

REINSPECTION REPORT

Focus Training (Plymouth) Reinspection

10 September 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

FOCUS TRAINING (PLYMOUTH) REINSPECTION

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

REINSPECTION REPORT

Focus Training (Plymouth) Reinspection

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Focus Training (FT) was established in March 1999 and is now managed by three partners. Its head office is in Plymouth and it has learners throughout Devon and Cornwall. FT offers apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in business administration and management, retailing and customer service and in hospitality.
2. The three partners work as operations manager, NVQ manager and internal verifier. FT also employs 14 staff, comprising eight assessors, a second internal verifier, three administrative staff, a part-time business development consultant and a learner on work placement.
3. FT's training provision is funded through the Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council. The greatest proportion of training takes place on the job. A small amount of additional training is offered at FT's head office. FT provides the initial assessment and the key skills and literacy and numeracy support for all its learners.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. FT has nine advanced and 15 foundation modern apprentices in administration. A further 14 learners are working towards the NVQ at level 3 in management and one learner is working towards a level 4 NVQ in administration. Most learners are referred to FT by their employers, and a few are recruited through the Connexions service or through personal recommendations. Learners are employed in a variety of local public and private organisations in Devon and Cornwall. Learners have an initial assessment and induction at the start of their programme. Most training is carried out in the workplace, where FT staff visit learners regularly to carry out assessments. Progress reviews are carried out every eight weeks.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

5. Eighty-seven learners are involved in work-based learning. Seven of these are following advanced modern apprenticeship programmes in retailing and 15 are in customer service. FT has 29 retailing and 36 customer service foundation modern apprentices. Most training is carried out in the workplace. All new starters carry out a literacy and numeracy test as part of their initial assessments. They also receive an induction and are provided with a portfolio. Assessment and internal verification is carried out by FT staff who are mostly well qualified and have occupational experience. Some staff have qualifications in key skills training. Almost all the learners are employed and work in a variety of businesses throughout Devon and Cornwall which include national and regional chains as well as independent retailers.

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Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

6. FT has 22 learners on hospitality programmes. Of these, four are advanced modern apprentices who are working towards qualifications in hospitality supervision and advanced craft food service. Eighteen learners are foundation modern apprentices and working towards qualifications in bar service, housekeeping, hospitality services, quick service, and food and drink services. All learners are employed in a range of local hospitality businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, cafes and licensed premises. Learners are recruited from their places of employment. Assessors visit learners every two to three weeks. Most training is carried out in the workplace, except for technical certificates, which are delivered by FT, or by a variety local of training providers throughout Devon and Cornwall.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	28
Number of learner interviews	58
Number of staff interviews	38
Number of employer interviews	21
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of partner/external agency interviews	1
Number of visits	46

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. The ALL's previous inspection, in August 2003, found that the work-based learning in business administration and management programmes was satisfactory together with that in hospitality programmes. Learning in retailing and customer service programmes was unsatisfactory. FT's leadership and management and the arrangements for quality assurance were also unsatisfactory. Equality of opportunity was satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

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

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

Retailing, customer service & transportation	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Grades awarded at reinspection

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	3

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

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

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. The good standard of learners' work in hospitality and in business administration has been maintained. **Business administration learners' portfolios demonstrate a very good standard of work. Standards of work in retailing and customer service are also very good and have improved since the previous inspection.**

9. **Progress towards achievement of NVQ units remains slow for apprentices recruited before the previous inspection.** Recently enrolled apprentices are making good progress and many are ahead of target. Retention of learners in all areas of learning is improving. The completion rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks are improving.

10. **Retention and achievement rates for learners on the management NVQ programme are low.** Only 16 of the 36 starters in 2002 are still in training. There have been only three NVQ achievements to date. Only two of the current learners have achieved any units so far, after several months on the programme.

11. The implementation of key skills training for some learners on business administration, retailing and customer service programmes is slow. Increased support for these learners is now taking effect and several have almost completed their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Since the previous inspection there has been an improvement in the timing of the introduction of key skills training into hospitality programmes.

Quality of education and training

12. **Learners have extensive opportunities in the workplace to develop their professional and personal skills.** They receive good on-the-job training to help them succeed in their roles and complete their qualifications. They are taking on additional responsibilities such as job rotation and deputising for more senior staff.

13. **Learners are very well supported by assessors,** who visit them regularly and frequently. Any personal problems are dealt with promptly and sensitively. Learners are all aware of the company's information hotline and the wide range of advice and help available.

14. **Assessment planning has improved since the previous inspection and is now good.** Targets are clear, realistic and time restricted and motivate the learners to progress in manageable steps to speed up achievement. Assessor visits are arranged to meet the needs of the learners and to minimise business disruption. Most visits are agreed with employers in advance.

15. Initial assessment is not thorough enough for some learners on hospitality programmes. Insufficient consideration is given to the accreditation of previous knowledge, skills and qualifications. FT responds quickly and effectively to any identified need for literacy and numeracy support. However, these additional needs are not always adequately identified. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection and, since that time, improvements have been made.

Leadership and management

16. **The management of assessors and training programmes is thorough and effective.** FT has established a number of systems to enable tighter control of operational practice. Planning is clear and more effective and strategic planning is sound.

17. **Management at FT is open and responsive.** FT has recently undergone a period of rapid and extensive change and this has been managed well through regular consultation with staff. The partners develop strategy and training provision in close consultation with all staff, and staff members at all levels are encouraged to give their views. Managers are approachable and responsive.

18. **Insufficient use is made of management information for long-term planning.** The new management information system is a recent development. A range of information is collected and analysed, but the results of the analyses are not being used to identify performance trends or to guide longer-term strategic development.

19. **Employers are not sufficiently involved in the planning and monitoring of learning.** Some employers do not know which programme learners are following, how much progress they have made, or the expected completion date. Employers are sometimes not consulted over assessor visits, and do not always attend progress reviews. However, this situation is improving and some employers are very effectively involved.

20. **FT provides good support that promotes equality of opportunity for learners and staff.** Learners are well supported with additional resources and training opportunities that widen access to learning. Equal opportunities training during the staff induction is reinforced with a comprehensive workbook and awareness raising workshops.

21. **Arrangements for the management of equality of opportunity are not complete.** FT has recently begun to collect and analyse some equal opportunities data about learners, but there has been little or no analysis of achievement data for different groups of learners and no long-term trend analysis. The collected information is not used to develop a strategic approach to equality of opportunity.

22. **The quality of provision is monitored through a well-structured system with clear procedures.** A quality assurance team meets regularly to monitor continuous improvement throughout the organisation. Policies and practices for quality assurance are comprehensive and clearly written. FT takes prompt action to introduce improvements where the need is identified. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. Staff are well involved in the process. The report includes a satisfactory level of critical

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analysis. A comprehensive development plan was drawn up following self-assessment and it is regularly reviewed.

23. Internal verification is satisfactory. Regular standardisation meetings are held and good practice is shared promptly. A clear sampling plan is used and the work of internal verifiers is audited satisfactorily and regularly checked by the operations manager.

24. **The strategy for quality assurance is not fully established.** The system has been introduced during the past six months and useful information has been collected about the quality of some aspects of the provision. However, it has not had sufficient time to make a significant impact. At the moment, the collected information is not analysed and used sufficiently to help the organisation with long-term strategic planning of quality monitoring and continuous improvement.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- comprehensive management of assessors and learning programmes
- open and responsive management
- good equal opportunities support for learners and staff
- well-structured system to monitor quality of provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of management information for long-term planning
- insufficient involvement of employers in the planning and management of training
- incomplete arrangements for the management of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently established quality assurance strategy

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- very good standard of work in portfolios
- extensive development and progression in the workplace
- good training and pastoral support for learners
- good assessment planning

Weaknesses

- slow completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks in administration
- low achievement rate for NVQs in management
- insufficient involvement of employers

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- very good standard of learners' work
- good learner achievements in employability skills
- well-planned and frequent assessments

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards NVQ achievement
- delayed implementation of key skills training for some learners

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Strengths

- good standard of learners' work
- good training and pastoral support for learners
- good learner progression

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards modern apprenticeship framework completion for some learners
- insufficiently thorough initial assessments for some learners

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

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

Strengths

- comprehensive management of assessors and learning programmes
- open and responsive management
- good equal opportunities support for learners and staff
- well-structured system to monitor quality of provision

Weaknesses

- insufficient use of management information for long-term planning
- insufficient involvement of employers in the planning and management of training
- incomplete arrangements for the management of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently established quality assurance strategy

25. Assessors and training programmes are managed comprehensively. FT has introduced a number of operational systems since the previous inspection and there has been an improvement in the operational management. Planning is clear and effective and strategic planning is sound. The new role of the NVQ manager has been clearly defined and assessors are well managed through regular three-weekly meetings. These meetings are used to discuss new learners, leavers, targets, progress, health and safety, and individual learning plans. Clear performance targets are set for assessors and these are well monitored. Assessors receive useful and regular feedback about assessment practice. Staff are clear about their job roles with FT, and most have detailed job descriptions. A more effective initial assessment process has improved the identification of support needs. Resources are available to meet the needs identified. A comprehensive range of new procedures has been introduced since the previous inspection which includes a code of practice for assessors and a special needs policy.

26. Management at FT is open and responsive. FT has recently gone through a period of rapid and extensive change and this has been well managed through regular consultation with staff. The partners develop strategy and training provision in close consultation with all staff. Staff members at all levels are encouraged to give their views and fully understand the concept of continuous development. Managers are approachable and responsive to the needs of assessors and learners. For example, during an on-the-job visit to a learner and assessor by the NVQ manager it was identified that an electronic spellchecker was required to help a learner with dyslexia. This was purchased immediately. Staff appreciate the sensitive and caring management style. Internal communications are effective. Regular staff meetings are held and minutes of

these meetings are recorded. However, some minutes do not indicate required actions clearly enough.

27. Most staff are well qualified. FT is a member of a local training provider network which organises a range of relevant training for staff. Assessors receive a thorough induction programme which includes company procedures and policies. Health and safety is given a high priority. It is discussed at quality assurance meetings and appropriate actions are taken when necessary. For example, a member of staff reported feeling unsafe when working at night and an action plan was put into place that included the purchase of a personal alarm. Staff are encouraged to team up with a buddy and meet once a month to ensure that they are not isolated when working in widespread geographical areas.

28. FT has good external working relationships. The local training provider network, of which FT is an active member, operates to develop effective links in the community, to share good practice and to collaborate in the provision of joint training for staff and learners. FT attends meetings regularly, taking an active role in the network. Learners benefit from these links in a number of ways, including access to enhancement funding available to support learners who would be unable to start training or who would be at risk of failing to complete their programme. The recent initial assessment introduced by FT is also used by all members of the training provider network, so that learners moving from one training provider to another do not need to complete a second initial assessment.

29. Staff appraisals and development are satisfactory. Appraisals are carried out annually, with a six-monthly review. The appraiser and appraisee jointly identify training needs and an individual learning plan is produced that is cross-referenced to FT's overall learning plan. Assessors' reviews are also carried out every three weeks by the NVQ manager. Staff receive a comprehensive induction that includes a period of shadowing existing staff. A good range of training is available to staff through the training provider network which also includes learning styles and technical certificates. Management of resources is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, there has been an improvement in the resources available to support learners. This includes increased learning resources for technical certificates and key skills, more laptop computers and portable dictation machines available for loan, an increase in the number of hours available for internal verification, and the development of the learner forum on the website.

30. Management of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. The new initial assessment procedure ensures that most learners with specific needs are now identified. A range of support can be offered which includes extra visits by assessors, and individual workbooks.

31. Management information is not used sufficiently for long-term planning. A comprehensive management information system has recently been introduced to monitor the progress of learners and the work of assessors. Data is now collected more frequently and a range of regular reports are produced to help monitor learners' progress. The system is easily accessed by all staff and information can be analysed

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according to individual learners, assessors, geographical area, gender and disability. Useful reports are regularly shared with assessors and learners, as well as partners. The information system is used well to monitor and manage assessors' caseloads. However, the system is not well established and is not being used to its full capacity. Management information is not being used to identify trends over time or to assist in the development of longer-term organisational planning.

32. Employers are not involved enough in the planning and monitoring of learning. Some employers do not know which programme learners are following, how much progress they have made, or their expected completion date. Employers are sometimes not consulted about assessors' visits and do not always attend reviews, but they usually sign the review forms. However, there has been an improvement in employer awareness and involvement since the previous inspection and some employers are very involved. All new employers receive a comprehensive employer pack which gives details of the target qualification and the importance of health and safety and equality of opportunity. These packs are relatively new and their use by employers is not well established. FT is making efforts to involve employers through the collection of feedback, the promotion of the employer forum on the website and the requirement for employers to sign that they know what progress the learner is making.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

33. FT provides good support that promotes equality of opportunity for learners and staff. A concise and informative equal opportunities booklet is given to learners at induction and a well-publicised confidential hotline is available for learners. Its use is well monitored. Learners are well supported with additional resources and training opportunities that widen access to learning. For example, where a need is identified, learners are provided with portable dictation machines and laptop computers. Equal opportunities training during the staff induction is reinforced with a comprehensive workbook, which staff are required to complete and which is reviewed to test their understanding. This initial training is imaginatively supplemented by workshops to raise staff's awareness. FT adopts a flexible approach to staff's working hours to meet learners' and employers' needs. For example, appointments for progress reviews are made at times to suit learners' varying work patterns and in alternative locations when workplaces are unsuitable for such meetings. The learners are given assessors' mobile telephone numbers and feel that their assessors are approachable and easily contactable.

34. FT has a satisfactory equal opportunities policy which is reviewed annually, but there is no clear strategy for the implementation of this policy. There are satisfactory complaints and appeals procedures and policies to counter bullying and harassment. Access to FT's head office and training centre is satisfactory for learners and staff with mobility difficulties. Satisfactory checks are made on employers to ensure that they have current equal opportunities policies. Improvements to the checking of this information have been introduced since the previous inspection. Initiatives to increase employers' awareness of equality of opportunity have recently been introduced, but these developments are too recent to have had any significant effect on employers.

35. FT produces informative and easily readable marketing material, but there is not enough promotion of positive images of learners. Procedures to encourage fair recruitment and selection and equal access to learning are satisfactory. The development of staff's awareness of equality of opportunity is satisfactory and has improved since the previous inspection. Equality of opportunity is a regular item on quality team meeting agendas and learners' progress reviews now include a set range of equal opportunities questions. Most learners have a satisfactory understanding and awareness of equality of opportunity, and its significance in training and in the workplace. Equal opportunities is introduced to learners during the initial induction and reinforced during subsequent visits. However, FT does not provide any additional formal training for learners to increase their awareness and knowledge. Learners are aware of FT's complaints and appeals procedures and know the appropriate member of staff to approach in the event of bullying, harassment or complaints. All complaints are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. A recent analysis of learners' responses to questionnaires in 2004 shows early signs of an improvement in awareness about some of the equal opportunities procedures.

36. Arrangements for the management of equality of opportunity are incomplete. FT has recently begun to collect and analyse some equal opportunities data about learners; however, there has been little or no analysis of achievement data for different groups of learners and no long-term trend analysis. The recent monitoring of retention rates indicates a reduction in the number of learners leaving at an early stage since the previous inspection, but it is too soon to confirm whether this is part of a longer-term trend. The information that is collected is not used to develop a strategic approach to equal opportunities. FT has introduced a range of satisfactory initiatives to promote equality of opportunity. These include the equal opportunities booklet for learners, the employers' file and the inclusion of questions about equal opportunities in learners' progress reviews. However, the overall approach to management and promotion is not planned and co-ordinated.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

37. Quality is monitored through a well-structured system that includes clear procedures to monitor the quality of assessments, progress reviews and learners' targets. A quality assurance team meets regularly every two weeks and members of the group have responsibility for formally reporting on specific aspects of FT's work. Although the system has only been in operation for a relatively short time it is beginning to have an effect on learners and learning. For example, following research into completion of technical certificates, a useful new database has been designed to collect information about certificate completion. This allows staff to monitor progress and ensure that tests are booked for learners so that modern apprenticeship framework completion is not delayed. Policies and practices for quality assurance are comprehensive and clearly documented. FT takes prompt action to secure improvements where a need is identified. A comprehensive development plan was drawn up following self-assessment and it is regularly reviewed.

38. Internal verification is satisfactory. Internal verifiers have increased the amount of

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time spent observing assessors and working with learners and employers. A 'quality grid' is used to grade the standard of assessment practice and includes useful feedback to the assessors. The internal verifiers conduct effective interviews with employers and learners to ensure that the quality of delivery is satisfactory and standardised. Internal verifiers hold regular standardisation meetings with the assessors. The training needs of assessors are identified and suitable training is arranged when necessary. Information from the external verifier's visits is shared promptly to further good practice. A clear sampling plan is used to ensure that all units are sampled over a period of time. The work of internal verifiers is audited satisfactorily and checked regularly by the operations manager.

39. Satisfactory systems are used to collect feedback from learners, employers and staff. Questionnaires are completed by learners after induction, during their programmes and on leaving. Feedback from learners is generally good to satisfactory. Employers are given questionnaires about equal opportunities and customer satisfaction. Good levels of satisfaction are reported, but some employers acknowledge insufficient awareness of the expectations of some learning programmes, and the targets towards which their employees were working. The information gained is used for the self-assessment report but there is no evidence that employers' feedback has affected learning. Staff understand and are well involved in the self-assessment process. They complete questionnaires and attend a workshop to assist in the grading of training provision. The report uses the 'Common Inspection Framework', gives a good overview of the training provision and includes a satisfactory level of critical analysis. The report identifies many of the weaknesses identified by the inspectors. However, some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were regarded by inspectors as normal practice.

40. The strategy for quality assurance is not fully established. The system has been introduced during the past six months and useful information has been collected about the quality of some aspects of the provision. FT plans to extend its use to other areas of learners' experiences, such as initial assessment and learners' start-up procedures. However, it has not had sufficient time to make a significant impact. The collected information is not used sufficiently to provide FT with an overview that can be used for the longer-term strategic planning of quality monitoring and continuous improvement. There are currently no plans to systematically review and update the quality assurance procedures, although they are regularly discussed and considered at the quality assurance meetings.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

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

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

Strengths

- very good standard of work in portfolios
- extensive development and progression in the workplace
- good training and pastoral support for learners
- good assessment planning

Weaknesses

- slow completion of modern apprenticeship frameworks in administration
- low achievement rate for NVQs in management
- insufficient involvement of employers

Achievement and standards

41. Since the previous inspection, the very good standard of learners' work has been maintained. Their portfolios demonstrate a very good standard of work. Learners provide exemplary product evidence, personal statements and case studies showing how they have solved problems in the workplace. Further improvements have been made to the construction of portfolios of evidence, which are all personalised and of which learners are justly proud. Learners have an excellent working knowledge of the contents and are able to talk about their work with confidence. Evidence is effectively cross-referenced to other units and to key skills qualifications. Better use is now being made of witness testimonies from work colleagues to supplement direct observations by assessors. Key skills work is now integrated with NVQ evidence wherever possible. In some cases, photographs and display literature have been used to good effect.

42. Progress towards achievement of NVQ units and key skills qualifications remains slow for administration modern apprentices recruited before the previous inspection. Some of these are taking up to eight months longer than planned to achieve their modern apprenticeship frameworks. One advanced modern apprentice due to complete in February 2004 has still only achieved three NVQ units, another has achieved only two units and a third only four units. Three foundation modern apprentices are in a similar situation. Some apprentices did not start the key skills elements until they had completed their NVQs and this has delayed framework achievement. Increased support

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for these learners is now taking effect and several are nearing completion. Recently enrolled apprentices are making good progress and many are ahead of target. Key skills training and technical certificates are now introduced at an early stage in the programme. Eighteen apprentices recruited this year have already achieved the technical certificate.

43. Improved initial assessment is identifying levels of key skills and support needs at an early stage, enabling better selection of programmes and support. Retention of administration learners is improving. Only two learners have left before the end of their programme in the past 12 months. The overall achievement rate for modern apprenticeship foundation frameworks is now satisfactory and is averaging 50 per cent. Although achievements are still low for advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks, at around 33 per cent, several learners are nearing completion. There is good progression from foundation to advanced apprenticeships. Many learners are also upgrading their level of key skills awards.

44. Retention and achievement rates for management NVQs are low. Only three learners have achieved NVQs to date, of the 36 starters since 2002; 16 are still in training. Only two of the current learners have achieved any units so far, even after several months in training. Some management learners were not assessed for several months during the recent long-term absence of an assessor. Some management learners make slow progress. They have heavy workloads. Not enough use is made of alternative methods of assessment, such as observation or professional discussion, to speed up progress.

Quality of education and training

45. Learners have extensive opportunities in the workplace to extend and develop their professional and personal skills. Administration apprentices are extending their skills by taking on additional responsibilities, job rotation and deputising for more senior staff. Their duties are well matched to the requirements of the NVQ and key skills qualifications. They are developing good interpersonal, teamworking, communication and organisational skills. Learners occupy responsible company positions and are valued by their employers and co-workers. Many learners form part of their employer's succession planning. Two management learners have already been promoted to be managers of retailing outlets, managing staff, stock, security and cash. Workplaces are well resourced and working conditions are good. Learners receive good on-the-job training to help them succeed in their roles and complete their qualifications. Such training includes product knowledge, customer service, computer applications, management skills, and health and safety.

46. Learners are very well supported by assessors, who visit learners regularly and frequently. Any personal problems are dealt with promptly and sensitively. Assessors have enabled learners to stay in their jobs through intervention where there are personality clashes or other problems at work. Assessors frequently visit learners for assessment outside of normal hours to accommodate shift-working patterns. Assessors

are available by e-mail or telephone at any time, including evenings and weekends. Learners value the respect with which they are treated. Learners are all aware of the company's confidential support hotline and the wide range of advice and help available.

47. Assessment planning has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. At each fortnightly visit the assessor reviews portfolio evidence and carries out any planned direct observation. The assessor and learner then agree a detailed action plan, listing specific short-term tasks which the learner will complete before the next visit. Targets are clear and realistic with timescales, and they motivate the learners to progress in manageable steps. Improvements in the management information system have helped progress monitoring and support assessors in setting realistic assessment targets to speed up achievements.

48. Internal verification has improved since the previous inspection and is satisfactory. Assessors are regularly monitored for consistency and improved record-keeping is providing better information about learners' progress. There are regular assessor meetings where staff are kept up to date with new developments, carry out standardisation exercises and share good practice. Assessment practices have now improved and are also satisfactory. Most learners now receive sufficient workplace observations and are encouraged to obtain witness testimonies from workplace colleagues.

49. Assessors are meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs with improved initial assessments, resources and support. Staff are adequately qualified to deliver NVQs and key skills training, but although some have coaching qualifications, there is still a shortage of staff with specific training or key skills qualifications. The resources provided for background knowledge are satisfactory and include workbooks, handouts and internet learning materials.

Leadership and management

50. Internal communications have improved, and there are regular team and management meetings. New staff are well supported and developed through mentoring, shadowing and training. There is insufficient contingency planning for staff absences.

51. Programme planning has improved. Key skills training and technical certificates are now integrated from the start of the programme. Assessment of evidence is more efficient and progress is quicker. Sustained attempts have been made to engage more employers in the planning of training and in progress reviews, but some employers are still not sufficiently involved in the process and are unaware of learners' progress. Most employers sign progress review records and include written comments, but many do not participate in progress review meetings with assessors and learners.

52. Internal verification practices have improved and meet awarding body requirements. Assessors are given good, detailed feedback about their assessment decisions. Meetings with assessors are particularly effective in helping staff to develop

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and share good practice. Staff and learners show a satisfactory awareness of equality and diversity and learners feel protected against bullying and harassment.

53. Most weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been analysed and improvements have been made. All staff participated in the production of the self-assessment report and many of the strengths and weaknesses found at inspection were accurately identified in the report.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	87	3

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

Strengths

- very good standard of learners' work
- good learner achievements in employability skills
- well-planned and frequent assessments

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards NVQ achievement
- delayed implementation of key skills training for some learners

Achievement and standards

54. The standard of learners' work is very good and has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Learners' work is well presented in carefully organised and planned portfolios. Well-written personal accounts and case studies in learners' portfolios clearly demonstrate competence. Assessors countersign the statements and amplify various points. In many cases employers also countersign. Portfolios also contain good examples of other work, such as completed paperwork and company memoranda. Evidence of employer involvement is also clear from the witness testimonies and other correspondence in learners' portfolios. Learners have a good understanding of their portfolios, which in some cases exhibit flair and style.

55. Learners are well motivated and very well regarded by their employers, who appreciate the increased self-confidence of their employees on learning programmes and the fact that they adopt a more responsible approach to their duties. Many learners have progressed in their workplaces. Promotions achieved include that from head waiter to restaurant manager, from sales assistant to sales supervisor to assistant manager. Other learners are now key holders, first aiders, health and safety officers and fire marshals. These additional roles and responsibilities have enhanced the employability of the learners and have complemented their learning.

56. The previous inspection identified slow progress as a key weakness for some learners. Since then, FT has made considerable efforts to resolve the situation. Although many learners have made significant progress and are back on schedule with their previous achievement target date, some are about to complete their objectives six months late. Other learners who started earlier in the year had very little assessment in the first few months and began to become demotivated. However, all learners

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interviewed are now working well and have recovered their motivation, but many will complete well beyond their planned completion dates. Those learners who began training within the past few months are working to a good standard and are meeting agreed targets.

57. The previous inspection identified poor achievement rates. Since then there has been little achievement, but most learners are still in training. For the year 2003-04, 85 per cent of learners are still in training.

Quality of education and training

58. Assessors generally visit their learners every two weeks and more frequently if required or requested. Each assessor's visit is carefully arranged to meet the needs of the learners and to minimise business disruption. Visits are agreed with employers in advance, with assessors ensuring that there is full communication with everybody concerned. On these visits, learners receive good-quality verbal and written feedback about their work and skills development. This is recorded on their assessments. Achievements are regularly recorded on a chart so that learners and FT's staff can easily monitor progress. This data is now collected centrally and used to inform FT about learners' progress. It enables them to set assessors' performance targets in a more focused way. Good, short-term target-setting was identified in the previous inspection and has been maintained. The process is well structured and establishes a defined but practical approach to evidence collection. This is of particular benefit to those working for an NVQ for the first time, as well as providing assessors with the means to monitor learners' progress more effectively.

59. The previous inspection identified poor planning of individual learning programmes. Since then, a very comprehensive initial assessment process has been introduced. Learners carry out a computer-based test to determine literacy, numeracy and language needs. The test also identifies dyslexia. Learners also carry out a paper-based exercise to identify which NVQ would be most suitable for them and at what level. There are discussions with the learner and the employer to discuss the most appropriate learning programmes. The provision for technical certificates is well planned and learners are making satisfactory progress. The previous inspection identified ineffective initial assessments, and they are now satisfactory.

60. Learners are working in well-resourced workplaces that enable them to gather all their NVQ evidence. Places of employment are well organised and enable learners to follow well-structured, up-to-date commercial practices. Learners work in a range of establishments including specialist retailers, hotels, a large department store and a leisure centre. Most employers are very supportive and make time available, not only for assessors' visits but also for learners to carry out work on their evidence gathering and writing up. Employers and assessors have productive working relationship. Employers are, for the most part, involved in the progress review process and aware of their employee's progress. Some training is given but in general the only employer training available is shadowing.

61. Although, in general, employers offer adequate training, this is not sufficiently enhanced by individual training or coaching. Learners rely solely on the occupational training supplied by their employers, irrespective of the size of the business or of the priorities they give to training. Most of the NVQ requirements can be met in the workplace but there are those key elements that would be more readily understood and assimilated if additional training or coaching were provided. For example, one learner in a specialist selling environment had had no appropriate further sales training to enhance their occupational skills or understanding.

62. Although the provision for additional learning support is satisfactory, some learners with additional literacy needs have not had the opportunity to improve their communication skills in a more focused and objective way. Assessors do not always correct spelling and punctuation errors in learners' work.

63. The previous inspection identified inadequate attention to key skills training. Although there have been substantial improvements, some key skills training is still delayed. Although key skills are better integrated than at the previous inspection they are still not fully integrated with the framework. Some learners with weak information technology (IT) skills are not able to make the best possible use of the internet to support their work or to complete those elements of their units requiring these skills. Recent starters are incorporating key skills training with their NVQ programmes at an early stage. Where possible, learners are accredited with previous key skill or general certificate of secondary education achievements to use against the key skills requirements of their modern apprenticeship frameworks.

Leadership and management

64. The management of FT has worked hard to improve the provision and has overcome many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. However, some of them are still partly evident. Corrective actions will take time to be effective. Staff are effectively involved in the self-assessment process, and the self-assessment report identified many of the strengths and most of the weaknesses identified by inspectors. In some cases, strengths were found by inspectors to be normal practice. The management information system informs management about learners' progress and enables them to effectively plan assessors' activities. Internal verification is well planned and carried out effectively. A good sampling plan ensures that work is sampled from different assessors, learners and individual qualification units. The internal verification process also encourages and supports assessors and ensures good professional development.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	22	3

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

Strengths

- good standard of learners' work
- good training and pastoral support for learners
- good learner progression

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards modern apprenticeship framework completion for some learners
- insufficiently thorough initial assessments for some learners

Achievement and standards

65. Learners produce good standards of work. This good standard has been maintained since the previous inspection. Portfolios are well structured. Evidence is well recorded in learners' portfolios, and cross-referencing between NVQ and key skills units is good. Learners make good use of a wide range of sources of evidence to identify and record learning in their portfolios. Key skills are fully integrated with the NVQ and learners value and recognise what they achieve. Eleven of the 22 learners are working towards a higher level of key skills than required for their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Many learners make good use of IT and the internet for research.

66. Some learners make slow progress towards the completion of their modern apprenticeship frameworks. In 2002-03, three learners completed foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks in hospitality. In 2003-04, a further three completed their frameworks. Some learners are in training for between six and nine months before they complete any units of the NVQ. Learners are often working on a number of NVQ units at any one time. Since the previous inspection there has been a change in the timing of the introduction of technical certificate and key skills training. These are now introduced at the beginning of learners' programmes, rather than near the end.

Quality of education and training

67. Learners receive good support, a strength that was identified at the previous inspection and which has been maintained. Assessors visit learners every three weeks. When a learner is new to FT, assessor visits are more frequent and take place every two

weeks. Assessors adopt a flexible approach to visits, and appointments are arranged to suit learners' needs. For example, FT's staff visit in the early mornings to observe breakfast service or at weekends to observe a function. All learners are supplied with their assessor's mobile telephone number and assessors are easily contactable. They respond speedily and effectively to learners' calls. Assessors have high levels of occupational knowledge and experience which they share freely with learners. Learners value this knowledge and have a high respect for their assessors.

68. Learners have sufficient access to equipment to support their learning. For example, good use is made of laptop computers, spellcheckers, printers and portable dictation machines. FT holds a number of relevant textbooks at its head office. Some learners are well supported by an enhancement fund, which has improved their learning experience by offering them the opportunity to obtain additional qualifications. For example, a learner living and working in a rural area received driving lessons, and other learners have achieved additional qualifications, such as a national pool lifeguard award and a manicuring qualification. Some learners are offered a financial incentive through this fund for completing their framework on time. If a learner changes their employment during the course of the qualification, FT provides good support by ensuring that they maintain continuity of assessor.

69. Learners make good use of the range of opportunities for progression offered to them. Many learners have progressed to the advanced modern apprenticeship in hospitality on completion of their foundation frameworks. A number of learners whose developing skills have been recognised by their employers, have been promoted at work. All learners are well motivated and appreciate the benefits they feel they have gained from their learning programmes. They acknowledge an improvement in their self-confidence, knowledge and skills. Employers recognise the skills gained by learners and the fact that these are put to good use to perform their jobs more thoroughly and effectively. Most training takes place on the job and is carried out by employment supervisors, but there is insufficient recording or monitoring of this by assessors.

70. Formal reviews of learners' progress take place every eight weeks. Learners agree satisfactory short-term targets with their assessors which are adequately recorded and monitored. Target-setting was identified as a strength at the previous inspection. Employers are not fully involved in the progress review process and they do not all attend and participate in the progress reviews. However, most employers sign and make relevant comments on the review record forms. Assessment practice is satisfactory, as is the recording of learner information and the monitoring of progress.

71. Initial assessment is not thorough enough for some learners. Initial assessment takes place before learners start their programmes, and the required NVQ subject and key skill levels are appropriately identified. However, little consideration is given to the accreditation of prior knowledge and skills. For example, one learner had obtained an NVQ in customer service at level 2 but this qualification was not used to contribute to the customer care unit of the NVQ in hospitality at level 2. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection, but since that time, some improvements have been made. However, the initial assessment process does not adequately identify the additional

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learning or social needs of learners. Where a need is identified, some effective support is usually offered quickly. Support for literacy and numeracy needs is inadequate. Staff in hospitality do not have appropriate basic skills support qualifications, although they do their best to support learners. There is no formal or systematic referral process for learners with additional needs.

Leadership and management

72. A significant improvement has been made in the management and monitoring of learners' unit achievements since the previous inspection. Assessors meet regularly with the NVQ manager and performance and targets are reviewed. The internal verification process is satisfactory and is supported by an effective sampling plan. Verifiers visit places of employment, where they observe assessors at work with learners. They also check learners' portfolios and interview a sample of learners. The internal verifier is appropriately occupationally competent in the subject area. Assessors meet each month to share information and good practice and to standardise procedures and practice across the occupational areas. The hospitality programme has not been reviewed and evaluated. Staff have been involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report graded the provision as satisfactory. Many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were regarded by inspectors as normal practice and some strengths and weaknesses were not identified in the report.