

REINSPECTION REPORT

Harlow Information Technology Centre (1992) Ltd Reinspection

15 April 2005



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. 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.

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Harlow Information Technology Centre (1992) Ltd (Harlow ITeC) was established in 1983 and is a private limited company with charitable status. It offers work-based learning for young people on apprenticeship programmes, programmes leading to a level 2 qualification under the employer training pilot (ETP), and Entry to Employment (E2E). Most learners on these programmes are based at Harlow ITeC. Courses are in business administration, information technology (IT), customer service and call handling. Customer service and call handling were not included in the reinspection.
2. Since the previous inspection, Harlow ITeC has undergone significant organisational restructuring in mid-2004. The senior management team is now made up of the managing director, the head of learning and the head of finance and resources. This team is responsible to the ITeC management board. There are 16 full-time, two part-time and two sessional staff.
3. Harlow ITeC works with a range of partner organisations including the newly established west Essex work-based learning consortium and the local further education college. Its work-based learning provision is funded by the Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The ITeC also provides training for industry and commerce and private individuals and is a learndirect provider.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. Harlow ITeC offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in business administration. There are 22 learners. Two are advanced apprentices, 18 are apprentices and two are on the ETP programme. The latter are working towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2 and are assessed in the workplace. Learners on apprenticeship programmes are employed or are on work placements with local companies. They receive an initial period of training to prepare them for work. Apprentices attend off-the-job training at Harlow ITeC. This includes training for literacy, numeracy, key skills and technical certificates. Assessors visit the workplace every three weeks. Learners' progress reviews include the learner, their employer and an assessor.

Information & communications technology

5. Harlow ITeC has 29 learners on information and communications technology (ICT) programmes. There are seven apprentices following programmes in installing and supporting IT systems and one in using IT. One learner is on an apprenticeship for installing and supporting IT systems. There are 21 learners on the ETP programme. They attend taught ICT classes for an examination-based computer course at a set time each week, either during the day or evening. Learners on apprenticeship programmes are in work placements or are employed in local companies. They receive an initial period of training to prepare them for work. Off-the-job training is provided at Harlow ITeC. Assessors visit the workplace every three weeks. Learners' progress reviews involve the learners, their employer and the assessor.

Foundation programmes

6. The E2E programme has been offered since August 2003. Connexions refers a significant number of the learners. The programme is not time-bound and learners continue until they are ready to progress to either employment or further training. There are 16 learners, of whom three had started during the week of inspection. Learners attend for 28 hours each week, Monday to Thursday. Programmes are individually tailored. Induction of up to eight weeks includes initial assessment and basic skills tests and diagnostics. Learners follow a carefully timetabled programme, including literacy and numeracy, social and life skills and vocational development. There is a work taster scheme. Vocational training in IT, customer service and administration are to be expanded to include sports coaching and horticulture. All learners are encouraged to complete the level 1 award and many achieve the level 2. Most training is delivered by ITeC staff. Specialist training is delivered by subcontractors or through the strong links and partnership with the local college of further education. Harlow ITeC provides an E2E programme for young people within the Harlow catchment area.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	19
Number of staff interviewed	13
Number of employers interviewed	4
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	6
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. At the previous inspection, leadership and management and the foundation provision were unsatisfactory. Provision for ICT was good and that for business administration, quality assurance and equality of opportunity satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

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	3

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Apprenticeships for young people	3

Information & communications technology	2
Contributory grades:	
Apprenticeships for young people	2

Foundation programmes	4
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	4

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

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

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Apprenticeships for young people	3
Employer training pilot	3

Information & communications technology	2
Contributory grades:	
Employer training pilot	3
Apprenticeships for young people	2

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Entry to Employment	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. **Overall, the standard of learners' work in business administration is appropriate to their jobs and qualification level** and they continue to gain good office skills.

9. Retention and achievement rates for business administration apprentices have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. Retention and achievement for advanced apprentices are now good.

10. **The achievements on IT apprenticeship programmes continue to be good.** Retention is also good.

11. Retention and achievements for the ETP are satisfactory.

12. Overall, the standard of learners' work on apprenticeships and ETP programmes is good. They achieve good work and personal skills.

13. **Achievements and retention on the E2E programme are much improved since the previous inspection and are now good.**

14. **The progression of learners to work and further training is good.** Learners gain confidence and become increasingly motivated to engage in their training. They gain valuable additional qualifications and improve their numeracy and literacy skills. Learners' social skills are also well developed, increasing employability or the opportunity to attend more advanced training.

15. Retention and achievement rates for the business ETP are satisfactory.

Quality of education and training

16. **Teaching and learning are often good.** In ICT, teaching is good, with a very effective range of teaching and learning methods. In foundation studies, teaching continues to be good and trainers successfully involve learners in sessions which are interactive and fun. Projects, which support other strands of the learners' programme, are well used. However, there is insufficient use of handwriting in lessons to identify literacy needs and develop skills.

17. Learners in all areas benefit from good work placements or work tasters. They are carefully chosen to ensure a good match between learners and employers. Staff ensure that all learners are well prepared for work placements. Employers have a good understanding of the learners' programmes and provide good workplace facilities and programmes to support learners' work at the ITeC. In foundation studies, staff liaise closely with learners and parents before their placements to ensure the fullest support and encouragement. There are debriefing meetings afterwards to identify how learners' confidence has progressed. Further opportunities are then discussed and planned.

18. Guidance and support for learners in all areas are good. In foundation studies, support is much improved since the previous inspection, when pastoral support was considered to be unsystematic. ITeC and employers' staff are very responsive to individual learners' needs, and concerns are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Learning preferences are identified at initial assessment and supported in the workplace. Learners also have access to personal tutors for advice and support for personal and social problems. In foundation studies, trainers engage fully with learners and have developed and gained their trust. Learners' progress and concerns are discussed at weekly E2E meetings.

19. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory in all areas. In business administration, the training rooms are equipped to industry standard and materials are satisfactory to cover background knowledge for the technical certificates. Staff are suitably qualified with relevant occupational experience.

20. Initial and formative assessment is now satisfactory in all areas. They are much improved in foundation studies, where initial assessment was inadequate at the previous inspection. There are now comprehensive initial diagnostic tests in literacy and numeracy and formative assessment is regular and well recorded. Literacy and numeracy support in ICT was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, but is now satisfactory.

21. Internal verification is incomplete in business administration and ICT. Procedures for internal verification were considered to be good at the previous inspection. While interim and final internal verification takes place for all programmes and there is much that is effective, there is no clear sampling plan or strategy to formalise activities in a coherent way. Standardisation meetings do not focus on activities to improve the quality of assessment across each qualification. Some minutes of meetings do not contain dates or action points. There are also no formal plans to verify key skills units.

Leadership and management

22. Harlow ITeC has extensive and productive partnerships. Staff at all levels engage in partnership activities and learners clearly benefit from these. Of particular note is the long-standing partnership with the local college of further education.

23. Programme management is good in all areas of learning. Managers have a clear

view of what needs to be done to make further improvements and provide firm leadership. In business administration and ICT, there is strong leadership, with managers monitoring programmes and liaising effectively with tutors and employers. In foundation studies, managers have worked hard and successfully to embed and develop E2E provision. All weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been resolved and the programme is now well delivered. The disjointed lines of communication have now been rectified. Responsibilities and channels of communication are clear and effectively used.

24. Staff training and development remain strengths. The outcomes of the comprehensive annual staff appraisal scheme contribute to detailed staff development plans, and the training is fully evaluated. There is an extensive programme of internally-led staff development.

25. Harlow ITeC continues to manage its resources well. Resources are comprehensive and a well-budgeted, three-year programme of equipment replacement ensures that learners work with the most up-to-date IT equipment and software.

26. Much work has taken place to improve the management of literacy and numeracy, and it is now satisfactory. A learning support officer now takes the lead in this area. There is comprehensive and effective initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy support needs.

27. Overall, the collection and use of data is satisfactory. Managers continue to receive a good range of information, and data is regularly analysed to develop target-setting and business planning. However, data is still not fully used to plan the provision.

28. Since the previous inspection, Harlow ITeC has continued to develop its approach to equality and diversity. There is an effective and up-to-date equality and diversity action plan. It notes progress but is also realistic about the work that is still to be done. There are adequate policies and procedures, some of which need updating, but generally they are understood by learners and staff. Meetings of the senior management team cover equality of opportunity, but the equal opportunities group has not met since late 2004. The complaints procedure is clear and used effectively to make improvements.

29. The promotion of equality and diversity is now satisfactory. The ITeC now markets directly to young people from minority ethnic groups. It has identified target groups and has run a number of projects to widen participation. The ITeC is also an important partner in county-wide projects to widen participation. Learners continue to receive an appropriate range of information on equality of opportunity.

30. Harlow ITeC continues to have a detailed system of quality assurance, generally understood by staff. A process of internal audit monitors the implementation and effectiveness of procedures, but not always effectively. The quality working group has not met for some time.

31. Strengthening the quality of training is a key strategic priority for the ITeC.

Additional status has been given to quality improvement through the recent creation of the standards committee of the management board.

32. Target-setting for improvement is no longer ineffective. It is developing well and is satisfactory, although the application of targets and their use by staff is inconsistent.

33. Some important elements of the quality assurance system are yet to be fully introduced or exploited. Quality assurance has not identified that some processes are not working to best effect.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- extensive and productive partnerships
- good programme management
- good staff development and training

Weaknesses

- incomplete quality assurance

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good work placements
- good guidance and support for learners

Weaknesses

- incomplete internal verification process

Information & communications technology

Strengths

- good retention and achievement on apprenticeship programmes
- well-planned and delivered training
- good work placements
- good support for learners
- strong leadership and management

Weaknesses

- incomplete internal verification process

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- good achievements and retention
- good progression by learners
- well-delivered programme
- good support for learners
- proactive and successful management

Weaknesses

- some insufficient focus on short-term targets
- insufficient use of handwriting to identify literacy needs

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

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

Strengths

- extensive and productive partnerships
- good programme management
- good staff development and training

Weaknesses

- incomplete quality assurance

34. The Harlow ITeC management board and senior managers provide clear strategic direction. They have a good knowledge of the work of the ITeC and a ready appreciation of the challenges it faces. They have been central to the work of responding to the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection. The management board is now much more proactive in its consideration of key issues for the ITeC, significantly extending its involvement with the setting and monitoring of standards. Business planning is much improved since the previous inspection. Objectives and targets are clear, with full explanation of what is to be achieved, by when and by whom.

35. The previous inspection recognised Harlow ITeC's good links with external organisations. This strength remains, through their extensive and productive partnerships. Staff at all levels engage in partnership activities and learners clearly benefit from these. For example, the ITeC's capacity to deal with learners' literacy and numeracy needs has been much enhanced through their involvement with the local basic skills project. Of particular note is the long-standing partnership with the local college of further education. They work closely together to widen participation and to complement each other's provision. The work-based learning consortium provides another forum for joint working and development.

36. Programme management is good in all areas of learning. Managers have a clear view of what needs to be done to make further improvements and provide firm leadership.

37. The previous inspection prompted senior managers and the management board to further their consideration of new management structures. Changes were made in 2004, to strengthen the senior management team and to provide a clearer focus of responsibilities for learning, finance, resources and strategy. Implementation was considerably delayed by the difficulty in finding suitable candidates. In spite of this, the new arrangements, fully operational since January 2005, provide a much improved

model for communication and decision-making. The lines of communication are no longer disjointed as identified in the previous inspection.

38. Staff training and development remain strengths. The outcomes of the comprehensive annual staff appraisal scheme contribute to detailed staff development plans, and the training is fully evaluated. There is an extensive programme of internally-led staff development and many joint training activities from the ITeC's partnerships and consortium activities. For example, the ITeC has made good use of the work of a government department's standards unit in improving its E2E provision and has worked with the local further education college in jointly developing each organisation's staff.

39. Harlow ITeC continues to manage its resources well. The self-assessment report identified that resources are comprehensive and inspectors' judgements matched this finding. A well-budgeted three-year programme of equipment replacement ensures that learners work with the most up-to-date IT equipment and software.

40. Much work has taken place to improve the management of literacy and numeracy, which is now satisfactory. A learning support officer now takes the lead in this area. There is comprehensive and effective initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy support needs. Staff development has improved the trainers' understanding of literacy and numeracy needs and how to use the outcomes of tests in their teaching. Harlow ITeC has worked with the local college of further education to promote the skills for life agenda and has participated in an LSC skills for life quality initiative and a project to promote better teaching.

41. Overall, the collection and use of data is satisfactory. Managers continue to receive a good range of information, and data is regularly analysed to develop target-setting and business planning. However, as the self-assessment report indicates, data is still not fully used to plan provision.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

42. Since the previous inspection, Harlow ITeC has continued to develop its approach to equality and diversity. There is an up-to-date equality and diversity action plan with clearly identified objectives and targets. It notes progress, but is also realistic about the work that is still to be done.

43. There are adequate policies and procedures which are generally understood by learners and staff. The overall equal opportunities policy and some related documents need updating to reflect management and role changes. Recent work on policies has resulted in a separate racial equality policy. Harlow ITeC meets its obligations under race equality and disability legislation. Meetings of the senior management team include equality of opportunity, but the equal opportunities group has not met since late 2004. The monitoring of equality of opportunity appropriately takes place in work placements. The complaints procedure is clear and used effectively to make improvements.

44. The promotion of equality and diversity is now satisfactory. Using project funding

for promoting training to minority ethnic groups, the ITeC now markets directly to young people from minority ethnic groups. It has identified target groups and has run a number of projects to widen participation. For example, the largest local minority ethnic group is Chinese and working in partnership with a Chinese centre, the ITeC has launched open days and developed publicity specifically for this audience. More broadly, a range of publicity has been published in community languages. The ITeC is also an important partner in county-wide projects to widen participation, such as for IT programmes for lone parents within the various neighbourhoods of Harlow.

45. Staff development and training in equality of opportunity are satisfactory. All trainers receive awareness training and review their practices in team meetings. Some staff have attended more specialist training. Further training is planned as part of the consortium programme. Recent use has been made of ALI diversity materials to improve staff understanding.

46. Learners continue to receive an appropriate range and quality of information on equality of opportunity. It is part of learners' induction and is particularly thorough for E2E learners. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted and reinforced through an ongoing programme of 'issues of the month', raising topics for discussion in training, including employment rights, bullying, sexual harassment and racial discrimination. Staff check learners' understanding of their rights and responsibilities at progress reviews.

47. A good range of equality and diversity related data is collected. Since the previous inspection more frequent analysis and monitoring is developing. However, the ITeC has yet to analyse details of learners who are not retained on programmes. This weakness is recognised. The self-assessment report identifies insufficient monitoring of analyses of data as a weakness.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

48. Harlow ITeC continues to have a detailed system of quality assurance. The quality manual is regularly updated and provides a comprehensive account of procedures. Staff generally understand quality assurance arrangements. Roles and responsibilities for quality assurance are clear, with the recently appointed head of learning taking the lead for the quality of programmes. A process of internal audits monitors the implementation and effectiveness of procedures, but not always effectively. The quality working group has not met for some time.

49. Strengthening the quality of training is a key strategic priority for the ITeC. Additional status has been given to quality improvement through the recent creation of the standards committee of the management board. Chaired by a senior further education manager, the committee has started to sharpen the board's focus on quality and standards. The committee has so far discussed the consistent presentation of data, the simplification of data and area and programme target-setting. It is starting to work closely with the head of learning to help the board understand the links between the quality of the learners' experience, learner recruitment and ITeC finances.

50. Target-setting for improvement is no longer ineffective. It is developing well, although the application of targets and their use by staff is inconsistent. The business plan sets overall programme-level targets for learners' achievement and progression and these are translated into individual programme targets. The standards committee will work with the head of learning to monitor and review these. The managing director also holds rigorous target review meetings with managers, where progress with retention and achievement, among other things, is monitored. Programme teams are increasingly involved in target-setting, but in foundation studies the use of targets is not established.

51. Some important elements of a comprehensive quality assurance system are yet to be fully introduced or exploited. For example, the internal scheme of training observations, noted in the previous inspection, has been relaunched as part of the continuing professional development scheme for staff, but is in its early stages. Self-assessment has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory, but it is not thorough and rigorous. The 2005 report is a detailed account, based on wide range of evidence. However, for leadership and management it is not always clear how the text relates to the bullet point strengths and weaknesses. For quality assurance, although self-assessment is mentioned, there is no overall judgement on its effectiveness. The accompanying development plans are much easier to use to determine key issues for improvement.

52. Quality assurance has not identified that some processes are not working to best effect. For example, internal verification, identified as a strength at the previous inspection, is now incomplete, particularly with regard to the absence of secure processes for sampling and standardisation. Quality assurance processes have not identified these shortcomings. Neither have they identified the absence of monitoring of the implementation of health and safety procedures by the health and safety working party, which has not met since late 2004.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Apprenticeships for young people	20	3
Employer training pilot	2	3

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

Strengths

- good work placements
- good guidance and support for learners

Weaknesses

- incomplete internal verification process

Achievement and standards

53. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices are now satisfactory. They were poor at the previous inspection. Sixty-four per cent of learners who started programmes in 2002-03 were retained and 60 per cent of these completed the full apprenticeship framework. Forty-seven per cent of those recruited in 2003-04 have been retained, of whom 33 per cent completed their full apprenticeship framework with two still in learning. However, a significant number of these learners were referred to the ITeC by other partners in the work-based learning consortium. They had been training for some time without receiving support and guidance and with little awareness of framework requirements. Eighty per cent of apprentices who started programmes in 2004-05 are still in learning. Seventy-five per cent of advanced apprentices who started in 2003-04 have completed their framework and 75 per cent have been retained. In 2002-03, 68 per cent of apprentices progressed into employment, as did 73 per cent in 2003-04.

54. Retention and achievement rates for the ETP are also satisfactory. Sixty-seven per cent of learners who started in 2002-03 were retained and 67 per cent of these achieved their qualifications. Fifty-seven per cent of those recruited in 2003-04 have been retained and 29 per cent have achieved their qualifications, with two still in learning.

55. Overall the standard of learners' work is appropriate to their job and qualification level.

Quality of education and training

56. Employers provide good work placements to enable learners to practise and acquire good office skills. Harlow ITeC takes time to ensure that learners are carefully matched to employers. Employers are very supportive and are closely involved in all aspects of learners' work and have a good understanding of NVQ requirements. They provide opportunities for learners to attend specialist courses. Learners gain confidence and are able to develop the appropriate job skills for a range of diverse duties.

57. Learners receive good support and guidance from staff and employers. Learning preferences are identified at initial assessment and supported in the workplace. Assessors give learners clear information and guidance on gathering evidence for their apprenticeship programmes. Some learners are in demanding and high-level jobs and value and appreciate the attention and support they receive from assessors. Employers provide good on-the-job guidance with clear instructions to develop skills. They often discuss problems and review assessment needs with their learners. Learners are well regarded and motivated to complete their framework. Assessors are skilled and highly committed and respond quickly and effectively to problems that arise at work. Learners also have access to personal tutors for advice and support for personal and social problems that affect their training programme.

58. Staff understanding of key skills requirements for apprenticeship frameworks is now satisfactory. There was insufficient understanding at the previous inspection. Learners and employers are clear about the units and levels of key skills to be achieved. Key skills workplace evidence is now integrated with NVQ portfolios more effectively. Learners have a better understanding of the contents and benefits of their apprenticeship framework.

59. Reviews are satisfactory and involve employers, learners and staff. However, there is variation in the level of detail recorded relating to short-term targets for some learners.

60. Accommodation and resources are now satisfactory, although resources were identified as good at the previous inspection and in the self-assessment report. Training rooms are equipped to industry standard and materials for the technical certificates are satisfactory. Staff are suitably qualified with relevant occupational experience.

61. The quality and standard of work in portfolios is satisfactory, with evidence of ongoing observations and assessments. However, many portfolios contain too much evidence to meet unit requirements. There is no clear cross-referencing of evidence between units to deal with this. The problem was identified through internal verification but it is too early to see any impact on the collection of evidence in portfolios.

62. Initial and formative assessments are satisfactory. Diagnostic assessment now takes place to identify literacy and numeracy needs, and learners receive support with timetabled sessions at the ITeC. Assessments take place in the workplace every three weeks or less to meet individual needs.

63. Induction is remembered by most learners. They receive clear information on their learning programme, health and safety and equality of opportunity. Induction questionnaires are also completed in the workplace.

64. Internal verification was identified as good at the previous inspection. Although internal verification systems are in place, they are incomplete. Interim and final internal verification takes place for all programmes. Detailed and informative feedback is given to assessors, with clear timescales to complete actions. Meetings of assessors and internal verifiers take place, including target-setting meetings to determine learners' progress. However, there is no overall internal verification strategy or policy to formalise activities in a coherent way. Standardisation meetings do not focus on activities to improve the quality of assessment across each qualification. Some minutes of meetings do not contain dates or action points. Staff have recognised that there is no formal verification of key skills units and are working to deal with this.

Leadership and management

65. Programmes are well managed. There is strong leadership of the area with managers monitoring programmes and liaising effectively with tutors and employers. Staff benefit from regular meetings to share good practice and discuss issues relating to assessment, target-setting and internal verification. There is a clear focus in meetings to identify learners who are making slow progress, and on setting targets for improvement. Overall, the work of managers and staff is producing improvement.

66. All learners have a satisfactory awareness of health and safety and equality of opportunity, through induction and by reinforcement through discussion and questionnaires at the ITeC and in the workplace. Learners on ETP programmes now receive an initial assessment and additional support for literacy and numeracy and evidence for key skills, which are now better integrated with the NVQ.

67. Although some of the strengths and weaknesses are identified in the self-assessment report, the report is not a good account of the area.

Information & communications technology**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Employer training pilot	21	3
Apprenticeships for young people	8	2

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

Strengths

- good retention and achievement on apprenticeship programmes
- well-planned and delivered training
- good work placements
- good support for learners
- strong leadership and management

Weaknesses

- incomplete internal verification process

Achievement and standards

68. The achievements on IT apprenticeship programmes continue to be good. In 2002-03, 63 per cent of apprentices completed the framework. This increased to 83 per cent in the following year. Retention is also good, with 63 per cent of learners retained in 2002-03, 83 per cent in 2003-04 and with all seven apprentices still in learning for 2004-05. Retention and achievements for the ETP are satisfactory. Achievement rates were 68 per cent for 2002-03 and 48 per cent for 2003-04, with all learners still in learning for the current year. Retention is also satisfactory, at 69 per cent in 2002-03 and 49 per cent in 2003-04. All 23 learners are still in learning for the current year.

69. Overall, the standard of learners' work on apprenticeships and ETP programmes is good. They achieve good work and personal skills. The standard and quality of work in portfolios is at least satisfactory.

70. Sixty-six per cent and 100 per cent of apprentices progressed to employment in 2002-03 and 2003-04 respectively.

Quality of education and training

71. Training programmes are well planned, organised and delivered. Teaching is good, with a very effective range of teaching and learning methods, used to challenge and inspire learners. Staff are very knowledgeable and experienced. They co-ordinate activities well between practical activities and background knowledge to enable learners

to achieve qualifications. They also provide good support for learners at workshops. Links between on- and off-the-job training activities are good. Assessors carefully plan activities and assessments to meet individual needs and to achieve learning aims. Learners take additional ICT qualifications and progress to higher-level training for specialist software or for advanced features of IT applications. Employers are involved in planning the curriculum and learners provide examples of their competence at work. The ETP programme is also well planned and delivered. Times of courses are flexible and this flexibility was recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff are well qualified and have good expertise and experience in the occupational area. Other resources are satisfactory. Training rooms are well equipped with industry standard hardware and software.

72. Harlow ITeC has maintained its good work placements since the previous inspection. All placements are carefully chosen to ensure a good match between learners and employers. Staff ensure that all learners are well prepared for work placements. Employers have a good understanding of the apprenticeship framework and are provided with timetables containing details of learners' training programmes over the next year. Workplace facilities are appropriate to the needs of the programme. Tasks in the workplace are relevant to the ICT units. Learners are challenged with a variety of practical activities and have good opportunities to progress. Some learners are building personal computers, providing support to internal and external clients and visiting other workplaces to solve problems. Employers take a good interest in the training and development, which helps learners to progress and improve their practical skills.

73. Learners continue to be well supported, at the ITeC and at work. Staff are responsive to dealing with individual needs and are always available to answer learners' queries. Learners value the care and attention provided by staff, particularly when changing work placements. All problems are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Employers help coach individuals at work to develop their confidence and to help them feel part of a team. They also provide a very supportive environment for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Learners have access to personal tutors for advice and support for personal and social problems that affect their training programme.

74. Provision for learners with additional literacy and numeracy needs was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. Improvements have taken place and the identification of their needs and their support are now satisfactory. Individual learning needs are identified and dealt with. Learners attend off-the-job training sessions and frequently discuss these with employers in order to practise their new skills in the workplace. Key skills evidence is integrated into NVQ portfolios. Observations and assessments are detailed and portfolios are well referenced.

75. Initial and formative assessments are satisfactory. Harlow ITeC has introduced comprehensive initial diagnostic tests in numeracy and literacy for all learners, including for ETP learners. Learners' induction is satisfactory. It includes detailed information on health and safety and equality of opportunity. It is extended to the workplace where all information is reviewed and learners complete questionnaires to reinforce the process.

Progress reviews are satisfactory and planned according to learners' needs with appropriate short-term targets. Employers are involved in all reviews in the workplace.

76. Internal verification was identified as a strength at the previous inspection. Although internal verification systems are in place, they are incomplete. Interim and final internal verification takes place for all programmes. Detailed and informative feedback is given to assessors, with clear timescales to complete actions. Meetings with assessors and internal verifiers take place, including target-setting meetings to highlight slow progress. However, there is no clear internal verification sampling plan or strategy to formalise activities in a coherent way. Standardisation meetings do not focus on activities to improve the quality of assessment across each qualification. Some minutes of meetings do not contain dates or action points. There are also no formal plans to verify key skills units. These weaknesses have been recognised and staff are making plans for improvement.

Leadership and management

77. Programmes continue to be well managed, as identified at the previous inspection. There is strong leadership of the area with staff monitoring the programmes and liaising effectively with tutors and employers. Regular feedback is still sought from learners and acted upon. Communications with staff are satisfactory. There has been good action to further improve the quality of provision. Regular meetings take place to determine the quality of provision and to identify issues for action. There is a clear focus on setting and monitoring targets with learners, to check individual progress. Internal verification processes are currently incomplete, although detailed and informative feedback is provided to assessors.

78. Learners have a satisfactory awareness of health and safety and equality of opportunity at induction and their relevance at work. These aspects are covered in-depth at induction and are reviewed in the workplace through questionnaires and by raising issues in assessment plans.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Entry to Employment	16	2

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

Strengths

- good achievements and retention
- good progression by learners
- well-delivered programme
- good support for learners
- proactive and successful management

Weaknesses

- some insufficient focus on short-term targets
- insufficient use of handwriting to identify literacy needs

Achievement and standards

79. Achievements and retention are good, as noted in the self-assessment report. Achievement and retention are at 62 per cent and 67 per cent respectively for 2003-04. So far this year, the equivalent performance stands at a 93 per cent for retention and 21 per cent for achievement. This contrasts very favourably with the poor retention on the life skills programmes which was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection.

80. The progression of learners to work and further training is good. Learners gain confidence and become increasingly motivated to engage in their learning and training. They gain valuable qualifications at levels 1 and 2. In addition, learners improve their numeracy and literacy skills and complete progressive levels which are certificated by an awarding body.

81. Learners' social skills are also well developed, they improve their ability to work as part of a team and develop their personal presentation skills. Work tasters are provided when learners feel able to benefit from this. These attributes increase employability or the opportunity to take more advanced training.

Quality of education and training

82. The programme is now well delivered. Programmes are individual to each learner, with good use of individual learning plans. Learners are taught well on a range of subjects. At the previous inspection there was insufficient support for learners' literacy

and numeracy needs. Literacy and numeracy are now given a high priority with group sessions and individual coaching.

83. Teaching continues to be good. Many training sessions are interactive and fun, with trainers using opportunities to support other strands of the programme. A project to plan and take a journey to another town aided planning, organisational, personal confidence and teamwork skills. To present their findings the learners had to learn to use and apply visual presentation software. They also developed their numeracy and literacy skills as they dealt with project costs and had to record and present them. The 'SMART' project utilises external grants to provide learners with three modules of drama, creative writing and photography, delivered by experts. Learners are very positive about this opportunity.

84. Staff have developed strong partnerships with other organisations and employers and are able to provide relevant, safe and supportive work tasters and work placements. Staff liaise closely with learners and parents before their placements to ensure the fullest support and encouragement. There are debriefing meetings afterwards to identify how learners' confidence has progressed. Further opportunities are then discussed and planned.

85. Staff give learners good support. The previous inspection identified unsystematic pastoral support. Trainers now engage fully with learners and have developed and gained their trust, actively seeking to support when necessary. Learners fully understand how to ask for help and what is available to them. Learners' progress and concerns are formally discussed on a weekly basis at the E2E meeting. Trainers know their learners well and what their differing needs are. This was demonstrated in the lessons observed where trainers adopted different styles and techniques to encourage and support learners. It was further demonstrated by staff enthusing over individual successes. Learners who attend work tasters for the first time are personally escorted by trainers. Senior managers have an 'open door' policy for learners and staff to facilitate communications.

86. The previous inspection identified inadequate initial assessment. Induction and initial assessment are now satisfactory. Initial assessment includes a full computer-based basic skills diagnostic programme for all learners. Learners are fully briefed on the outcomes and guided on the construction of relevant programme objectives. Reviews are satisfactory and are held on a four-weekly basis in addition to the setting of weekly goals. Trainers seek to follow up on learning and development outcomes in order to maintain Passport records. Formative assessment is regular and well recorded. Assessment is enhanced if this is identified as necessary at the weekly team meeting.

87. There is insufficient use of handwriting to identify literacy needs and to develop literacy skills. This weakness is not directly identified in the self-assessment report. Learners enjoyed the three-day creative writing module delivered by a published author. More often, however, the level of handwriting exercises tends to be that of writing some job application letters. The lack of formal writing exercises is not allowing learners to improve writing presentation standards. A lot of the work involves using computers with

spelling and grammar checks, which reduces the opportunity to identify needs and deal with them. Screening for dyslexia is insufficiently robust, but there are opportunities to refer to external specialists.

88. There is some lack of focus on learners' short-term targets. Learners develop programme targets under guidance from staff, with monthly goals, backed up by weekly activity sheets and logs, with agendas. However, many logs are not fully completed and have not been signed off. Some monthly objectives are missed and are not identified until the four-weekly reviews. A few learners thought that the lack of reaction by staff to these incomplete logs meant that they were not important.

Leadership and management

89. Managers have worked hard and successfully to embed and develop the E2E provision. All weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been resolved and good progress has been made. The programme is now well delivered. The self-assessment report reflects the strengths identified at reinspection and partly reflects the weaknesses. The management information system reports on module completions but is not yet able to capture progress on short-term targets, objectives and goals. Quality assurance is inconsistent and does not capture shortcomings in a formalised way.

90. Trainers receive an annual appraisal and development reviews twice a year. They are encouraged and supported in their personal development.

91. The promotion and reinforcement of health and safety and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Learners receive careful briefing and tuition as part of their induction. This is regularly reinforced and monthly topics ensure that areas are continually refreshed. For example, learners produce posters to further engage them with key principles. The training centre carries a wide range of supportive materials and visual aids.