

INSPECTION REPORT

British Gas (British Gas Engineering Academy)

22 January 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 and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

INSPECTION REPORT

British Gas (British Gas Engineering Academy)

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. British Gas Engineering Academy (the academy) was formed in January 2003, in response to the company's need to recruit 5,000 new gas engineers over the next five years. The gas installation and maintenance industry has an acute skills gap and experienced and qualified existing engineers are not available in sufficient volume in the workplace. The academy is part of British Gas, which is a subsidiary of Centrica plc. The academy has two main training centres, one in Leeds and one in Basingstoke. The academy also has a training centre in Glasgow which was not in the scope of this inspection. All learners are on advanced modern apprenticeship training programmes in either domestic gas maintenance or domestic gas installation programmes.
2. The academy's strategic direction is given by a director who has direct access to members of the British Gas board of directors. The director is supported by a senior manager who has responsibility for the training centres. The senior manager is in turn supported by three training centre managers and one manager who is responsible for the quality assurance of the training programmes. There are 35 full-time training officers who are responsible for training and assessment.
3. British Gas has a contract to provide training with the national contracting service of the Learning and Skills Council. Learners are recruited from across the country. Only learners with at least four general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) are recruited to the academy's training programmes.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Construction

4. There are currently 502 learners working towards an advanced modern apprenticeship at the academy. There are 369 following the domestic gas maintenance training programme and 133 on the domestic gas installation training programme. Learners are recruited from across the country and employed from the start of their training programme. The training programme aims to enable learners to complete the modern apprenticeship 12 to 18 months after their start date. Learners on the service and maintenance training programmes spend 30 weeks and learners on the installation training programme spend 26 weeks at one of the training centres. Learners spend the remaining time working with qualified engineers in the workplace. Learners work towards additional qualifications in unvented hot water systems and intensive gas safety. These additional qualifications allow learners to prepare for the gas industry's national accreditation assessment. There are 35 training officers involved in the provision of off-the-job training. Two hundred service engineers or installers in the workplace are qualified assessors. There are also 27 internal verifiers in the workplace.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	22
Number of learner interviews	64
Number of staff interviews	73
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	34
Number of partner/external agency interviews	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in gas installation and servicing is outstanding. The leadership and management of the academy are good. The academy's arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory and those for quality assurance are 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

Construction	1
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. **Retention and achievement rates are excellent.** Over the past three years between 89 and 96 per cent of the learners who started training have completed the modern apprenticeship framework. Eighty-five per cent of learners complete their training programme in the time allowed by the academy. Very few leave the training programme without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan. Learners gain very good practical skills while in training. Learners' work is very good. Very soon after starting on the training programme, learners can complete practical tasks to industry standard in customers' homes. While achievement is excellent and the provision has a strong emphasis on gaining practical skills, key skills training and assessment is uninspiring for learners. Key skills are taught through open learning packs and there is

little direct teaching. **Many learners are not sufficiently challenged by the key skills provision.** Learners only obtain the minimum level of key skills required by their training programme rather than the level for which they were identified as being capable of during initial assessment. However, this has not had a significant impact on learners' achievement.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	1	9	1	0	0	11
Total	0	0	1	9	1	0	0	11

7. **There are exceptional learning resources for learners at the academy.** The numerous work bays at the training centres effectively replicate conditions found in the workplace. Appliances for finding gas faults are modern and very well maintained. Productive links with manufacturers across the country help the academy to maintain a supply of a wide range of boilers, fires and cookers. Teaching rooms are modern and well resourced. Laptop computers with specifically designed software for installation and servicing engineers are effectively used. Teaching is satisfactory. Practical vocational training is very effective with all training officers being professionally qualified and experienced. However, a lot of classroom training focuses too much on the training officer.

8. **Training is particularly well planned.** The whole of the training programme is planned in minute detail. Learners understand their training timetables well and are able to use them effectively to plan independent study. On-the-job training is well planned to ensure learners work with all the gas appliances and situations required by the national vocational qualification (NVQ). When necessary, learners are moved to different geographical locations to enable them to cover the range of appliances needed. Assessments are planned into the training programme by using the organisation's 200 work-based assessors around the country. Initial assessment is given during the recruitment stage as a method of screening out learners who do not have the necessary literacy or numeracy skills required for this course.

9. **The academy provides learners with very good support.** Many learners stay in good hotels when attending the training centre. Training officers, both in the workplace and at the training centres, have a good knowledge of learners' personal circumstances and act on this knowledge promptly and with sensitivity. A buddy system, which gives learners their own personal mentor at work, is very effective in supporting learners at work. This system continues even after the training finishes. Good monitoring of learners' performance ensures prompt help with specific difficulties. All learners get industry standard tool kits, uniforms and a new van. Driving lessons are arranged for those learners who do not drive. All learners get a benefits package which includes healthcare, a good pension scheme and share options. Any specific problems to do with numeracy or literacy, usually associated with key skills, are handled by individual training officers.

Leadership and management

10. **There is very effective strategic development at the academy.** Following analysis of learners' performance in 2001, the management at British Gas made the strategic decision to provide training directly and not use subcontractors. British Gas invested heavily in the building and equipping of the academy's training centres. British Gas's business plan includes clear objectives and performance measures linked to the quality of the training provision. British Gas sets the academy's retention and achievement targets. Targets are clearly communicated to all staff. The academy has had centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) status since January 2004.

11. **The management of training is good.** Training is well organised and planned. All staff and learners understand the training programme and their views are sought regularly and used to adapt the programme. Learners' progress is fully monitored and they are provided with the support they require, from their recruitment to the training programme until they finish it. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is good. Resources are well maintained and managed. Staff training and vocational experience are good. **However, there is insufficient development of the teaching skills of staff.** Most staff only have a basic teaching certificate. Teaching methods are insufficiently varied. There are plans in place to further develop the teaching skills of staff.

12. **The academy uses management information very effectively.** The academy uses two databases to give accurate and timely information about learners' backgrounds and to monitor retention and achievement rates. This information is used to improve performance. For example, after analysing learners' pass rates for the gas industry's national accreditation assessment, the academy changed the training materials it used. Pass rates have since improved. Information is used effectively for operational and strategic planning.

13. **The academy has an effective recruitment process.** The organisation eliminates any bias in its adverts and information packs. All materials have positive images of women and minority ethnic groups to encourage learners from these groups to apply. However, only 1 per cent of learners are women, 1 per cent have a physical disability and 4 per cent are from minority ethnic communities. The academy has insufficient strategies to attract under-represented learners to its training programme. The academy's main strategy to recruit under-represented groups is based on British Gas's education liaison strategy which aims to raise schools' and Connexions's awareness to the academy. The academy has done some work to link with women's groups and minority ethnic groups but these efforts have been sporadic and not strategic. All managers are trained in recruitment and interview techniques to ensure fairness. Learners must have at least four GCSEs and pass a number of tests used in the selection process. The academy is currently changing its application process, as analysis identified some possible bias against learners from minority ethnic groups. Learners recruited to the academy have very few literacy, numeracy or language support needs. The recruitment process is effective in recruiting learners with good base line skills.

14. **The academy has some good initiatives to promote equality of opportunity.** British Gas has a new equal opportunities strategy. The academy now has a recruitment officer specifically responsible for equality of opportunity. One member of the recruitment team is now specifically dedicated to widening participation in learning. There are still three vacant positions. Despite these initiatives, **there is insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity** by staff and learners. Staff training on equality of opportunity has only recently started. This is now being used during the induction of new learners. Most learners have no recollection of covering equality of opportunity at induction. However, new learners' recollection of it is better. Not enough is done to ensure learners have the breadth of knowledge for the wide range of customers with whom they will be dealing. Actions are planned to remedy this problem.

15. **The academy has very good quality assurance arrangements.** Training processes are monitored very effectively. Detailed procedures are well understood and followed by staff. Performance data are analysed as part of the quality assurance arrangements. There are good arrangements for collecting feedback from learners and staff. Learners' forums are used in addition to questionnaires to elicit information which is then used to make improvements to the provision. The self-assessment arrangements are satisfactory. While quality assurance is good, **there is some unsatisfactory monitoring of internal verifiers.** Internal verification in the workplace concentrates mainly on monitoring portfolios of evidence and not on the assessment process itself. Records about learners' progress are not always easily available. The academy has identified this problem. An internal verification manager has now been appointed. Some improvements are already in place.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very effective strategic development
- good management of the training provision
- very effective use of management information
- effective recruitment process
- some good actions to promote equality of opportunity
- very good quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient staff development in teaching
- insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity
- insufficient strategies to attract under-represented groups to the academy's training programmes
- some unsatisfactory monitoring of internal verifiers

Construction

Strengths

- excellent achievement and retention rates
- very well-developed practical skills
- exceptional learning resources
- well-planned training programme
- very good support for learners

Weaknesses

- uninspiring key skills provision

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT BRITISH GAS (BRITISH GAS ENGINEERING ACADEMY):

- the good learning resources
- that they are treated like adults
- the friendly staff
- that they are paid well
- the tools and equipment that the academy provides
- the benefits package
- that there are staff located throughout the country - 'there's always someone to call on'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK BRITISH GAS (BRITISH GAS ENGINEERING ACADEMY) COULD IMPROVE:

- the key skills provision - 'its boring and has been done before'
- more time in training
- access to laptop computers for evening studies
- training closer to home
- clearer joining instructions - 'like what we have to wear and how we will get there from the hotel'

KEY CHALLENGES FOR BRITISH GAS (BRITISH GAS ENGINEERING ACADEMY):

- ensure coherent and effective strategies to attract under-represented groups into learning
- progress staff development in teaching and learning to a standard of excellence
- significantly increase staff and learners' knowledge of equality of opportunity
- make effective use of initial assessment for the planning of individual learning

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very effective strategic development
- good management of the training provision
- very effective use of management information
- effective recruitment process
- some good actions to promote equality of opportunity
- very good quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient staff development in teaching
- insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity
- insufficient strategies to attract under-represented groups to the academy's training programmes
- some unsatisfactory monitoring of internal verifiers

16. The academy has very effective arrangements for strategic development. Following a detailed analysis of learners' performance in 2001, British Gas made a strategic decision to provide training to its learners directly and not use subcontractors. In the past three years, British Gas has established a number of exceptionally well-equipped training centres, heavily investing in the training provision. British Gas's business plan contains clear objectives and a range of performance measures specifically linked to the quality of training for its learners and their performance. For example, British Gas sets the academy's retention and achievement targets. These objectives are well communicated and promoted to the academy's staff. All staff understand these objectives well and are very clear about their contribution towards achieving them. Managers at the academy reinforce these objectives regularly and maintain strong leadership in this area. The academy has had CoVE status since January 2004.

17. The academy's management of training is good. The academy has developed a very effective process to manage learners' progress, from their induction through to a period of supported employment following their completion of the modern apprenticeship framework. Learners receive a thorough induction to their training programme and have a clear understanding of how they can develop their careers in British Gas. The training programme is thoroughly and effectively planned. Learners receive a clear, well-produced and detailed plan of on- and off-the-job training. Assessment weeks are clearly identified. Learners are well informed and very clear about their individual learning plan and their progress. The academy routinely monitors learners' progress. For example, the

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academy monitors learners' off-the-job assessments. Those learners who are identified as not having completed these assessments successfully are provided with additional support. This support is very effectively provided by the training officers who are assigned to support the pastoral and training needs of groups of learners during their training programme. These training officers provide practical training which is relevant to the needs of British Gas's business operation. British Gas provides excellent facilities in the training centres to support this training. Through effective use of the management information system, the academy has identified some problems with its selection process. The organisation has now stopped using some of its selection methods. The academy is developing better processes for its future recruitment of learners.

18. The academy uses management information very effectively to plan its training programmes. The academy has developed two databases which provide accurate and timely information about learners' gender, ethnicity, retention and achievement and learners' progress through the training programme. For example, after analysing learners' pass rates for the gas industry's national accreditation assessment, the academy changed the training materials it used and increased the support provided by its staff. Pass rates have now improved. The academy also utilises this information to develop or modify its strategic and operational direction. The academy also monitors learners' performance during the period of supported employment after the training programme as a means of evaluating and identifying modifications to the training programme.

19. Internal communication in the academy is satisfactory. There is a range of strategic, operational and quality assurance meetings which appropriate staff attend. These are regular, well-attended meetings which focus on the management, development or quality assurance of the training programmes. For example, in these meetings, learners' views are discussed and clear actions are identified. Minutes of these meetings are recorded and all staff are aware of their content. Some actions are not timebound. There is also a range of working groups to improve aspects of the training programme. For example, there is a key skills working group and a working group to report on any staff concerns. These groups improve teamworking. The academy's senior manager regularly travels to all the training centres. Staff have appropriate opportunities for regular, informal discussions with the senior manager and other managers.

20. Arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support at the academy are satisfactory. The academy does not yet have a written literacy or numeracy strategy or action plan and none of its training staff have, or are working towards, the new recommended qualifications for tutors and support tutors. However, due to the rigorous selection process, the academy's learners have few literacy, numeracy or language support needs. More advanced literacy and numeracy needs are supported by individual training officers as they are identified, through the good support mechanisms for learners.

21. The academy's management of resources is satisfactory. All training officers are professionally competent and most have a basic teaching qualification. There are plans to extend their teaching competence through further staff development. Accommodation is welcoming and well maintained. There has been heavy investment in vocational resources for learners. However, learners do not have access to dedicated

computers with internet access, and cannot use the training centres in the evenings for independent study.

22. All staff at the academy receive a full and detailed appraisal once a year when their performance and contribution to British Gas's priorities and challenges are adequately discussed and agreed. For example during these meetings, targets for retention and achievement rates are agreed. There are financial incentives for staff to achieve or exceed these targets.

23. There is insufficient staff development in teaching. For most staff, previous training and development has been on vocational topics. Many training officers are well trained and experienced vocationally but are new to training. Most staff now have a basic training qualification. Only two members of staff have more advanced training qualifications than this introductory, two-week training course. Their presentation skills have improved. Most training officers also have assessor awards. Teaching observed by inspectors focused too much on the training officer. Learners did not participate sufficiently. Until very recently staff had not received training about equality of opportunity. No-one in the organisation had received any training to deal with learners with literacy or numeracy support needs or to help with key skills. Staff involved in the recruitment process have received training to enable them to identify learners who have dyslexia, but none have received training to support these learners. The academy has identified this weakness and there are plans in place for staff development in this area. This has had minimal impact on learners who continue to develop good practical skills and maintain an excellent record of achievement.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

24. The academy has an effective recruitment process which is fair and rigorous. The organisation eliminates any bias in its adverts and information packs. All materials contain positive images of women and people from minority ethnic groups, to encourage them to apply for the training programme. All managers involved in the recruitment process are trained and given information packs with standard questioning and approaches to eliminate bias in paper-based selection and during interviews. Applications are considered by managers without personal details attached to ensure that the process is fair. Assessments are rigorous and applied by professionally qualified staff. They effectively identify learners who do not have the necessary skills to enable them to complete this very demanding programme. Where potential bias was found in the assessments, steps were taken to put alternative assessments in place. A new e-recruitment system is now in place. This gives instant access to data about applicants which is used to monitor fairness in the recruitment process.

25. The academy has some good initiatives to promote equality and diversity. The training programme is promoted in women's and minority ethnic community publications. This publicity campaign has substantial financing, reflecting the importance British Gas has placed on the recruitment of learners from these groups. A major television advertising campaign for British Gas focuses on the organisation's learners, with good representation of both women and people from minority ethnic groups. A

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new equality of opportunity and diversity officer is now in place. An equality and diversity strategy for British Gas has been written. A recruitment officer is now dedicated to the diversity agenda and has started some good work linking with minority ethnic communities. A new education liaison strategy is in place which sets out how the academy is to link with schools and Connexions. A new CD-ROM has been commissioned. A copy of this strategy is to be sent to all schools and Connexions. Three posts have been created to further this work. One post has already been filled and the other two remain vacant. Many of these initiatives are relatively new so it is too early to judge their impact.

26. The academy's policies and procedures are satisfactory. There is a range of policies covering race relations, disability, bullying and harassment, and human rights. They are comprehensive and clearly written, and cover all relevant legislation.

27. The academy's accommodation and resources are adequate for equal opportunities purposes. There are good teaching resources in both centres. Access is satisfactory for people with restricted mobility, and most areas are on the ground floor. Lifts are installed in areas needing upstairs access. Toilet facilities for people with disabilities have also been installed. The academy has been subject to an access audit. Following this, some ramps have been built. Further actions are detailed in the organisation's audit plan.

28. The grievance and complaints procedure is satisfactory. Learners consistently report that their rights are well protected. They have access not only to company lines of responsibility but they are also encouraged to seek union representation. This forms part of their induction. All learners know who to complain to and how to make a complaint. Complaints received have been dealt with efficiently and in compliance with the procedure.

29. There is insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity by staff and learners at the academy. Staff training on equality of opportunity has only started very recently. A session to raise staff awareness of equality of opportunity was provided just before the inspection. This is now being used during the induction of new learners. Before this initiative, learners covered equality of opportunity by reading through policies. Learners have no recollection of covering equality of opportunity at induction. However, new learners' recollect it better. A new question is now specifically asked at progress reviews with learners to prompt the discussion of equality of opportunity, but this has just been implemented and there is little impact as yet. A bank of questions is asked but these do not fully explore wider equal opportunities topics. Learners go into the homes of customers throughout the country. There is insufficient exploration of the potential problems learners could face.

30. The academy has insufficient strategies to attract learners from under-represented groups. British Gas has a clear diversity strategy. Staff are enthusiastic about it and are committed to developing the diversity of learner representation. However, the academy does not have its own diversity strategy. The academy's diversity arrangements are based on the education liaison strategy which aims to raise schools' and Connexions's awareness of training opportunities with British Gas. Some partnership work has started

but this has been largely dependent on the enthusiasm of one member of staff. However, there are plans to remedy this situation with further staffing. There is little extended work with strategic or operational partners. There is a marketing plan which is currently targeting under-represented groups but this is separate from any academy diversity plans. Taster sessions or introductory courses are not used well to give learners a better understanding of what is involved in the training programmes. Links with other work-based learning providers who specialise in less advanced courses are not well developed so there are no direct progression routes to the academy's training programmes.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

31. The academy has good quality assurance arrangements. The provider has very effective arrangements for monitoring the training processes. A manager has overall responsibility for all quality assurance arrangements and all staff are well aware of their quality assurance responsibilities. The academy has a comprehensive quality assurance policy manual which is used well by all staff. There is also a well-developed range of quality monitoring procedures and a schedule of quality monitoring activities. For example, there are detailed procedures for the observation of training, induction and progress reviews. Training officers are observed training twice each year. These give a good basis for individual action plans. The academy routinely monitors the organisation's compliance with the quality assurance policies and procedures. This process is very effective in identifying problems relating to performance. When problems are identified, an action plan is drawn up and progress against it is monitored through monthly management meetings.

32. The academy uses these policies comprehensively to quality assure and monitor the performance of all its training centres. This monitoring is very effective in quality assuring the provision at all of the training centres. Performance data for each training centre is analysed as part of the quality assurance process and trends are identified for each training centre and for the academy as a whole. There are good arrangements for collecting feedback from learners. The academy uses a wide variety of questionnaires to use as a basis for modifying the training programmes and other aspects of the learners' experience. Learners are also offered the opportunity to express their views through learner forums. In response to such feedback, the academy has increased the resources available for on-the-job mentoring.

33. The academy's self-assessment process is satisfactory. All staff have been involved in the self-assessment process and the report provides a satisfactory assessment of the training provision. It has correctly identified most of the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. However, the academy has not thoroughly assessed its arrangements for equality of opportunity. The organisation has developed a comprehensive action plan based on the self-assessment report, but it is too early to judge the impact of many of these actions. Most of the grades given by inspectors are the same as those in the self-assessment report, although the grade given by inspectors for the area of learning was higher than the grade in the self-assessment report.

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34. There is some unsatisfactory monitoring of internal verifiers. A team of regional technical managers and technical support officers carries out internal verification of work-based evidence. The internal verifiers work according to geographical location. There are currently 27 internal verifiers in different geographical areas. The organisation's evaluation of internal verification activities identified inconsistencies in how this key activity is carried out. For example, workplace internal verification mainly concentrates on monitoring completed portfolios of evidence and not the assessment process. Verifiers also use a range of different documents. Sampling plans for assessment are not fully completed by all internal verifiers. Records of the observation and monitoring of assessors are not always easily available. The academy has appointed a full-time internal verification manager to concentrate on developing verification practice and the monitoring of all internal verification practices across all the training centres and throughout the country. This role has had an immediate positive impact on verification practices.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 1

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	502	1

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- excellent achievement and retention rates
- very well-developed practical skills
- exceptional learning resources
- well-planned training programme
- very good support for learners

Weaknesses

- uninspiring key skills provision

Achievement and standards

35. Retention and achievement rates are excellent. Over the past three years between 89 and 96 per cent of the learners who started training have completed the modern apprenticeship framework. Eighty-five per cent of learners complete their training programme in the time allowed by the academy. Very few leave the training programme without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan.

36. Learners gain very good practical skills throughout their training programme. Learners' work is very good. They pay close attention to health and safety and company procedures. Learners are given responsibility for doing work in customers' houses early in their training and show that they are able to work to industrial standards. Those learners working on the installation training programme complete pipework exercises which are neat and accurate. Learners on the servicing modern apprenticeship demonstrate good ability in finding faults on gas appliances and show they are able to research information from a wide range of sources to help them complete their work effectively and safely.

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The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	372		209		208		190		114		95				
Retained*	4		70		186	89	180	95	110	96	88	93				
Successfully completed	4		70		186	89	180	95	110	96	88	93				
Still in learning	367		133		2	1	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

37. Resources for learning are exceptional. Work bays in the training centres effectively replicate conditions found in the workplace. Learners are able to simulate working under floors or in the loft areas of houses. Gas appliances for learners to practice fault-finding techniques are modern and well maintained. British Gas has made many productive links with manufacturers to help maintain the supply of boilers, fires, cookers and water heaters. Classrooms are also very good. Rooms have good resources for learning, including overhead and data projectors. All facilities are well maintained. From the first week of the training programme, learners work with the same laptop computers that qualified engineers use in the workplace, using specific software for the development of vocational skills. Each learner is supplied with a tool kit and those who can drive are given a company vehicle in their first week of training. Training officers are very well qualified and experienced in gas installation and servicing and the practical training they provide is good.

38. Training is particularly well planned. The whole of the training programme is planned in minute detail. Learners are able to see exactly where they will be for each week until the end of the course. Subjects to be covered are included in the plan allowing learners to prepare for learning sessions in their own time and focus on particular topics when in the workplace. On-the-job training is planned to ensure learners cover all the gas appliances and situations required by the NVQ. Arrangements are made to move learners to different geographical areas to ensure that they cover all the NVQ requirements. For example, certain types of air heaters are more commonly found in particular types of houses. Learners may be temporarily moved to areas with more of these houses in order to gain the necessary experience. Learners keep detailed diaries of their activities at work. These are frequently checked by training officers. Initial assessment is given by the recruitment team in Basingstoke. There are industry standard tests to aid selection and recruitment of potential learners. The results of these tests are recorded on individual learning plans. However, training officers are unsure as to what

the results mean. If any additional learning needs are identified during initial assessment, they are not recorded in any detail on the individual learning plan. There is insufficient use of target-setting for learning through individual learning plans or progress reviews. Those few learners who have additional needs for literacy, numeracy or dyslexia receive individual support as required during the training programme. The recruitment process is effective in ensuring learners have good baseline skills before starting the training programme. Learners get good support from staff. All training officers are also qualified assessors. They do not assess learners they have trained. This is an added quality assurance measure which exceeds the awarding body's requirements. Each training centre has two members of staff who internally verify training centre assessments and candidates' portfolios. Training centre staff sample all completed NVQ portfolios when received from the district internal verifier.

39. Support for learners is very good. Many learners stay in good hotels when attending the training centres. Monitoring of the accommodation and learners' personal circumstances is continuous and complaints are acted upon promptly. Trainers in the workplace and training officers at the training centre have a good knowledge of learners' personal circumstances and provide support sensitively and confidentially. Many learners who have had other jobs or done other training programmes since leaving school, express high degrees of satisfaction with their training at the academy and the support they receive from staff. Buddy systems, where experienced engineers support learners who are coming to the end of their training, help ensure that learners work within their capabilities while developing new skills. Learners' performance in the workplace is monitored after they finish the training programme to identify any modifications required to the training programme. Each learner is supplied with an industry standard tool kit and, if they can drive, a company vehicle in their first few weeks of training. If they cannot drive, driving lessons are provided. All learners have a good benefits package which includes a good pension scheme, healthcare and share options.

40. Most learning sessions are satisfactory. However, there is insufficient variety in teaching methods. Mostly, traditional methods of teaching are used. In one learning session observed, the training officer dominated the process and there was little student involvement, challenge or stimulation. Practical teaching in workshops and the workplace is good.

41. Induction is satisfactory. A week is set aside at the beginning of the training programme to familiarise learners with the company's procedures and introduce them to training. At the end of the training programme, learners are inducted to the workplace. During this time, their responsibilities for working unsupervised are emphasised.

42. The key skills training programme is uninspiring. There is no planned programme of training for key skills. Key skills training is provided through an open learning pack. The pack outlines a number of tasks that the learners must complete. A chart is provided to show how the completed activities might cross-reference to the key skills standards. There is also guidance on the support that learners can expect from their training officer and assessor. Many learners completing the key skills pack do not feel they have learnt

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anything from the process. Most learners had either completed key skills at a more advanced level before or had exemptions. All learners aim for the minimum framework requirements of key skills qualification regardless of their starting point. Some learners are capable of achieving a higher level of key skills than that which they are working towards.

Leadership and management

43. The training centres at Leeds and Basingstoke train and assess new learners working on service or installation engineer training programmes. The training centres are effectively managed. There are regular team meetings and course reviews. Information from these meetings forms part of the self-assessment process. Centre management operate strict quality assurance systems. Procedures are well understood by all staff. Target-setting for the academy is done as part of British Gas's overall business plan. Members of staff are appraised and set targets for performance. These targets are monitored throughout the year. The management information system used by managers is effective in assisting with the analysis of the performance of the training programme and is used as a basis for planning and making improvements to the training programme.

44. Internal verification of work-based assessment activities has not yet been introduced throughout the country. Some verifiers in the workplace are not frequently monitored. In some cases, verification is left to the end of the training programme and focuses too much on checking portfolios of evidence rather than observing assessment. This problem has been identified by the academy. A new manager is now in place and has started to introduce changes.

45. The self-assessment report identified the main strengths and one weakness in this area of learning. There was a broad consultation process, which involved all stakeholders. The development plan is a standard agenda item in the monthly management meetings.