

INSPECTION REPORT

Vocational Training Services

12 February 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

VOCATIONAL TRAINING SERVICES

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

Vocational Training Services

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Vocational Training Services (VTS) is a private limited company established in 1994 and based in Essex. The company offers training and assessment for national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in care and early years care and education. The senior management team comprises the director and five managers who oversee contracts, business development and operational management. VTS employs 40 members of staff and uses the services of 250 work-based assessors. The company has a head office and training centre in Westcliff-on-Sea and a further training centre in Colchester.
2. Learners are funded by Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Over 800 learners are currently following training programmes. A small number of learners are working towards the early years foundation certificate as part of the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme. However, there were too few learners for this area to be included in the inspection. A larger number of learners are funded wholly by a European Social Fund (ESF) grant and are just finishing their training. Almost 90 per cent of all learners are employed.
3. In 2001, the managing director of VTS took long-term absence for health reasons. The management team was restructured and a general manager appointed. In January 2003, 80 per cent of the new management team left VTS to start their own company in competition with VTS. The managing director has since returned to work full time.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Health, social care & public services

4. VTS has 342 learners following NVQs in early years care and education and 228 young learners working towards NVQs in care. Of these, 141 are advanced modern apprentices and 330 are foundation modern apprentices. There are 145 adult learners taking NVQs as part of an LSC-funded employment training programme called 'Profit from Learning' which offers funded training to employed adult learners. Learners work in hospitals, residential and nursing homes and private and community-run nurseries. Off-the-job training is provided for level 2 NVQ early years care and education learners at VTS's training centres in Westcliff-on-Sea and Colchester. Learners attend either one or two days each week. Some work placements have work-based assessors. VTS's assessors carry out assessment of learners' practice in the workplace when necessary.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	24
Number of learner interviews	70
Number of staff interviews	29
Number of employer interviews	29
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	12
Number of visits	31

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, VTS's leadership and management and approach to equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Its arrangements for quality assurance are unsatisfactory, as is the quality of its provision in health, social care and public services.

GRADES

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

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

Health, social care & public services	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4
Other government-funded provision	4

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. **Completion rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks are poor.** Less than 10 per cent of learners have achieved their qualifications in the past three years. Retention rates are improving in both care and early years care and education modern apprenticeship programmes. Eighty-one per cent of learners starting advanced modern apprenticeships in 2002-03 were retained, compared with 48 per cent for the 2001-02 intake. The retention rate for learners starting foundation modern apprenticeships increased from 58 per cent for 2001-02 to 71 per cent for 2002-03. Ninety-six per cent of learners recruited in 2003-04 remain in training. Achievement rates for learners solely following

NVQs are also poor, standing at just over 1 per cent for the 204 learners starting programmes since 1999-2000. The rate of progress towards achieving qualifications is slow for many learners. However, the standard of practical skills learners demonstrate at work is good.

Quality of education and training

7. **Training in the workplace is good.** Many work-placement providers and employers provide additional training courses related to the NVQ. However, this additional training is not always recorded in the learners' individual learning plans. Some employers allocate learners a mentor or key worker who provides coaching, support and guidance.

8. **VTS provides a good programme of off-the-job training for level 2 early years care and education learners.** Training is carefully planned, and learners work independently or with the support of assessors to record evidence of their knowledge or perform practical activities. The four care and early years care and education training sessions observed during inspection were satisfactory or better.

9. **VTS's assessment practice does not take account of individual learners' needs.** Not enough use is made of witness testimonies, work products and oral questioning. Written work is relied upon too much. All learners are required to complete written answers to pre-set questions, including those who find writing difficult. Some assessors do not observe learners frequently enough. Assessors give learners detailed feedback following assessments, but not enough monitoring of the evidence is carried out.

10. Learners make slow progress towards completion of their full modern apprenticeship frameworks. **Not enough key skills training and assessment take place.** Most learners are unaware of key skills qualification requirements and do not have a copy of the key skills standards. Assessors have insufficient knowledge of key skills qualifications and do not use naturally occurring evidence in the workplace for key skills assessment. Up-to-date requirements for key skills training are not accurately recorded in learners' individual learning plans.

11. **Support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language development is weak.** Specialist support is not available for learners who need it, and no formal policy or procedures are in place for supporting learners who have additional needs.

Leadership and management

12. **VTS takes good, clear actions which bring about organisational improvement.** Management information is up to date, accurate and used effectively to target areas for improvement in the organisation.

13. **VTS has strong partnerships with external organisations.** These include employers, work placements, Connexions and local schools. Many of these are long-standing relationships valued by VTS. The company carries out annual surveys of employers and

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takes actions to resolve any concerns that arise.

14. Progress in improving completion and achievement rates is slow. Only 5 per cent of advanced modern apprentices starting programmes in 1999-2000 and only 3 per cent in 2000-01, completed their framework. VTS has made efforts to improve completion rates and there has been a recent upturn, with the activity of the key skills co-ordinator. Three per cent of the 2002-03 learners have completed their framework, and 69 per cent are still in learning.

15. **VTS has taken a number of successful measures to make its provision more socially inclusive and to widen participation of under-represented groups.** It works closely with schools and Connexions to provide training to 14-16 year olds, and receives funding from the LSC to provide training to employed adults experienced in care and early years care and education work.

16. **VTS has a good self-assessment process.** All of VTS's staff members have been involved in the production of the self-assessment report and the development plan. Areas of concern have been identified and agreed through staff meetings, questionnaires and training events. Overall, the report's findings match those given by inspectors.

17. **VTS's system for monitoring internal verification is incomplete.** Assessment practice is not regularly observed, and no formal method of recording the internal verification process exists.

18. **VTS's arrangements for monitoring the quality assurance of training are inadequate.** Some learners receive only brief information and guidance, and records in individual learning files are not detailed enough to identify prior learning and/or specific learning needs. VTS does not ensure that concerns raised at induction are followed up throughout the programme. Individual learning plans are not used to identify attainment, and there are several gaps in recording.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear actions bringing about organisational improvement
- strong partnerships with external organisations
- successful measures to improve social inclusion
- good self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- slow progress in improving framework completion rates
- insufficient development of key skills strategy
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities policies and procedures

- incomplete internal verification procedures
- inadequate monitoring of quality assurance arrangements

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good training in the workplace
- good off-the-job training for early years care and education level 2 learners

Weaknesses

- poor framework completion rates
- poor assessment practice
- insufficient key skills training
- weak support for literacy, numeracy and language skills development

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT VOCATIONAL TRAINING SERVICES:

- being allowed to work at their own pace
- the chance to gain a qualification
- the enjoyment of college days
- the support from assessors in the workplace
- being able to work independently
- the friendly trainers and assessors

WHAT LEARNERS THINK VOCATIONAL TRAINING SERVICES COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of in house training offered
- the amount of time each learner has with their tutor, such as in individual tutorials
- the frequency of visits to placements
- the number of observations at work
- the permanence of assessors - they are changed too often
- the help provided for cross-referencing the NVQ evidence
- the provision of suitable books, and information about training days

KEY CHALLENGES FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING SERVICES:

- raise completion and achievement rates
- improve assessment practice through the effective implementation of internal verification procedures
- further develop and implement the key skills training and assessment strategy
- monitor the implementation of equal opportunities policies
- review and evaluate the implementation of the quality assurance arrangements
- develop and implement appropriate strategies for the support of learners with literacy, numeracy and language skills needs

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- clear actions bringing about organisational improvement
- strong partnerships with external organisations
- successful measures to improve social inclusion
- good self-assessment process

Weaknesses

- slow progress in improving framework completion rates
- insufficient development of key skills strategy
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities policies and procedures
- incomplete internal verification procedures
- inadequate monitoring of quality assurance arrangements

19. VTS has taken good, clear actions to bring about organisational improvement. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Just over one year ago, many of the senior managers of VTS left the company and established their own business in direct competition nearby. A large proportion of VTS's staff were also recruited by this new company. VTS has reviewed the company's requirements and made key appointments including a business development manager, administration manager and key skills co-ordinator. Its collection and use of management information has been revised and is now up to date, accurate and effective in targeting areas for improvement in the company. Learner data are recorded for contractual purposes, and a further database is used to record learners' progress. VTS continues to develop methods of recording the achievements of learners to ensure that it maintains an accurate picture of their overall progress. Learners receive a detailed progress review every 10 weeks which includes an analysis of employer support, portfolio development, progress to date and the likelihood of qualification achievement in the required timescale. VTS analyses its recruitment campaigns to target its recruitment activity toward specific geographical areas and under-represented learner groups. Retention rates are now satisfactory and completion and achievement rates are improving, although they are still poor.

20. VTS has strong partnerships with external organisations. These include employers, work placements, Connexions and local schools. VTS has worked closely with many of its employers for a number of years. VTS values these long-standing relationships, and makes great efforts to maintain and develop them. VTS carries out annual surveys of employers, and takes actions to resolve any concerns that arise. These surveys highlighted a number of concerns in the past year when VTS lost many staff members to a newly established competitor. Its most recent survey shows a much better rate of

satisfaction with the service it provides. It has recently established good links with Connexions. Connexions refers learners to VTS, which also makes good use of the other services provided by Connexions including its range of support and guidance information. VTS's recruitment staff and business development manager have established particularly strong links with local schools. VTS plays a significant part in an education action zone that covers five local schools, ensuring that learners have access to foundation-level learning. VTS provides training in early years programmes for 14-16 year old learners. Although these groups are small, many of the learners progress to level 2 qualifications in early years care and education. VTS also works closely with other local schools, which invite the company to participate in careers events, parent evenings and industry days. The self-assessment report correctly identified this as a strength.

21. VTS carries out its strategic and business planning to a satisfactory standard. Corporate targets for recruitment and achievement rates are contained in these plans, which are disseminated to senior managers and consider topics geographically and by area of learning. Staff are made aware of the group targets. Insufficient target-setting for improvement takes place where learners' progress towards achievement of qualifications is slow. Some good short-term target-setting is carried out. Communication in the organisation is satisfactory. VTS holds a wide range of purposeful meetings on a regular basis. These are properly recorded, with detailed action plans being set and implemented. Staff meetings provide good opportunities for staff members to discuss ideas and areas for development. A range of other meetings is used effectively. These include managers' meetings and support group meetings, which follow up learners' and the company's progress towards learning and corporate targets. However, good practice is not fully shared. Not all staff understand the systems and procedures that are in place.

22. Staff resources are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately qualified and have a wide range of experience in their occupational area. They maintain their vocational competence by a variety of methods which are fully recorded. The annual staff appraisal system, supplemented by quarterly personal development reviews, is effective. This system was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Requests for additional training are fully discussed and, when approved, they are funded by VTS. Staff and managers identify development needs as part of the appraisal and review process. However, staff development needs are not related to the objectives of the business plan. VTS has not trained or developed staff enough in the delivery and assessment of key skills, and has not yet corrected its poor assessment practices as part of the staff development process. The management of physical resources is satisfactory.

23. VTS carries out an appropriate range of initial assessments to determine whether learners need additional literacy, numeracy and language support. Some additional support is given by assessors in the workplace, although assessment methods do not always reflect individual learners' needs. Where learners' needs cannot be met by VTS, support is arranged through a local college or learners are referred back to Connexions. VTS has recognised that it has not provided enough support in some areas and has recently appointed a member of staff to assist in the provision of additional literacy,

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numeracy and language skills support.

24. Progress in improving rates of completion is slow. The self-assessment report identified this weakness. Only 5 per cent of advanced modern apprentices beginning courses in 1999-2000 achieved all the targets on their individual learning plan. The proportion for the 2000-01 intake was 3 per cent. No learners have completed the framework since then, although many learners are still on programme. The rate of completion for learners on foundation modern apprenticeships is slightly better. The completion rate showed an initial decline from 16 per cent for 1999-2000 starters to 3 per cent for 2000-01 starters. Three per cent of the 2002-03 intake have completed their framework, and 69 per cent remain in learning. Achievement rates for learners solely following NVQ programmes is also poor. Of the 204 learners starting NVQs since 1999-2000, only 27 have achieved their qualification and a further 23 remain in learning. Achievement rates were not available for the 'Profit from Learning' learners, most of whom are still in training.

25. VTS has not sufficiently developed its key skills strategy. This weakness was partly identified in the self-assessment report. VTS's recently appointed key skills co-ordinator has a clearly defined set of objectives. The company has carried out a lot of recent work to develop good-quality training and assessment materials, which it has piloted with a group of 20 learners. However, most of the remaining learners are unaffected by these developments. This pilot group of learners has now completed their key skills qualification and the targets on their individual learning plan. However, many other learners are not aware of what key skills are, or whether they are working towards them. One member of staff carries out most off-the-job training in key skills, and holds a key skills qualification. Not enough assessment of key skills takes place in the workplace.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

26. VTS has taken a number of initiatives to make its provision more socially inclusive. It has taken positive action to encourage more carers and early years care and education workers to gain a vocational qualification. The programme, called 'Profit from Learning', is funded by the Essex LSC and enables those carers who have been working in the sector for some time to gain a level 2 qualification. VTS has successfully recruited 240 learners on to the programme. In addition, young people aged 14-16 years old who are at risk of exclusion from school and who wish to pursue a career in early years care and education, but not through an academic route, attend the VTS learning centre for a childcare course that includes work experience. These learners are then able to continue their vocational route into an appropriate NVQ. Recently VTS has received funding to increase the number of male learners it trains. The current proportion of its learners who are men is almost 8 per cent, and VTS has set a target to increase this to 10 per cent by June 2004. It has run an effective marketing campaign to attract men to care and early years care and education courses. Further analysis of data has highlighted areas of Essex where learners are not accessing VTS's facilities. Discussions with Connexions and other organisations have highlighted transport as a problem for potential learners from some of these areas. VTS is exploring ways of overcoming these barriers, including providing transport or renting offices nearer to the areas concerned. It is developing strategies to

focus marketing in postcode areas identified as not responding to general marketing strategies. The company's initial plans are to target those people from financially disadvantaged groups. Marketing materials use images and case studies to promote equality, but are not available in different formats or languages. VTS has access to interpreting services if it needs to offer material in a different language.

27. Training and office area accommodation is accessible for learners and staff with restricted mobility. VTS has portable dictation machines, laptop computers, and coloured paper for the use of learners with differing learning and assessment needs. However, some learners are not given the opportunity to use these aids. Learners on the level 2 NVQ early years care and education programme attend the training centres for off-the-job training. Other learners do not routinely have access to the same resource. VTS does not formally identify or provide resources which could help non-attenders. It is looking at ways to enable more learners to access off-the-job training sessions, seeking the preferred time and day for most learners. Most learners have a satisfactory knowledge of the company's equal opportunities policy and procedures, but do not sufficiently understand the wider topics of equality and diversity. Information on equality of opportunity is given during induction. Copies of the learners' equal opportunities policy, NVQ appeals and complaints procedures are given to the learner at the beginning of their programme. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity matters is not regularly checked, and is not routinely included in progress reviews. VTS has identified this weakness and has designed new review documents that include recording of understanding. It has begun work on producing standardised material to assess learners' knowledge and understanding of equality of opportunity. Most staff attended an in-house training session on equality of opportunity in September 2003. Evaluation of the session indicated that the topics covered had been useful and contained new material for most of the staff.

28. VTS has two equal opportunities policies, one of which is specifically for the learners and outlines rights and responsibilities and anti-harassment procedures. The policies do not contain reference to current legislative requirements. VTS has identified the need for a more comprehensive policy on harassment and bullying. A draft policy is at the consultation stage. Customer complaints procedures and disciplinary and grievance procedures are in place. The policies have recently been updated and a procedure for their implementation produced. However, VTS carries out no monitoring to ensure that the equal opportunities procedures are implemented.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

29. VTS has a good self-assessment process. All of VTS's staff members have had involvement in the self-assessment report and the development plan. Areas of concern have been identified and agreed through staff meetings, questionnaires and training events. Overall, the report's findings are accurate. Areas of responsibility have been clearly identified and timescales for implementing change and improvements have been set. All of VTS's staff members have access to the development plan and have been made aware of the targets set. The company director responsible for operations, reviews the evidence collected from questionnaires distributed to employers and learners. The

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method of collecting and analysing evaluations has recently been changed, and the response has now improved. Evidence collected is used to evaluate the training provision, and to identify further action. A quality assurance manager is responsible for the development and maintenance of policies and procedures, and these have recently been updated. All policies and procedures are documented effectively and staff are aware of how they can be accessed. The most recent versions have not yet been fully implemented. No system is in place to enable electronic access to policies and procedures, but hard copies will be made available to all staff. VTS has introduced a system of internal verification and has implemented procedures to identify how the process is managed. Standardisation of assessment is being worked on during meetings, and minutes of these meetings identify how the assessment process is being developed.

30. VTS's system for monitoring internal verification is incomplete. Some assessment records are made in a number of stages; the assessor completes a tick-list to check administration details but this does not provide enough detail of how omissions are to be rectified. A feedback form provides some details of action points but timescales for completion are not recorded. VTS has recently introduced interim sampling of all portfolios. The internal verifier provides written and verbal feedback to assessors. VTS has made some progress in standardisation of assessment. However, its holistic approach to assessment has several weaknesses. Some learners' portfolios show evidence of progress towards completion of units, but they have insufficient opportunity to cross-reference evidence. Observations of assessment practice are not regularly carried out, and no formal method of recording the process is in place.

31. VTS's arrangements for monitoring quality assurance of training are inadequate. Learners can access information and guidance before they sign up to courses. However, this information is too brief for some learners, and recording in individual learning files is not detailed enough to identify prior learning and/or specific learning needs. The induction session enables the trainer/assessor to outline the provision for health and safety and VTS's equal opportunities policies, including its complaints and appeal procedures. Learners are also given some information on how resources can be accessed, such as through drop-in facilities. The learners are given a copy of the induction handbook, which contains some information about the content of the programme. Few learners found the induction memorable, and VTS does not ensure that topics raised at induction are reinforced throughout the programme. Individual learning plans are not used to identify achievement and do not always include all relevant information. VTS does not systematically monitor learning materials provided by employers and/or employers' policies and procedures. Some verbal discussion of the outcome of assessment takes place, but not enough to guide further training effectively.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	570	4
Other government-funded provision	145	4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good training in the workplace
- good off-the-job training for early years care and education level 2 learners

Weaknesses

- poor framework completion rates
- poor assessment practice
- insufficient key skills training
- weak support for literacy, numeracy and language skills development

Achievement and standards

32. Completion rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks are poor. Just under 10 per cent of learners starting modern apprenticeships in the past three years have completed their frameworks. Many learners make slow progress towards achieving their qualifications. Achievement rates for learners solely following NVQ programmes are also poor, with only just over 1 per cent of the 204 learners starting courses since 1999-2000 having successfully achieved their qualification. The quality of learners' written evidence is satisfactory. Some learners research information carefully and take care with the presentation of their work. Other learners rely too closely on textbooks and do not clearly show they have gained the required knowledge. The standard of learners' practical skills demonstrated at work is good.

33. Retention rates are improving. Seventy-five per cent of the 2002-03 intake of early years care and education advanced modern apprentices were retained, and all of the 2003-04 intake for this programme are still in learning. Retention of all foundation modern apprentices has also improved from 58 per cent for the 2001-02 intake to 72 per cent for 2002-03, with 96 per cent of the 2003-04 intake still in learning. All learners recruited to advanced modern apprenticeships in care in 2003-04 are still in learning, as are 96 per cent of the current intake of care foundation modern apprentices. The retention rates for the 2002-03 intakes of care foundation and advanced modern apprentices were 73 per cent.

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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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	37		105		85											
Retained*	0		85	81	41	48										
Successfully completed	0		2	2	15	18										
Still in learning	36		83	79	22	26										

*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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	155		260		142											
Retained*	0		188	72	83	58										
Successfully completed	0		8	3	33	23										
Still in learning	144		170	65	16	11										

*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													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	8		103													
Retained*	4		55	53												
Successfully completed	0		25	24												
Still in learning	3		10	10												

*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

34. Learners receive good training in the workplace. Many work-placement providers and employers provide additional training courses related to learners' NVQs. These include child protection, dealing with conflict, and an 11-week course in insights and awareness for working with adults with learning difficulties. However, this additional training is not always recorded in individual learning plans and new knowledge and understanding are not always used as evidence for the NVQ. Some employers allocate

each learner a mentor or key worker to provide coaching, support and guidance. Many placements offer a wide range of opportunities for learners to complete the NVQ requirements. Early years care and education learners gain experience with different age groups. Most employers support learners' development of practical skills well.

35. VTS provides a good programme of off-the-job training for level 2 early years care and education learners. Off-the-job training is carefully planned and all learning sessions observed during inspection were satisfactory or better. In morning sessions, learners work independently or with the support of assessors to record evidence of their knowledge. In the afternoons, trainers provide a variety of planned activities that effectively develop learners' knowledge and skills for working with children. Learners show good understanding of how activities such as cooking benefit children's development. They work well in small groups to share their experiences. Sessions are fun and interesting. Most level 2 early years care and education learners attend for one day each week, with a small number attending for two days.

36. VTS provides satisfactory guidance and support for learners. Learners' skills and suitability for the programmes are appropriately assessed on entry, through interviews and literacy and numeracy skills tests. Tests are marked and additional needs are identified. Assessors visit learners in their workplaces to explain clearly the complaints procedure and learners understand this process. Assessors continue to visit learners each month to offer guidance and support about how they can generate evidence of their knowledge. Some assessors write detailed short-term targets that describe what evidence learners need to collect. However, not all assessors use this process effectively to ensure learners make progress towards achieving their qualifications.

37. The range and quality of resources are satisfactory. Assessors and verifiers have relevant experience of early years care and education and the care of adults. Staff have relevant assessment or verification qualifications, or are working towards them within an acceptable time limit. Accommodation for training and learning is good, with spacious rooms at each site. Furniture is arranged to allow for a variety of activities that include group work, whole-class discussion and practical activities such as first aid training. VTS uses a smaller training room for key skills training, and laptop computers are available. A small number of level 2 learners have been given a textbook each. Other learners who attend the training centres do not always find a sufficient number of books. Level 3 learners who are employed are asked to buy their own textbooks.

38. VTS provides a suitable range of programmes. It offers support at foundation level for 14-16 year old learners and with NVQs and modern apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3. Training takes place at one centre in the north of the county and one in the south on different days and at different times of the day. Staff are available on Saturdays for learners who are employed during the week.

39. Planning for assessment is not varied enough to suit all learners' needs. Assessors frequently tell learners in what order their units will be completed and what evidence to collect. Insufficient use is made of witness testimonies, samples of work and oral questioning, particularly for collecting evidence of early years care and education

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learners' skills and knowledge. Written work is relied on too much. All learners, including those who find writing difficult are required to complete written answers to pre-set questions. Learners also write accounts describing skills that will need to be observed to meet the awarding body's requirements. Written evidence is not routinely signed or dated by the learner or the assessor. Not all assessors observe learners frequently enough. When observations take place, assessors generally record evidence for one or two elements only and do not record the many skills learners demonstrate that relate to other units. Reports and feedback sheets are not always signed and dated. Learners receive detailed feedback following assessment, but monitoring of evidence is insufficient. Many learners are unsure about their progress towards achievement. Assessment methods are not varied to suit individual learners' needs. For example, learners who find writing difficult are allocated additional assessment time but this is in the form of support to complete the pre-set questions. Some learners have photocopied assessment plans. Most assessors make monthly visits to the workplace to discuss written work, but carry out insufficient observation of learners' activities. VTS is working towards a holistic approach to assessment, has not yet established this.

40. Learners make slow progress towards completing their full modern apprenticeship frameworks. Most learners are unaware of the need to complete key skills qualifications. They do not have a copy of the key skills qualifications standards and do not recognise opportunities for demonstrating them. Assessors have insufficient knowledge of key skills qualifications and do not use naturally occurring evidence in the workplace for assessment of key skills. The small number of learners who have achieved their key skills qualification have started this work towards the end of their programmes. Up-to-date requirements for key skills are not accurately recorded in learners' individual learning plans. New arrangements have been put in place and 10 learners are waiting for their evidence to be verified.

41. VTS's support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language development is weak. All learners receive assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills during their induction to VTS. Their assessment results are analysed, but no specialist support is available for those learners who need it. VTS does not have a formal policy or procedures for supporting learners who have additional needs. The company has made arrangements for learners who are under 19 years old to receive support through its E2E provision. Assessors meet learners with additional needs more frequently, usually every two weeks, but this is to help them complete specific written work for the NVQ. Some assessors use portable dictation machines to record learners' knowledge, but others are unaware that these are available.

Leadership and management

42. VTS's communication is generally satisfactory with most employers, and good with those with which it has well-established relationships. Employers are sent clear information on NVQs and assessments when learners start their programmes, and employers have frequent contact with assessors and other members of VTS's staff. Learners' files are well ordered and contain appropriate essential information. Staff meetings are recorded and plans produced to enable the effective implementation of

action points. However, not enough standardisation of assessment practice takes place. Most assessors do not make best use of their visits to learners, and learners' performance in real-work environments is not always observed or recorded when possible. Assessors' visits are often informal checks on learners' progress, and records made of learners' achievements are poor. Some assessors cancel appointments at short notice. Assessors have a heavy workload. The number of learners allocated to each assessor fluctuates, but may be in excess of 60.

43. VTS does not yet fully understand the role of the internal verifier in monitoring and standardising assessment practice. Internal verification takes place one day each month. Verifiers randomly select portfolios to verify. Some verifiers have recorded observations of assessors' practice in the training centre during these days but few assessors have been observed assessing learners at work. Many learners are employed by or placed with enthusiastic employers and managers. These companies have qualified assessors who are keen to assess learners at work. VTS is not taking advantage of the opportunities for work-based assessors that some employers can offer.

44. Equality of opportunity and health and safety procedures are not reinforced during progress review visits to the work placement. Most learners are aware of the appeals and complaints procedure but have a very basic understanding of equality of opportunity.