and part-time trainer/assessors, two employer liaison officers, a full-time training officer to support administration and accounts learners and an off-the-job trainer who specialises in administration and key skills. The company also employs four administrative support staff. The company holds the Investor in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

3. Access funds its training through Tyne and Wear Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In the Tyne and Wear area, from which Access recruits its learners, the proportion of the local population from minority ethnic groups is 3.2 per cent, according to the 2001 census, compared with 9 per cent nationally. Unemployment in the region is at 4 per cent, compared with 2.6 per cent nationally. The rate rises to 5.4 per cent in South Tyneside, one of the areas from which learners are recruited.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

4. Training is offered in manufacturing and security and alarm systems. There are 13 learners following a level 2 national vocational qualification (NVQ) in performing manufacturing operations, and 18 are following an advanced modern apprenticeship in security and alarm systems, of whom three are working towards NVQs at level 3 and the others at level 2. There are no learners from minority ethnic groups and no learners have been identified as having a disability. All learners are men. The manufacturing programme lasts for 14 months and the security programme for four years. Most learners are employed. The performing manufacturing operations programme is carried out on the job. The security programme comprises four days on the job and one day at a subcontractor for background knowledge training. Assessment and key skills training and

ACCESS TRAINING

assessment are carried out by provider staff or by the subcontractor. Progress reviews take place every two months. Two full-time training officers are employed to teach and assess manufacturing.

Business administration, management & professional

5. There are currently 21 advanced modern apprentices, 79 foundation modern apprentices and 15 NVQ learners working towards NVQs at levels 2, 3 and 4. All modern apprentices follow appropriate key skills qualifications. Learners recruited after January 2003 also work towards the technical certificate element of the framework. In programmes managed through co-financing funding, 21 learners are working towards an introductory management qualification and a further nine learners, a certificate in management. There are also 19 learners following the certificate in training practice. Of the current learners, 71 per cent are women, 3.8 per cent have an identified disability and 1.9 per cent are from minority ethnic groups.

6. Learners attend off-the-job training at the training centres in either Sunderland or Gateshead. All learners complete an induction to their programme, which includes health and safety and equal opportunities. From September 2003, all learners will complete an assessment of their numeracy and literacy skills. There is no formal assessment of numeracy and literacy skills for learners on co-financed provision.

7. Most of the learners are in full-time employment or on work placement in the legal sector, education, information technology (IT), voluntary sector and manufacturing. Learners are visited every two weeks in the workplace for progress reviews, assessment and action-planning. There is also ongoing liaison by telephone and e-mail between staff and employers. Some learners carry out additional training in areas such as telephone techniques, time management and IT.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

8. There are four advanced modern apprentices, 21 foundation modern apprentices, and 14 NVQ learners working towards qualifications in distribution, warehousing and storage operations at level 2 NVQ, or customer service at NVQ levels 2 or 3. Nineteen learners are women and one learner has an identified disability. The planned duration of the programmes is two years for advanced modern apprentices, 12-15 months for foundation modern apprentices, and nine to twelve months for NVQ learners. On-the-job training is given by employers, with off-the-job training, mainly in key skills and some aspects of warehousing operations, provided by Access. Assessment is conducted mostly in the workplace by Access staff from their training centre in Gateshead.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	32
Number of learner interviews	81
Number of staff interviews	39
Number of employer interviews	40
Number of subcontractor interviews	9
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	7
Number of partner/external agency interviews	2
Number of visits	46

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

9. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The provision of business administration is good. In addition, arrangements for learners on co-financing business administration programmes are good. The provision of manufacturing and security alarms is satisfactory as is that for learners on retailing, customer service and warehousing programmes. The leadership and management of Access are good, equality of opportunity is satisfactory and quality assurance arrangements are also good.

GRADES

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

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

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

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

ACCESS TRAINING

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

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

10. **There is good achievement and retention on business administration NVQ programmes and on co-financing courses.** In NVQ programmes achievement rose to 67 per cent while 97.6 per cent of learners on the introductory management certificate gained accreditation. **Retailing, customer service and warehousing NVQ learners also benefited from good achievement in 2001-02** with an upward trend across other programme areas also being seen. However, there is some slow progress for some learners on this area of learning, mainly where programmes delay the teaching of key skills. In manufacturing and security alarms, effective measures have been put in place to improve retention and achievement. **Learners' are now developing good practical skills to complete work tasks.** Across all programmes, significant improvements in retention and achievement are in evidence, with all areas of learning being judged as either good or satisfactory. Only learners on the business administration management programme had less than satisfactory performance. This has been recognised by Access and the contract terminated with the subcontractor before inspection took place.

Quality of education and training

11. **Learners on work-based learning and co-financing courses in business administration are given good-quality training.** Methods are varied, sessions well-planned and appropriate materials are used well to reinforce learning. **In retailing, customer service and warehousing, learners have particularly good opportunities for development.** They receive good on-the-job training, develop good job skills and some have been promoted as a result. In manufacturing and security alarms, staff have good development opportunities, which allow them to maintain a high level of professional competence. Access staff in retailing, customer service and warehousing have been active in promoting a positive initiative to raise training standards in the distribution and warehousing sector. This is unique in its approach and echoes the partnership working Access does on a more strategic level. **Across all areas of learning the teaching profile is judged to be satisfactory or good.** However, in one subcontractor, teaching learners on manufacturing and security alarms programmes, the quality of training is not adequately monitored by Access' staff, in accordance with their own procedures.

12. **There are very good training facilities and resources in business administration.** Staff are well-qualified and experienced. Training rooms are equipped to a high standard and learners have good access to additional training resources including library access.

Across all other areas of learning resources are satisfactory for the needs of learners.

13. Business administration learners have good places of employment which are well matched to their career goals. Learners are well integrated with work teams and well supported. Employers do not always have sufficient knowledge about the learners' programmes. Employers are not always fully involved in planning assessment opportunities and are not always fully aware of the needs of the programme. **Manufacturing and security alarms learners also enjoy the benefits of strong links with supportive employers** who welcome Access' staff into their organisations. This is not always commonplace in manufacturing companies.

14. For learners on business administration programmes, there is good individual support and guidance. Visits are very regular. Staff are viewed as helpful and quick to react. They resolve problems swiftly. Some learners have been given financial help. Across all other areas of learning, support is satisfactory with learners reporting favourably about the frequency of visits made by Access' staff.

15. In manufacturing and security alarms, and retailing, customer service and warehousing programmes, ineffective use is being made of the review process. Not all learners are given copies of their reviews so being proactive with their learning is difficult. Targets are not always specific or time bound. For learners on the retailing, customer service and warehousing programme, there is also some poor assessment practices. Some recording of assessment is not adequately done. Assessors' reports are sometimes unclear. For learners on co-financing courses in business administration insufficient initial assessment is carried out. While all learners have an individual interview, no form of assessment for literacy or numeracy and their links to occupational competence is done.

Leadership and management

16. There is an effective strategy for raising achievement and retention rates at Access. Management information is used well to keep all staff up to date on learners' achievements. The appraisal process and team meetings are used to set individual and team targets. These are reviewed regularly. Positive actions are taken quickly to solve identified problems. The recruitment process is thorough to ensure learners are on the right programme. A probationary period is given so learners can try the course before they start. Effective links with Connexions mean learners who do not continue with Access are given good support to find alternative training. Good use is made of an incentive scheme. **Learner successes are well celebrated and publicised.** The results of the strategy is seen in the improvements in retention and achievement rates across all programmes.

17. Access makes a good contribution to partnership working in the area to help develop good-quality provision for existing and future learners. The partnerships are respected for the quality and effectiveness of their work, both regionally and nationally. Access' managers play a very proactive role in the collaborative work. Projects being

ACCESS TRAINING

initiated will develop new resources for learners and new progression routes through provision in line with national guidelines. Access is currently involved in at least three good partnerships.

18. **Access has good staff development arrangements** which lead to staff being better able to support and develop learners. It is well planned and managed. A high priority is given to teaching and training development. Appraisal is thorough and used proactively to identify specific staff needs. Various forms of informal and formal staff training are used to develop staff. All training is linked back to the needs of learners. Key skills training for staff has been specifically useful and its effects can be seen directly in learners' achievement.

19. **Some good actions to promote equality and diversity** have been put into place by Access' staff. Projects have been started to identify learners not usually attracted into Access. These include a project targeting girls experiencing difficulty at school and an initiative to use interpreters with some learners who speak English as an additional language. A good-quality information sheet for employers giving information on their responsibilities in terms of equality of opportunity has been produced and circulated to all employers. This has been shared freely with other work-based learning providers.

20. **The quality assurance arrangements in Access are good.** Managers take active responsibility for the promotion of quality assurance and implement arrangements effectively. There is a clear strategy which is understood by all. A very thorough audit process takes place on a six-monthly cycle. Actions are taken and improvements made.

21. **Arrangements for the support of learners with literacy or numeracy needs are ineffective.** The recruitment process is very thorough in Access and most learners with specific individual support needs are guided into other, more appropriate, provision. However, some learners in Access still have some literacy or numeracy needs. A new initial assessment process has recently been put into place. This is not yet applied consistently. Not all learners are assessed and learners who are already employed or who are on co-financing courses have no specific assessment. Staff giving the assessments are not trained or experienced. They do not fully understand the purpose of assessments and the results are not fully recorded. However, review visits are very frequent and assessors support learners individually.

22. **There are some inconsistent application of procedures** in Access which affect some learners. While there is a satisfactory range of appropriate procedures for staff to follow, and in the main these are understood and followed, in some instances there are inconsistencies. For instance, progress review procedure detailing planning between learner, employer and Access' staff member does not always take place in the manner described. Similarly, there are specific guidelines for the integration of key skills with the main vocational programme. For most learners, this happens in the way set down in procedures, but for some learners key skills training does not take place until late in the programme.

23. **Access has an under-developed strategy for recruiting learners from under-**

represented groups, such as people from minority ethnic backgrounds or with multiple barriers to learning. Some work has been started on this, in terms of project work with specific organisations. Also, the partnership working to raise the profile of work-based learning generally is helping to widen participation. However, the strategy is not yet fully developed. It looks in the short term at needs of learners not usually attracted to Access, but does not take into account the longer-term planning needs such initiatives need. For instance, no account has been taken regarding staffing resources needed for learners with multiple barriers to learning, or the financial implications such a change in emphasis may bring.

24. Internal verification is satisfactory. Planning, management and implementation of the policy and procedures for internal verification are carried out appropriately. Meetings are held regularly and assessors are given appropriate guidance.

25. The self-assessment process involves all staff and includes learners' and employers' views sought by questionnaire. It is an established part of Access' quality assurance arrangements and is supported by a written procedure. The most recent report was produced in April 2003. The current report is mostly accurate, thorough, and an honest reflection of provision.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- effective strategy for improving achievement and retention rates
- good contribution by Access to partnership working
- good staff development
- good actions to promote equality and diversity
- good quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- ineffective arrangements for literacy and numeracy support
- some inconsistent application of procedures and guidelines
- inadequate strategy for widening participation

ACCESS TRAINING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- effective measures to improve retention and achievement rates
- strong links with supportive employers
- good staff development

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of progress reviews
- inadequate monitoring of subcontractor training

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good achievement and retention rates on NVQ programmes and co-financed programmes
- good off-the-job training
- very good training facilities and resources
- good matching of employers to learners
- good individual support and guidance for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient initial assessment on co-financed programmes
- insufficient understanding of programmes by employers

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good achievement of NVQs in 2001-02
- particularly good development of learners
- effective initiatives to improve training in distribution and warehousing

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- some poor assessment practices
- ineffective use of progress reviews

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ACCESS TRAINING:

- the individual approach to the programmes
- the fact that they feel respected and valued
- the friendly helpful staff who solve problems quickly
- being talked to as an adult and not as a school child
- the key skills projects
- gaining recognised qualifications
- the bonus paid for achievement
- the frequency of visits by staff
- friendly and helpful work colleagues

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ACCESS TRAINING COULD IMPROVE:

- more involvement of the learners in training sessions
- more information on the length of the programmes
- the induction could be more interesting

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ACCESS TRAINING:

- make better use of progress reviews
- ensure guidelines and procedures are consistently applied to give all learners the benefit of their protection
- develop the assessment and support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs
- fully develop a strategy which will enable Access to widen participation in their programmes to learners who do not usually come into their training
- build on initiatives already started to increase employer knowledge of learners' programmes

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective strategy for improving achievement and retention rates
- good contribution by Access to partnership working
- good staff development
- good actions to promote equality and diversity
- good quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- ineffective arrangements for literacy and numeracy support
- some inconsistent application of procedures and guidelines
- inadequate strategy for widening participation

26. There is an effective strategy in place to improve achievement and retention rates. Managers are well informed about performance issues. There are effective systems to identify learners' progress and achievements. Regular evaluation of training and appraisal of performance in different programme areas takes place. Individual programme managers review performance effectively with their teams and with individuals. Targets are set and appropriate support and development are provided. Practices identified as contributing to raising achievement and retention levels are promoted by managers and shared across the organisation. Successes are identified, celebrated and well publicised in the organisation and through local media. Good role models are used to motivate learners. Incentives are used to motivate learners to succeed at stages of their programme. Learners have probationary periods so that they can decide whether the programme is right for them. Recruitment practices ensure learners have the skills to succeed on their chosen programmes. Good links with Connexions ensure that learners not accepted onto Access' programmes are given appropriate alternatives. Retention and achievement rates are improving. For example, in business administration, of those advanced modern apprentices who started in 2000-01, 60 per cent remain in training, compared with 31 per cent in the previous year. The achievement rate for 2000-01 also improved from 26 per cent the previous year to 48 per cent. These upward trends are seen across all programmes.

27. For a small number of learners in two areas of subcontracted provision, retention and achievement rates are not improving. In one area, managers have terminated the contract for the advanced modern apprentices. In the other area, recruitment has been suspended and measures are now in place to improve the programme. Learners are now making better progress.

ACCESS TRAINING

28. Access makes a good contribution to a range of external collaborative partnerships. Following initial work by the managing director, Access is working with four other work-based learning organisations to set up a new work-based learning consortium in the area. This project has gained support from other strategic partners locally and nationally. The aim is to provide good work-based learning programmes and resources, including purpose-built facilities on a high-profile site in Gateshead. This will sit alongside a new further education college, and other relevant industries and companies. The partners in the consortium are also working to improve progression opportunities from training to employment. Through work with two other work-based learning providers and other partners in education, Access has achieved status as a centre for vocational excellence. The aim is to introduce good work-based vocational training progression routes with schools, colleges and higher education. Access contributes to the Gateshead Learning Partnership and the Sunderland Learning Partnership. Access works with partners to achieve the targets set in the local area action plan. The company was responsible for setting up and running a successful sector-specific network of training providers in warehousing and distribution which promotes and shares good practice.

29. Staff development is good and is well planned and managed. Strategic goals for staff development are set as part of the strategic plan. The number of staff with professional teaching and training qualifications has increased. There is an effective policy for staff development which is well implemented by managers. Staff have regular reviews and appraisals to identify learning and development needs. Staff are encouraged to identify their own personal development needs and suggest ways to meet them. A range of internal and external courses are provided, many of which lead to external qualifications. Coaching, mentoring and other forms of training and development are also frequently used. Induction for new staff is good. Staff skills are improving in providing key skills training and assessment.

30. Facilities and resources are satisfactory overall and are managed effectively. At the main training centre in Gateshead, there are sufficient training rooms with an appropriate standard of equipment and training aids. There are separate social and refreshment areas for learners. The workspace for staff is satisfactory. Access is good with all rooms on the ground floor. The facilities at the Sunderland training centre, though smaller, are satisfactory. The equipment and materials used here are also appropriate. There are very good resources and learning materials for business administration at both the training centres.

31. There are ineffective arrangements for the support of learners with literacy or numeracy needs, a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. Recruitment procedures are thorough and many learners with support needs are identified. However, some current learners with support needs are not provided with appropriate support. Other learners are not adequately assessed by Access to identify support needs. For example, some learners who are already employed have no form of objective assessment. A new assessment process has been established which identifies learners' prior knowledge. This is new and is not yet consistently applied. The new assessment procedure is complex. Staff carrying out assessments do not fully understand the purpose of the assessments. Results are not adequately recorded. Appropriate support

is not planned or taught effectively. There is insufficient literacy and numeracy teaching. Staff are not appropriately qualified or experienced. There are specific literacy or numeracy learning goals or plans. There are no training sessions to cover specific skills either on literacy or numeracy. There are **insufficient** literacy or numeracy learning materials.

32. There is some inconsistent application of procedures and guidelines. Managers have established a satisfactory range of policies, procedures and guidelines for training and administration. These are generally followed appropriately by staff. There are regular internal reviews and audits of the application of policies and procedures. However, in some cases, some procedures and guidelines are not always followed. Although key skills training and assessment are generally effective, in some cases the guidelines are not being followed and this work is not introduced at the start of the learning programme. Regular progress reviews are held by staff with learners and employers. The procedures for these reviews are not always followed. For example, in some cases the review does not include a three-way discussion and planning session between the employer, learner and member of staff. In other cases, learners are not left with a record of the progress review outcomes. Procedures for management of subcontractors are generally followed. However, in one case the requirement for staff to observe and report on subcontracted training is not being carried out. Actions are currently being implemented to tackle these issues.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

33. There are good actions to promote equality and diversity, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. There is some partnership work to promote progression. For example, Access works with a women's outreach project that works with girls experiencing difficulty in formal education. A subcontractor for Access is making links with a minority ethnic group. Access has organised the provision of interpreters for learners. Many hospitality learners work in restaurants and Access has organised training towards a food hygiene certificate. There are some good learning materials. For example, an information sheet was produced in response to the need to provide employers with basic information on equal opportunities issues and how they should support learners in the workplace. This good practice has been shared with other work-based learning providers.

34. Access to premises is satisfactory. The Gateshead site is all ground floor level. Adaptations have recently been made following an access audit by a specialist organisation. Specific resources to support learners with various disabilities have been sourced and costed. The action plan details how support can be gained, should learners with specific needs be recruited. The Sunderland site is fully accessible by lifts. Both premises have toilets adapted for the use of people with disabilities.

35. Equal opportunities policies and procedures are adequate. External advice has been sought for producing new policies on disability and in updating current literature. A newsletter is produced twice a year and circulated to learners, employers and staff. Every copy has an item giving an update on some aspect of equality of opportunity. All learners are asked at progress reviews about equality of opportunity, though this is not

ACCESS TRAINING

always fully reinforced or explored.

36. The strategy for widening participation in Access is not adequate, a weakness not identified in the self-assessment report. Widening participation and a commitment to equality and diversity is recorded as a key aim in the strategy document. A yearly action plan gives specific actions to develop short-term initiatives. The partnership activities in which Access are involved help to promote some aspects of widening participation by ensuring a better resource for learners. However, there is insufficient long-term planning. Although some use is made of data collected for short-term projects data are not used effectively for long-term planning. There is not enough planning for the specific needs of identified groups. For example, some links have been made with a project specialising in learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Not enough planning has been done to assess the resource implications both in staffing and in materials to provide adequate support for learners with multiple barriers to learning. The staff training needs have not been fully assessed. The financial implications have not been assessed to ensure a smooth transition for learners who may take longer than most other learners to finish their learning programmes.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

37. Quality assurance arrangements are good. Managers are responsible for quality assurance and implement the arrangements very effectively. Quality assurance is well managed. Managers have identified a clear strategy for quality assurance and continuous improvement and have implemented the strategy effectively. The administration director provides effective leadership as the quality assurance manager. The general manager effectively leads the team of internal verifiers and assessors. The other three senior managers are fully involved in applying the quality assurance strategy. The current arrangements include a very thorough internal audit process. This takes place twice a year over a period of up to one month. There is also a well planned and recorded series of staff observations. Audits and observations are led and mainly carried out by the five senior managers. Preparation and planning is carried out thoroughly and there are detailed reports produced and effective analysis of non-compliance and areas for further improvement. Actions are implemented and improvements made.

38. The arrangements for quality assurance are clearly specified and well supported by written procedures. The scope of the arrangements are appropriate and cover the main aspects of training and the administration of training. All staff are briefed on the systems and procedures and are involved in the application of the quality assurance arrangements. The quality assurance system has been recently reviewed and improved and further development is taking place. This process is being managed well. The previous emphasis on compliance with standards and procedures has been developed to prioritise key processes which impact on the learner. This change enables there to be a clearer focus on continuous improvement. Continuous improvement and significant work to improve training arrangements is consistently carried out. Managers and staff have a strong commitment to quality, continuous improvement and in sharing good practice internally and with external partners.

39. Internal verification is satisfactory. Planning, management and implementation of the policy and procedures for internal verification are carried out appropriately. Recording of activity is effective and verification is appropriately applied. Leadership to the internal verification team is provided, with meetings held regularly and assessors given regular and appropriate guidance. Some further internal verification improvements are planned and Access has identified the need to train more internal verifiers. This work is currently being carried out.

40. Self-assessment is an established part of the quality assurance arrangements and is supported by a written procedure. Learners, employers, subcontractors and other partners views are collected systematically and used to develop the content of the self-assessment report. The most recent self-assessment report was produced in March and April 2003. Effective consultation with staff takes place as part of the self-assessment process. A member of the management team works with each occupational training team to identify strengths and weaknesses. All staff met with the management team and a draft report was discussed with staff. Other external partners who were consulted also receive a report. The current self-assessment report provides an appropriate assessment of the training provision **in two occupational areas**. Inspectors identified a number of **weaknesses not found in the** self-assessment report and judged a number of the strengths **to be no more than normal practice**.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	31	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- effective measures to improve retention and achievement rates
- strong links with supportive employers
- good staff development

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of progress reviews
- inadequate monitoring of subcontractor training

Achievement and standards

41. There are effective measures to improve retention and achievement rates. Training officers are responsible for specific learners. At monthly team meetings, any concerns about individual learners are raised and acted on. Training officers discuss strategies to keep learners on programme. For example, one learner left the programme and was found to be working at a new company. As he was still interested in completing his qualification, the company was contacted and allowed him to accumulate evidence and complete it. Training officers have a 60 per cent achievement target set for manufacturing and 50 per cent for security. Learners are placed in companies for probationary periods of one month. These are regarded as work trials not work experience. Most learners become employed at the end of this month.

42. The standard of learners' practical skills and technical knowledge is satisfactory overall. All learners are generally able to carry out routine practical tasks without constant supervision. They work safely and use appropriate tools competently. Learners' numeracy and literacy skills are mostly adequate. However, some learners' numeracy skills are not always adequate for some of the work they carry out.

43. The retention and achievement rates have been rising steadily over the past three years. Once retained, learners normally achieve their qualification. Early leavers usually exit after four to five weeks on programme. Most portfolios contain a satisfactory range of diverse evidence.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	16		6		2											
Retained*	0		0		0	0										
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0										
Still in learning	13		3		2	100										

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	19		38		19											
Retained*	5		25	66	7	37										
Successfully completed	1		23	61	7	37										
Still in learning	13		0	0	0	0										

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

Quality of education and training

44. There are strong links with supportive employers. Companies work with Access to develop the training programme and recruit learners. Employers are gradually transferring most aspects of recruitment to the provider. Training officers frequently visit companies for assessment and liaison purposes. Some employers arrange work tasters for potential learners before any training is arranged.

45. Staff development is good. Training officers and their manager attend multiple training sessions, both internally and externally. These are all appropriate to their job roles. The wide-ranging topic areas give them skills that help them deal effectively with issues arising from a wide range of manufacturing occupational areas. This is very specific to the needs of this area of learning. Staff are able to remain occupationally competent.

46. Background knowledge teaching for modern apprentices is satisfactory. It is taught by day release at a local college and during visits to the workplace. The learning materials and pace of teaching are appropriate to the topic and learners' needs. There is good practical work. Some practical facilities are inadequate for the long-term needs of learners. Alternative arrangements are in place for these learners. On-the-job training is satisfactory. Learners are supported in the workplace by skilled and experienced craftsmen or workplace supervisors. Some have a thorough

ACCESS TRAINING

understanding of the qualification. Company resources are adequate and enable learners to develop new skills.

47. Learners normally progress at a rate suited to the qualification, although some **manufacturing** learners complete it within nine months. Regular visits by staff ensure **learners** are supported throughout their qualification. Learners make a significant **contribution** to the work of their employers, while developing their own confidence and work skills.

48. New arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills during their induction are adequate and apply to learners entering training and potential employment through the provider. Consistent skill benchmarks are now in place. For those employed before training, an occupational assessment tool is used. Employers and learners each indicate job role skills requirements and potential gaps. No objective assessments of literacy or numeracy needs are made for these learners other than a guided interview. No learners have been identified with serious support needs, but a system has been introduced which keeps a note about learners who may require some help. The induction process is satisfactory and work is underway to ensure provider and workplace inductions are co-ordinated effectively. Health and safety training is very good.

49. Assessment is satisfactorily planned and carried out. Learners' feedback from assessment by direct observation is not adequately detailed. Assessment and verification procedures are in accordance with awarding body requirements. Assessors are allocated approximately 40 learners. Four portfolios of evidence are sampled and verified by each assessor each month, with reviews every six months. Sampling is done through the management information system.

50. There is ineffective use of progress reviews. Work done towards the qualification is not always specific to the NVQ unit or element. The setting of targets is neither specific enough nor challenging to the learner. The review does not adequately help learners' progress. Learners do not receive a personal copy of the review to help in personal planning. Health and safety and equal opportunities are mentioned, but not always adequately reinforced. Overall, individual learning plans are satisfactory.

51. There is inadequate monitoring of subcontractor training. Though visits are made at least every three weeks by a training officer allocated to oversee the subcontractor, there is no observation of teaching and learning. The training officer is relatively new to the role. Quality assurance is based on external verifier reports and termly progress reports on learners. No access to the subcontractors' own observation of training has been gained.

Leadership and management

52. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There is an open style of management with informal internal communications. External communications are adequate, though communications with schools are not yet fully implemented. A new member of staff has been taken on to increase the profile of manufacturing training. All staff contributed to the self-assessment report. The report is generally accurate. Employers' and learners'

ACCESS TRAINING

input is by questionnaires, with additional employer input through the training officers.

ACCESS TRAINING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	144	2
Other government-funded provision	49	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement and retention rates on NVQ programmes and co-financed programmes
- good off-the-job training
- very good training facilities and resources
- good matching of employers to learners
- good individual support and guidance for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient initial assessment on co-financed programmes
- insufficient understanding of programmes by employers

Achievement and standards

53. Achievement and retention rates are good on NVQ programmes and co-financed courses. This strength was partly identified in the self-assessment report. Between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001, achievement rates for NVQ programmes increased from 60 per cent to 67 per cent and retention rates, from 65 per cent to 67 per cent over the same period. For co-financed programmes between May 2002 and September 2003, 97.6 per cent of learners successfully completed their introductory certificate in management. Two other co-financed programmes, the certificate in training practice and the certificate in management, have been operating since January 2003 and learners will complete their training in December 2003. The retention rate for the introductory certificate in management is 98 per cent. For the certificate in training practice, the retention rate is 63 per cent and for the certificate in management 78 per cent.

54. Retention and achievement rates for work-based business administration programmes are satisfactory. In 2000-01, 48 per cent of advanced modern apprentices completed their framework. For the same period, 54 per cent of foundation modern apprentices completed their framework. The retention rates for advanced and foundation modern apprentices in 2000-01 was 60 per cent and 63 per cent respectively.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	27		36		25											
Retained*	4		6		15	60										
Successfully completed	0		3		12	48										
Still in learning	21		10		2	8										

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	111		71		71											
Retained*	5		40		45	63										
Successfully completed	2		23		38	54										
Still in learning	79		11		0	0										

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	24		39		24											
Retained*	8		17	44	16	67										
Successfully completed	7		16	41	16	67										
Still in learning	15		6	15	0	0										

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

ACCESS TRAINING

Other government funded																
	2002-03		2001-02													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	334		29													
Retained*	266		29	100												
Successfully completed	260		27	93												
Still in training	49		0	0												

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

Quality of education and training

55. Off-the-job training is good, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Staff use a good range of teaching strategies. For example, in accounts, training is carried out through day release, half-day workshops, twilight sessions, individual tutorials and distance learning. Trainers fully understand individual learners' needs. Training is structured well and staff make effective use of lesson plans. They prepare good support materials to reinforce knowledge and understanding, including materials for learners working towards the new technical certificates. These materials focus on legislation such as health and safety and data protection. On co-financed courses, staff have prepared a number of case studies, which promote learners' understanding of management theories, such as motivation and working in teams. Although there are additional relevant qualifications available to learners, many are not aware of them.

56. Access has very good training facilities and resources, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. Staff hold relevant vocational qualifications and have appropriate occupational experience. All assessors and internal verifiers hold relevant training and development qualifications. There are good training facilities and resources at Access' and subcontractors' learning centres. Training rooms are well equipped with appropriate training aids and relevant visual displays. Learners are able to gain and practise skills such as presentation skills. Learners have access to appropriate computer software and hardware with internet access. Library resources are good and include a wide range of textbooks, professional workbooks, videos and journals. Resources can be loaned to learners on request. However, some learners are unaware of the range of resources available to them.

57. There is good matching of employers to learners, with 83 per cent of the learners in full-time employment, 11 per cent in work placements and 6 per cent have recently entered training and are awaiting a placement. Employment roles meet the aspirations and needs of learners, enabling them to collect evidence towards their qualification. Learners are integrated with work teams and have the opportunity to develop employability skills such as time management and working as a team member. There is a wide range of employment including the legal, financial, education, manufacturing and

security sectors. Employers are flexible to learners' needs and provide on-the-job training in response to identified needs including training in IT. Another example involved a learner who was encouraged by the employer to proceed to the specialised higher level qualification customised to the industry. Links between training staff and employers are good. Training staff ensure that employers are kept informed as to the progress of learners. This further contributes to a supportive employment environment for learners.

58. There is good individual support and guidance for learners, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Learners are visited in the workplace by training staff for formal and informal progress reviews, assessment and action-planning. Appropriate targets are agreed and are monitored on subsequent visits. Visits to the workplace enable training staff to identify specific support required by learners. For example, on the accounting technician programme, a specific need was identified for support in book-keeping. An external training organisation now provides this training. In business administration, a dedicated hardship fund was used to provide welfare support. Training staff have good working relationships with learners and employers.

59. Assessment is satisfactory. There is considerable observation of learners' performance in the workplace. Following assessment, learners are given constructive verbal and written feedback by the assessor. A range of evidence is used, including appropriate use of witness testimony and work-product evidence. Learners' progress is monitored satisfactorily. However, the monitoring system on modern apprenticeship framework programmes is not sufficiently clear to ensure that learners are always aware of their current progress. There is no accreditation or recognition of single units completed by learners following NVQ programmes. On co-financed programmes monitoring progress is good.

60. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets the requirements of awarding bodies. There is an internal verification policy and a sampling strategy and plan have been produced. A team of four qualified verifiers and a number of other staff are **currently** working towards the new verification qualifications. Internal verifiers, as part of the verification process, observe assessors and provide written feedback. There are monthly meetings between verifiers and assessors to discuss issues and to share good practice.

61. There is insufficient initial assessment for learners on co-financed programmes. This weakness was partly identified in the self-assessment report. The training provider and subcontractor are aware of this weakness and are in the process of introducing a more structured initial assessment. Since May 2002, informal assessment of learners' needs has been carried out by staff at the subcontractor. There is no evidence that a structured system of support for learners with additional numeracy and literacy needs is available.

62. Employers have an insufficient understanding of the learning programmes. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. **Although**, there is insufficient **promotion** of NVQs and modern apprenticeship frameworks, Access has developed an **appropriate handbook** and guidelines for employers. However, in most cases, employers **have an insufficient** understanding of the learning programmes. There is insufficient employer

ACCESS TRAINING

involvement in the assessment process. Employers do not liaise with Access' trainers to identify relevant opportunities for assessment. Employers do not receive a copy of the short-term action plan agreed by Access' staff with the learner. Learners do not always meet agreed actions and some make slow progress. Many employers do not contribute effectively during progress reviews.

Leadership and management

63. The area of learning is managed effectively. Communication between training staff and management is good and staff are kept well informed of developments. Staff understand the procedures and documents, although application is inconsistent in some areas. Meetings are well planned. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are not always consistently identified or supported. Staff do not hold qualifications which enable them to provide specialised support in this area. A new system is being piloted to ensure a more consistent approach. Subcontractors were involved in the self-assessment process.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	39	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good achievement of NVQs in 2001-02
- particularly good development of learners
- effective initiatives to improve training in distribution and warehousing

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- some poor assessment practices
- ineffective use of progress reviews

Achievement and standards

64. Achievement of NVQs in 2001-02 is good. Sixty-four per cent of learners who started their programme achieved their qualification. Retention rates have improved from 26 per cent in 1999-2000, to 64 per cent in 2001-02. In 2002-03, 30 per cent of learners achieved their NVQ. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices in 2001-02 was 67 per cent. Many of the foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners who started in 2002-03 are still in learning. The retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices over the past three years are satisfactory.

ACCESS TRAINING

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4				3											
Retained*	0				2											
Successfully completed	0				2											
Still in learning	4				0											

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	20		15		9		3									
Retained*	3		10		3	33	3	100								
Successfully completed	1		2		2	22	3	100								
Still in learning	17		3		1	11	0	0								

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	23		11		28		27									
Retained*	9		7	64	12	43	7	26								
Successfully completed	7		7	64	12	43	6	22								
Still in learning	14		0	0	0	0	0	0								

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

Quality of education and training

65. Learners' development is particularly good. All learners receive comprehensive on-the-job training from workplace supervisors and managers. Some also attend relevant in-house training courses provided by their employer. In addition to developing good job skills, learners also develop good personal skills, such as dealing with customers and working as a team. Some learners have been given specific areas of responsibility, or have been promoted during their time on programme. For example, one learner is now

a team leader and received a salary increase to reflect this. Employment opportunities are particularly good, as most learners are either employed at the beginning of their programme, or achieve employed status within three months of their programme start date.

66. There are effective initiatives to raise standards of training in the distribution and warehousing. The Distribution Network is aimed at improving practice in those local and regional learning centres providing distribution and warehousing qualifications. This includes six learning centres along with representation from the local LSC and the relevant awarding body. Over the past two years, quarterly meetings have been held to tackle issues such as standardisation of assessment, development of learning materials, and sharing good practice. Awarding body specialists have made visits to discuss aspects of new standards in the occupational area.

67. Teaching and learning within the occupational area is often through satisfactory individual coaching in the workplace. Off-the-job training sessions for key skills and aspects of customer service and warehousing are also provided. Learners' attendance at these group sessions has been poor, but recent initiatives to persuade employers to release learners for individual sessions, especially for key skills training, have been more successful.

68. Learning resources are satisfactory. Those for distribution and warehousing are currently limited to training session handouts on such subjects as security and stock control. A good range of learning materials is, however, available for customer service training, but they are rarely used. Plans are being made to make more frequent use of these resources. Occupational experience and updating of staff working in the area of learning is satisfactory.

69. Initial assessment of learners' skills is satisfactory. Appropriate tests are now being routinely used to determine learners' literacy and numeracy skills. All learners complete a detailed occupational skills check, related to their job role, and programmes are well matched to learners' job descriptions. No learners currently have additional support needs. The lead internal verifier is a qualified basic skills tutor.

70. Internal verification is satisfactory. Verifiers plan sampling of learners' portfolios on a quarterly basis. Sampling records are maintained, with detailed comments and actions for assessors as appropriate. Schedules of assessors' observations have also been planned, although not enough activity has been carried out in customer service. A new schedule to correct this is currently being drafted. Assessment team meetings are held each month by internal verifiers. Standardisation activities have taken place to introduce new qualification standards and to ensure consistency of assessment of current qualifications.

71. Some learners make slow progress. Several learners have been on programme for almost a year, and have achieved only one or two NVQ units. For some learners, key skills training and assessment are not introduced at the start of the learning programme. Assessment records identify slow progress and additional visits are planned. One

ACCESS TRAINING

learner's scheduled progress review was postponed due to inspection of the training company. Some learners have been changed back to previous methods of assessment, as assessors concluded that some newly devised assessments were hindering progress. Some learners' portfolios do not contain enough evidence.

72. Some assessment practices are poor. One assessor did not conduct an adequate briefing of the learner before starting assessment. Portfolios of other learners show a good number of evidence items not yet recorded on evidence reference sheets, and other items of evidence not cross-referenced to other appropriate NVQ units. Many assessor reports do not contain records of oral questioning used during assessment. Most assessor reports do not contain clear assessment decisions on learners' competence following assessment, although reports do refer to the qualification standards. No clear feedback given to learners on their performance during assessment is recorded.

73. There is ineffective use of progress reviews. Comments in review records are not adequately detailed and target-setting is poor. Some targets do not have clear achievement dates, or are not clearly related to NVQ units. Key induction themes such as health and safety are not sufficiently reinforced at progress reviews. Most learners are unclear as to their progress and do not understand their qualifications. Many learners are unaware of the need to take key skills, and also of the content and purpose of their individual learning plan. Most do not have a copy of this document.

Leadership and management

74. Management of the area of learning is satisfactory. Induction of learners takes place over a two-week or two-day period, depending on the time that each learner joins the programme. Longer inductions are held at the learning centre, while shorter ones are conducted in the workplace. Each learner receives a pack outlining the content and process of an NVQ, and managers are often present at some point, to help decide the choice of appropriate NVQ units. Other key processes are satisfactory.