

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Mercia Partnership (UK) Ltd**

**24 June 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

## Mercia Partnership (UK) Ltd

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Mercia Partnership (UK) Ltd (MP) is a private limited company established in 1995. It is based in Knowsley, Merseyside and provides work-based learning for young people in information and communications technology (ICT) within the engineering area of learning; it also provides literacy, numeracy and language skills training for adults. The programmes are funded by the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council, with some funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) for the adult literacy, numeracy and language skills programme. MP also offers learndirect programmes and a Jobcentre Plus programme, but these are not within the scope of this inspection.

2. MP has three learning centres in Kirkby, Prescot and Huyton where most of the learning takes place. The programmes are managed and delivered by a team of 42 staff.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

3. MP has 30 learners in this occupational area of whom 29 are foundation modern apprentices and one is an advanced modern apprentice. Most learners are on work placement and some learners are employed. All learners attend an initial 12-week course at MP's own training centre before being allocated a work placement. This is followed up with one day of training each week at the centre. Key skills training, portfolio-building, assessment and other skill requirements are provided by MP at the training centre. All learners are trained to achieve an examination-based qualification in information technology (IT). Learners are also trained in business skills appropriate to the workplace. One assessor visits the workplace to conduct assessments at approximately four-week intervals.

## Foundation programmes

4. There are 20 learners on the literacy and numeracy programmes. The call centre training programme is a full-time course and learners attend for 20 days. Another programme to improve basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills is delivered in partnership with social services. Five learners with learning difficulties attend for half a day each week. All learners have an induction period which includes initial assessment and the agreement of an individual learning plan. Five staff are directly involved in the provision of these programmes. One senior programme manager is responsible for two team leaders and two tutors, as well as two administration workers. Literacy and numeracy skills training is established within call centre training programmes. Learners from social services work on literacy and numeracy skills in discrete sessions.

5. Sixty-eight learners are working on a pilot Workforce Development Programme aimed at developing adults' literacy and numeracy skills to level 1 and 2. Learners generally work towards national tests in adult literacy and numeracy at the level identified by initial assessment. Of the 91 learners who have started the programme, most work towards level 2 standards: 76 in literacy and 53 in numeracy. All learners are employed. Tutors visit learners at least once each week in the workplace to provide coaching and assistance with developing skills. Learners work independently in their own time, completing workbooks. The programme lasts for approximately 10 weeks. The programme is managed by a team leader and the training is provided by seven tutors. All learners receive an induction which covers rights, responsibilities and complaints procedures. An induction leaflet is given to all learners.

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learner interviews	40
Number of staff interviews	41
Number of employer interviews	6
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	9
Number of partner/external agency interviews	28

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. MP's leadership and management, and approach to equality of opportunity are both outstanding; its arrangements for quality assurance are good. The quality of work-based learning in foundation programmes is outstanding, and in engineering it is good.

## GRADES

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

Leadership and management		1
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		1
Quality assurance		2

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> - Work-based learning for young people	30	2

Foundation programmes		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Literacy and numeracy</i> - Other government-funded provision	20	1
<i>Other contributory areas</i> - Other government-funded provision	68	2

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

7. **Achievements on the literacy and numeracy skills programmes are very good.** Learners develop good skills, enabling them to work independently and collaboratively.

8. **MP's retention rates for both the literacy and numeracy skills programmes and the Workforce Development Programme are very good.** All learners develop increased confidence from the skills gained in literacy and numeracy.

### 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
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Foundation programmes	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

9. **Standards of teaching and learning on the literacy and numeracy skills programmes is**

**good to excellent.** Learners are challenged and inspired and ably demonstrate understanding and awareness of their own progress. **Teaching and learning in engineering is also very good.** Learners are effectively involved and practise new techniques as they acquire them. Literacy and numeracy training is provided where necessary, but there is no provision for those learners for whom English is an additional language.

10. **Excellent resources in the literacy and numeracy skills programmes and good resources in engineering enable achievements and prepare learners for work.**

11. **Effective staff teamwork** in engineering supports the learners and enables them to progress. It also promotes confidence in relationships between employers and the training provider.

12. **The Workforce Development Programme is particularly responsive,** accommodating the needs of learners and employers. **Comprehensive programmes enable learners to prepare for work.** Employees value the quality and effectiveness of the learners' skills.

13. **Partnerships and links with external organisations are effective in both foundation programmes.** Training programmes are designed to meet employers' recruitment needs.

14. **Learners on the literacy and numeracy skills programmes receive very good vocational and personal support.** Individual needs are met effectively through flexible training, encouragement, support and celebration of successes.

15. **Programme requirements are not always implemented on the Workforce Development Programme.** MP has no system to identify slow progress and learners are not provided with copies of action, or learning plans.

### Leadership and management

16. **MP has good strategic management.** Its objectives and strategic aims are clear and well understood by all staff.

17. **Staff appraisals and development are very effective.** Appraisals are linked to development and all staff are actively encouraged in continuing their professional development. Staff are rewarded financially when qualifications are achieved.

18. **Excellent partnerships and links with external organisations** enable the range of work opportunities offered to learners to be extended. These extensive and positive relationships help MP to obtain additional funding to improve the resources available for staff and learners.

19. **MP celebrates the successes of learners and staff.** Monthly achievement lunches are organised to award successful learners with their certificates. Staff achievements are featured in newspaper articles.



20. **The provider's quality assurance system promotes continuous improvement**, and makes effective use of individual and team targets, a comprehensive planning cycle, a quality assurance group and stakeholder evaluations.

21. **MP has very good initiatives to engage the community and promote social inclusion.** Strategies and policies are well established for all working practices and are aimed at those individuals and groups facing multiple barriers to learning and employment.

22. Self-assessment arrangements are thorough. All staff are involved, and learners and employers contribute their views. The self-assessment report clearly focuses on improving the quality of the learners' experience; it is comprehensive and critical and its findings match many of the strengths identified by inspectors.

23. MP's arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- good strategic management
- very effective staff appraisals and development
- excellent partnerships and links with external organisations
- widespread celebration of learner and staff achievement
- very good practices to engage the community and promote social inclusion
- very effective quality assurance system to promote continuous improvement

### **Weaknesses**

- no significant weaknesses identified

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### ***Other contributory areas***

#### *Strengths*

- very good teaching
- good resources
- effective staff teamwork
- comprehensive employment-focused programme

#### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses identified

## **Foundation programmes**

### ***Literacy and numeracy***

#### *Strengths*

- very good levels of retention and achievement
- very good teaching and learning
- excellent resources for learning
- particularly effective partnerships
- very good vocational and personal support for learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses identified

### ***Other contributory areas***

#### *Strengths*

- very good retention rate
- particularly responsive programme
- effective links with external organisations

#### *Weaknesses*

- programme requirements not fully implemented

### **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT MERCIA PARTNERSHIP (UK) LTD:**

- helpful, approachable and supportive staff
- provider is good enough to work for
- 'programme gets me on the job market'
- work colleagues support each other
- 'I get paid while I learn'
- the separate practical area

### **WHAT LEARNERS THINK MERCIA PARTNERSHIP (UK) LTD COULD IMPROVE:**

- the explanation of NVQ terminology
- the advertising of training courses
- the challenge of the examination-based qualification in IT
- workbooks - they are sometimes repetitious and ambiguous
- the pay
- time spent with tutor
- several learners said nothing could be improved

**KEY CHALLENGES FOR MERCIA PARTNERSHIP (UK) LTD:**

- maintain the very good practice in training
- fast-track staff development for new staff
- prioritise quality assurance procedures for new programmes
- further develop and establish the management information system
- widen employment opportunities

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 1

#### Strengths

- good strategic management
- very effective staff appraisals and development
- excellent partnerships and links with external organisations
- widespread celebration of learner and staff achievement
- very good practices to engage the community and promote social inclusion
- very effective quality assurance system to promote continuous improvement

#### Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

24. MP has good strategic management. It has a three-year business and development plan which clearly details its strategic aims and objectives. The business plan is divided into sections, namely: programme development, staff development, learndirect planning, marketing, modern apprenticeship planning and quality of provision. Each section is written by a small group of managers and then presented to and discussed with all staff. All staff demonstrate a very good understanding of MP's aims, values and strategic planning. The business plan and the development plan are updated regularly.

25. Staff appraisals and development are very effective. All staff are appraised annually and there are also six-monthly reviews. The appraisal system has been in use for three years, is thoroughly implemented and well documented. Appraisals are very clearly linked to staff development. Staff are very enthusiastic about the use of the appraisal system. The staff development programme is well planned and staff are actively encouraged to continue their professional development. MP has a staff development plan and a central record of staff training. Most staff were previously learners with MP and have continued to work towards a number of more advanced qualifications. Staff gaining the qualifications identified in their personal development plans are financially rewarded.

26. MP has a range of excellent partnerships and links with external organisations. Staff are members of several national and local groups and working parties. The provider has extensive links with public and private sector organisations, local employers and schools. Parents evenings at schools have been used to inform learners of the training opportunities at MP. Links with local employers are particularly effective in extending the range of work opportunities offered to learners. MP's modern apprentices have helped local organisations by providing ICT equipment and support. Although MP does not hold any contracts with Jobcentre Plus, a member of the 'Action for Jobs' team visits MP every week to give assistance to learners with job seeking. MP's directors use their contacts

effectively to obtain funding from a variety of sources in order to maintain and improve the resources available to staff and learners.

27. Learners receive cash awards for completing their modern apprenticeships and national tests. Learners on the literacy and numeracy programmes receive a cash award on completion of their courses. Incentives are also available for employers and learners on the Workforce Development Programme. Every month, MP organises a celebration of achievement lunch, when successful learners are awarded their certificates. Staff participate in regular teambuilding events organised by the management. These include overseas visits and social events. Staff who achieve qualifications receive promotions and pay rises within the organisation.

28. MP's management information system is satisfactory. It has a new custom-built database which has been designed to meet the new LSC requirements. The organisation uses identical database systems for each of its programme areas, but these individual systems are not linked. There is no intranet link between the three MP sites, but internal communications are satisfactory. A locally managed e-mail system is used by all staff to communicate with each other and to access the monthly organisation update produced by one of the directors. MP has weekly management and team meetings and monthly programme development meetings. The literacy and numeracy needs of learners are identified at initial assessment. Any specific needs identified are met within the learners' individual programme.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 1**

29. MP's strategic approach to equality of opportunity demonstrates a significant commitment to equality and diversity issues. The strategy and policies are well established in working practices and focus on releasing the potential of those individuals facing multiple barriers to progression. MP has improved access and provided special IT facilities for wheelchair users. Local social services have recently agreed to support 10 learners with physical disabilities to attend literacy and numeracy and IT skills courses. Many resources are made available free of charge to remove or minimise any barriers to learning for learners; for example, course delivery times have been arranged to promote easier access and free stationery is given to all learners.

30. MP promotes social inclusion very well through work with schools and community groups and outreach initiatives. The parents' evenings held at local schools are used to recruit adult learners, and the funding that would otherwise have been spent on marketing and publicity is given to the participating schools. Modern apprentices are involved in a project to refurbish computers which are then donated to other local organisations. A very effective marketing strategy and publicity campaign has been conducted to recruit women into IT. Twenty-five per cent of engineering modern apprentices are women. The campaign included action groups, changing attitudes, building links and relationships, media coverage and the support of television personalities. To further encourage the number of women learners, MP has recruited two women technical tutors and a female manager to lead the programme.

31. Equality of opportunity is promoted through the use of appropriate recruitment literature and advertising designed to break down stereotypical views and attract applicants from under-represented groups. MP promotes a non-discriminatory culture that recognises and supports individual and team needs. The abilities of the learners are recognised through individualised learning that focuses on enabling the learner to develop skills and achieve goals. Monthly achievement events celebrate the successes of learners and staff. A new MP website actively promotes equality and diversity. Materials are available in adapted formats such as Braille and large print, and specialist equipment and materials are available and made use of to support learning and teaching. Learners have an understanding of equal opportunities issues based on a clear learners' charter, a comprehensive induction booklet; the inclusion of equality and diversity issues in the curriculum; and learners' progress reviews where roles, rights and responsibilities are discussed.

32. Staff have a good awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity. One member of staff is involved in raising the profile of equality and diversity at the regional strategy level. Some staff attend external training and then use team meetings to share their experience and learning. Team meetings also focus on marketing campaigns and how these can best reinforce key messages, the accommodation strategy, and how investment in facilities can take into account equality and diversity issues, such as improved access. All staff have a strong commitment to equality of opportunity, emphasising fair practice and improving performance through continual monitoring, review and evaluation.

33. Some monitoring of equal opportunities data is carried out. Information regarding recruitment and selection is evaluated in relation to the age, gender, disability and ethnicity of different learner groups. This data is used to some extent to inform decision-making, action-planning and target-setting. However, there is not enough analysis of the progression and achievement of different learner groups, such as those learners with additional learning needs or disabilities, and insufficient monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Contributory grade 2**

34. MP has a very effective quality assurance system which promotes continuous improvement. The comprehensive planning cycle is updated regularly. The quality assurance system is well documented, and up-to-date policies cover all aspects of the provision. The self-assessment process is good. The first self-assessment report was produced in February 2003 and the second in February 2004. MP collates information from staff questionnaires, learner evaluations and employers to produce the self-assessment report, which is then used to prepare the development plan. The self-assessment process is reviewed after the production of the self-assessment report and discussed with staff. The self-assessment report was thorough and its findings identified many of the strengths found by inspectors. The most recent report clearly focuses on improving the quality of the learner's experience.

35. MP uses a variety of methods to assure the quality of its provision and continuous

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improvement. One of the directors has a formal appointment with each team leader every week. These supervision meetings are used to discuss progress towards the team targets and the management of the team. Team leaders are also able to discuss any issues they have regarding their own work and that of their team members. These discussions are formally recorded and used in action plans. A quality assurance group meets once each month. Items on the agenda are often taken from issues raised at the supervision meetings.

36. MP sets challenging, but achievable, targets which promote continuous improvement. Targets for each team are discussed with team leaders regularly. Any significant problems in meeting targets are discussed at managers' meetings and action is taken quickly. Teaching staff are observed up to four times a year. They receive written and verbal feedback. Development points are recorded and used during staff appraisals and reviews. The observations are not graded at present but a system of grading is being considered by the quality assurance group.

37. The evaluation of learners' feedback is satisfactory. Questionnaires are used to gather learners' feedback and the replies are summarised. If necessary, a report and an action plan are produced to resolve any issues identified. Several different formats of evaluation questionnaire have been used. MP has encountered difficulties analysing the information. To overcome this problem, a more general form has recently been designed for use on all programmes, but is not yet being fully used. The internal verification system is satisfactory. Internal verifiers monitor and observe assessments adequately. There are sampling plans to ensure that MP monitors each member of staff. However, a large number of staff has been recruited to the Workforce Development Programmes. Some of the programme requirements are not applied consistently. For example, invigilation of examinations is sometimes carried out by tutors involved with the learners and not by a more independent member of staff. The management information system only records national test achievements and does not give information about the ongoing progress of the learners.



## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Other contributory areas</i> - Work-based learning for young people	30	2

#### *Other contributory areas*

##### *Strengths*

- very good teaching
- good resources
- effective staff teamwork
- comprehensive employment-focused programme

##### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses identified

#### **Achievement and standards**

38. Retention rates for these programmes are satisfactory. The retention rate was 46 per cent for foundation modern apprentices in 2002-03 and is currently 88 per cent. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices is currently 100 per cent. Achievement rates for programmes are satisfactory. The completion rate for foundation modern apprentices is currently 21 per cent with 25 per cent still in training. Of last year's profile, five learners have completed their modern apprenticeship frameworks before the expected date.

39. Learners are gaining good practical skills which they use competently in the workplace. Qualifications are well matched to their job roles enabling ease of relevant national vocational qualification (NVO) and key skills evidence to be gathered relatively easily. Learners are gaining confidence at work and developing in their job roles. Most learners attend a weekly training session in key skills and gather evidence towards their key skills portfolios. Some learners are exempt from key skills training. Other learners are working to a higher level in key skills in preparation for progression to level 3 programmes. Provision is made for literacy and numeracy training, but there is no provision for ESOL training.

MERCIA PARTNERSHIP (UK) LTD

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														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts			1													
Retained*			0	0													
Successfully completed			0	0													
Still in learning			1	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																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2003-04		2002-03														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	25		28													
Retained*	22		13	46													
Successfully completed	0		6	21													
Still in learning	22		7	25													

\*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

40. Teaching is very good at MP's learning centres. Learning sessions are well structured and new concepts are explained well. Tutors use effective questioning techniques to test learners' understanding; they actively engage the learners to improve the learning experience. Tutors explain the relevant links to job roles and NVQ evidence requirements using good examples. During question and answer sessions, tutors use effective listening techniques and give appropriate responses to learners' questions. Learners are actively encouraged to expand on their answers; appropriate praise is given to those learners who expand their answers with creative thought. Some learners put into practice new techniques learnt in the training centre to increase the quality of evidence for their portfolios. Learners' understanding is regularly checked by tutors' questioning. A range of visual aids is used and support for learners is offered throughout training programmes and during assessments and reviews.

41. Learning resources are good. The ICT suites and practical training rooms at MP are equipped with a large number of desktop computers with network printers, although some computers do not have an internet connection. Hardware and software in the training rooms and at the workplace meet current industry standards. Appropriate equipment for practical learning sessions is sourced from a recycling point, and

effectively conforms to the local policy on the environment. The practical sessions involve the effective refurbishment of this equipment to produce relevant NVQ evidence. The equipment is then donated to charity and community projects to meet the considerable shortage of equipment in these areas. The training rooms are well lit and spacious. Workplace employers have industry-standard hardware and software which enable learners to gather NVQ evidence effectively. Two learners have access to an excellent computerised video studio and editing facilities at their workplace, which enables them to gather a wide range of evidence. Some adaptive technologies are available to support disadvantaged learners. There are clear and well-formatted learning plans and handouts, some of which make use of relevant screen shots. Some staff have produced additional learning materials and exercises to support national training programmes. The seven staff members responsible for the training and assessment of the 30 learners all have a satisfactory understanding of the NVQ processes. Trainers are appropriately qualified in their occupational areas. The internal verifiers and assessors are appropriately qualified and occupationally competent in NVQ programmes. Most staff are currently working towards further qualifications.

42. Staff in this area of learning use effective teamwork to enable learners to progress through their programmes. The culture of good teamwork is evident throughout the organisation and its learners. Employers enthusiastically describe how this effective teamwork strengthens the employer/training provider relationship. Learners are given effective support by the assessment process and they are well aware of sources of current relevant evidence. Issues are resolved in a timely and effective manner using teamworking techniques. Learners are well supported in the workplace by supervisors and the teams; learners improve their knowledge of working practices and appropriate behaviour. Some learning sessions are delivered by two tutors who work together as an effective team.

43. Comprehensive programmes enable learners to prepare for work. All learners attend a dedicated 12-week course in practical skills before going on work placement. Employers view this course as a benefit to their organisation, as it enables new learners to be confident in work at a very early stage. All learners attend examination-based computer training and are required to achieve the qualification. This training is of benefit to the learners in improving their performances at work and increasing the quality of their portfolio evidence. These skills have also increased the quality of learners' work in the workplace. All learners receive good training in soft skills, for example, interview techniques, telephone skills and self-presentation. This part of the programme has increased their self-confidence and employment skills.

44. MP has established a network of employers. Learners are effectively matched to relevant work placements. Some work placements are changed at appropriate times to vary learners' work experience and their opportunities to gather NVQ evidence. They work in a variety of contexts and employment areas. Supervisors confirm that the MP programme has benefited learners and the work environment. When issues arise, they are swiftly and effectively resolved. Formal and informal communications between line managers and the programme manager are regular and effective. The programmes being offered in engineering meet the needs of the learners and employers.

45. All learners are initially assessed at the beginning of their programmes. They all receive satisfactory induction training, including health and safety, and equality of opportunity. All learners have a satisfactory understanding of the NVQ processes and equality and diversity. Assessment practices are appropriate. Evidence is gathered from a wide range of sources and is invariably work-based. Portfolios are structured and regularly assessed. Short-term targets are set at each assessment, but do not always challenge learners. Short-term targets state only minimal requirements for subsequent assessments. Most learners achieve targets with ease and some learners progress quickly through their programmes. At the end of each assessment, feedback is given to the learner identifying shortfalls in evidence. Internal verification uses appropriate sampling techniques, exceeding the awarding bodies' standards. Internal verification is satisfactorily recorded and effective, although it is difficult to interpret some of the data.

### **Leadership and management**

46. The programmes are managed comprehensively. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment report process, gathering information about strengths and weaknesses. Regular meetings between supervisors, trainers, assessors and internal verifiers share good practice and raise and resolve issues. Meetings are well planned. Staff have a good understanding of procedures and documentation. Work-placement managers and supervisors are very satisfied with the communication and level of support from MP. Efficient and effective use is made of resources. Learners and staff understand the programme framework sufficiently. Regular staff appraisals form development plans and objective targets. Tutors are regularly observed and assessed in their teaching performance. Staff work together effectively to give mutual support and guidance on programme processes and procedures. Some data is not easily interpreted, particularly that which identifies internal verification sampling rates. There are successful strategies to attract female learners into engineering.

47. The self-assessment process accurately identified that the provision in engineering is good, although the process did not correctly identify all the strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment was self-critical and mainly focused on changes in strategies and processes to resolve identified weaknesses.

## Foundation programmes

Foundation programmes		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b><i>Literacy and numeracy</i></b> - Other government-funded provision	20	1
<b><i>Other contributory areas</i></b> - Other government-funded provision	68	2

### ***Literacy and numeracy***

#### *Strengths*

- very good levels of retention and achievement
- very good teaching and learning
- excellent resources for learning
- particularly effective partnerships
- very good vocational and personal support for learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses identified

### ***Other contributory areas***

#### *Strengths*

- very good retention rate
- particularly responsive programme
- effective links with external organisations

#### *Weaknesses*

- programme requirements not fully implemented

## Achievement and standards

48. Learners on literacy and numeracy programmes make very good progress. In 2003-04, there were 122 achievements from 133 starters. Fifty-two per cent of learners on the four-week programme made progress and some achieved more than one outcome. Twenty-four per cent gained jobs. Twenty-seven per cent achieved national literacy level 1 or 2 and 27 per cent succeeded in numeracy tests. Fourteen per cent progressed into further learning. Learners develop good skills enabling them to work independently and collaboratively. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Many are motivated to voluntarily complete additional literacy and numeracy skills workbooks

at home in their own time. Attendance levels are very good. Learners develop good timekeeping routines. The Workforce Development Programme learners are very well motivated and work independently with minimum supervision. The achievement of learning goals is good for those who complete the programme, 14 of 15 learners passed two national tests each. Most learners take tests at level 2. Learners achieved an average of 84 per cent on adult literacy level 2 and 81 per cent on adult numeracy level 2. Learners develop increased confidence from skills gained in literacy and numeracy. Many of them are surprised at the extent of their learning capabilities.

49. Retention rates are very good on both programmes. The retention rate for 2002-03, when the literacy and numeracy programme was launched as a pilot programme, was 92 per cent. In 2003-04, retention for the same programme remained very good, at 90 per cent. In the same period, the Workforce Development Programme, operating as a pilot, achieved a retention rate of 91 per cent. Recruitment for the literacy and numeracy programme increased significantly from 48 starts in the first year of the programme to 126 in the second. The provider maintains a high profile and level of credibility within the community which attracts recruits to the programme.

### **Quality of education and training**

50. Resources for the literacy and numeracy programme are excellent. Modern equipment is available and good-quality computers are available, with appropriate software. A specialist, customised call centre training suite includes 12 computer workstations, all with high-speed internet access. A 12-point telephone system is used for call centre training and role-play activities which models equipment in industry. This is used to prepare learners for the real work environment in a call centre. There is also an eight-point mobile telephone system and a portable call centre, enabling learners to access training at outreach locations when required. This is a valuable resource for those learners with mobility difficulties who find attendance at the main centre difficult. The mobile unit is also used effectively for marketing and demonstrations to potential and existing learners. Learners recognise and value the progress they make because of the skills gained in a realistic work environment. Staff provide literacy and numeracy training with a call centre emphasis. Resources are satisfactory for the Workforce Development Programme. A newly appointed team are receiving training in appropriate qualifications and there are targeted staff development activities. Learning resources are effective in developing appropriate literacy and numeracy skills. Accommodation for coaching, initial assessment and testing at employers' premises varies according to the space and resources available. The mobile technology available to learners is good and they benefit from on-site diagnostic and online testing facilities available through G3 wireless technology.

51. Standards of teaching and learning are very good on literacy and numeracy programmes. All teaching observed was good or better. Session plans are very detailed, they contain comprehensive aims and objectives, supported by relevant activities and resources. Learners are well informed of the structure and content of the course, they are being given a full course programme and individual lesson plans for each lesson.

Learners demonstrate understanding and awareness of their own progress. Learners are paced according to the needs of participants. Lessons are interesting, interactive and encourage active participation from each member of the group. Teaching styles and lesson contents challenge and inspire learners. Teaching staff provide excellent role models for learners, many having been learners themselves. Eighty per cent of all the provider's staff were originally learners on MP's training programmes. Teaching and learning on the Workforce Development Programme is satisfactory. Training is provided effectively through weekly, individual coaching sessions on the employers' premises. Learners develop skills independently from workbooks completed in their own time and marked regularly by tutors. This style of learning suits the learners who are able to synchronise learning with personal and work commitments. Constructive feedback is provided. The learning style is restricted largely to independent study and does not make full use of learners' work roles in developing literacy and numeracy skills.

52. Workforce Development Programme is particularly responsive to learners. Employers are very appreciative of arrangements made by tutors to put learners' needs first and arrange training to accommodate work commitments. Tutors visit learners twice each week to ensure that all learners are seen irrespective of which shifts they are on. Tutors are very supportive of learners' needs and requirements. Coaching activities and thorough progress reviews are carried out in the workplace. Learners value meeting tutors on an individual basis. The mobile technology allows improved access to national tests.

53. Partnerships with local employers are particularly effective for the literacy and numeracy programmes and have enabled training to be designed to meet the employers' recruitment needs. Learners with learning difficulties can access literacy and numeracy skills training delivered in partnership between social services and MP. Learners receive weekly visits by a representative from 'Action for Jobs' who advises on the assistance available to help them gain jobs. There are additional effective links with a young people's charity and a dyslexia association. Effective links with external organisations have increased the profile of the Workforce Development Programme. The programme has successfully engaged learners who have not participated in learning for some time. Workforce development is provided successfully to staff representing 12 employers.

54. Vocational and personal support for learners is very good. There is a high ratio of staff to learners, with five members of staff currently supporting 20 learners. High levels of support designed to meet individual needs enables intensive training to be provided over the relatively short four-week period. Three tutors are training to provide dyslexia support when needed. Staff are very good at encouraging, motivating and supporting nervous learners and have a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses within the groups. The delivery of training is flexible enough to allow for preferences such as the use of headphones for those unable to read questions from a screen. Similarly, when a learner is uncomfortable with interactive computer programmes, there are hard-copy workbooks, or practical examples to use instead. Individual support and tuition is provided as required.

55. MP takes action to reduce learners' barriers in training. Mature women who feel

discriminated against in the labour market because of their age, or women returners who lack confidence after years away from a work environment, become motivated and more confident in response to the encouragement they receive. Tutors spend a lot of time with learners, reassuring them and dispelling their fears about enrolling on the programme. MP values learners' achievements and celebrates their successes publicly throughout the year. Support for learners on the Workforce Development Programme is satisfactory and meets a range of support requirements.

56. Initial assessment outcomes are not always used in the individual learning plans of literacy and numeracy learners. The results from the first initial assessment exercise, which is completed online, often do not become available until after the individual learning plan has been agreed. Workforce Development Programme learners are assessed and monitored at appropriate intervals. Diagnostic tests for initial assessment purposes and assessment against national standards are responsive and take place in the workplace. Some invigilation procedures, however, are not being carried out correctly.

### **Leadership and management**

57. The self-assessment report is an accurate reflection of the provision. The evidence contained in the report is sufficiently detailed to support the decisions made. A comprehensive system for development and appraisals is well established. Staff are motivated to develop their professional competences by achieving additional qualifications. Staff performances are observed, monitored and effectively linked to the appraisal system. Equality of opportunity is very effectively applied to increase and widen participation, and is very well promoted.

58. Workforce Development Programme requirements are not fully implemented. Detailed action plans record ongoing achievements, but there is no system to identify slow progress, or those learners continuing training beyond their agreed completion date. Management information systems only record final achievements of national tests. The quality assurance of learners' records is not thorough enough to ensure the validity of eligibility checks. New staff teams are not yet fully conversant with all the requirements of the programme. Learners are not knowledgeable enough about their qualifications. They are not provided with copies of action plans and learning plans. Invigilating procedures for national tests are not being followed effectively enough to ensure integrity of testing.