

INSPECTION REPORT

NRS Training

30 April 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

INSPECTION REPORT

NRS Training

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. NRS Training (NRS) is a subsidiary of Nova Recruitment Services and shares the same premises. Nova Recruitment Services is a private recruitment agency in Dudley, based in the town centre with a branch in Halesowen. NRS has been in operation since 1980 and provides recruitment services to a range of companies and public sector organisations. The company has a contract with the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide modern apprenticeships in business administration, retailing and customer service training programmes. National vocational qualification (NVQ) training in telesales and information and communications technology (ICT) has also been provided in the past by NRS. However at the time of the inspection there were no learners in training in these areas and the scope of inspection therefore did not cover these programmes.

2. The senior management team consists of two associate directors. There are also 10 full-time staff and three subcontracted assessors/internal verifiers and five self-employed staff, including four trainers. Learners are employed with organisations in the Midlands, mainly in the Dudley area. NRS was established in 1998 and has been providing modern apprenticeship training since 1999. The company also provides a range of open courses and customised training for companies in the Midlands. Training is provided at the main centre in Dudley which is also the administration and management base. There are three training rooms and other training resources to which learners have access.

3. The Black Country is a densely populated area. It comprises the four metropolitan boroughs of Sandwell, Dudley, Walsall and Wolverhampton. Most of NRS's learners live in the Dudley area. Employment in the area has traditionally been in the heavy engineering and manufacturing industries, but this declined considerably during the 1980s and early 1990s when many foundries and steel manufacturing companies closed. Service industries are now the predominant employment sector. The minority ethnic population in Dudley is 6.3 per cent, according to the 2001 census. In 2002 the unemployment rate in Dudley was 4.1 per cent, compared with a national average of 3 per cent and a West Midlands average of 3.5 per cent. The proportion of school leavers in Dudley in 2001 achieving five or more general certificates of education at grade C or above was 49.6 per cent, compared with a national average of 47.9 per cent.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. NRS provides training in business administration at NVQ level 2 and 3. At the time of inspection there were 33 learners, including 16 advanced modern apprentices and 17 foundation modern apprentices. All learners are employed and are working in a range of commercial companies in Dudley and nearby areas. All learners complete an induction to their programme. Learners attend off-the-job training sessions, including key skills, at the NRS training centre. Learners are assessed in the workplace by visiting assessors.

NRS TRAINING

Five qualified assessors are used by NRS, including four internal verifiers and assessors. Other NRS staff and employers review learners' progress every 12 weeks at the workplace.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

5. Thirty-five learners are involved in retailing and customer service programmes, including 20 advanced modern apprentices and eight foundation modern apprentices in customer service. One advanced modern apprentice and six foundation modern apprentices are on the retailing programme. Learners are employed by a variety of local retailing and service companies. In most cases they have been employed for some time before they are recruited to the programmes. Learners are assessed in the workplace by qualified visiting assessors from the same team as for business administration. Other NRS staff review learners' progress every 12 weeks at the workplace. Learners attend key skills and other training sessions at NRS's training centre.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learner interviews	20
Number of staff interviews	23
Number of employer interviews	8
Number of subcontractor interviews	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	14
Number of partner/external agency interviews	2

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, leadership and management including equality of opportunity and quality assurance are satisfactory. The provision in business administration and retailing and customer service is satisfactory.

GRADES

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

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

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. **Learners develop good job skills in business administration.** They have a good level of knowledge and understanding, appropriate to their job roles. Learners are all employed and are confident in carrying out their duties. **They demonstrate good key skills at work.**

8. **In retailing and customer service, learners demonstrate good key skills and are able to perform a range of tasks with minimal supervision in many cases.** Learners are confident at work and carry out their duties to a good standard. They demonstrate good working practices in their jobs.

9. Only small numbers of learners started business administration training before 2001-02 and there is insufficient evidence on which to base judgments about retention and achievement rates for the advanced modern apprenticeship programme.

10. **A few learners make slow progress towards completing their modern apprenticeship frameworks in business administration.** The pace at which most learners progressed during the period 2001-03 is unsatisfactory.

11. Achievement rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks in retailing and customer service are poor. Retention levels are unsatisfactory.

Quality of education and training

12. **NRS's staff respond very effectively to individual learners in meeting their needs.** Staff are very flexible and communicate well with learners. They have regular and frequent personal contact with learners individually in the workplace.

13. **Learners are well motivated, interested and enthusiastic about their training,** both on and off the job. They participate very effectively in workshops and other training sessions. Learners' contributions in workshops and other training sessions are to a good standard.

NRS TRAINING

14. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Training facilities and resources are satisfactory. A range of off-the-job training is available through full- or half-day workshops, twilight sessions and individual tutorials.

15. The development of learners' literacy and numeracy abilities is satisfactory. All learners are given an initial assessment in literacy and numeracy at induction, which identifies areas for improvement. They are then offered places in NRS workshops, or given individual help in the workplace.

16. **Target-setting is poor and some of the training and assessment planning is ineffective.** Short-term plans are not sufficiently clear about the specific tasks, deadlines and assessment opportunities necessary to enable learners to progress with their NVQs and modern apprenticeship frameworks.

Leadership and management

17. **Staff participation in business planning and review is good.** Staff at NRS are very clear and well informed about the aims of the company, the current plans and any planned developments.

18. **Staff development is good.** NRS's staff make good progress in their career development. They are involved in a range of staff training and development activities which are applied to the benefit of learners.

19. The management information system is satisfactory. NRS has developed its own access database as well as using standard computerised operating systems. The system allows each learner's progress to be monitored effectively.

20. The development of learners' literacy and numeracy abilities is satisfactory. If required, learners can take part in workshops in, for example, spelling, grammar or long multiplication. This support is also offered in the workplace when appropriate.

21. Arrangements are satisfactory for monitoring health and safety in learners' workplaces.

22. NRS's approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory. NRS has a clear commitment to equality of opportunity and has successfully involved under-represented groups in training. **The company has effective resources and systems and takes positive action to include people with disabilities.** The self-assessment report is satisfactory.

23. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. Quality assurance of training is supported by written procedures, which are clearly communicated to staff and subcontractors.

24. Assessment and internal verification practices are also satisfactory.

25. **NRS does not have sufficient guidelines to support the implementation of its equal opportunities policy.**

26. **The management of the company's performance is not thorough enough.** Managers do not conduct sufficient monitoring and review all the programmes to ensure that actions taken are having an effect.

27. **Management target-setting is weak.** Targets used are not specific enough, or capable of measuring progress, and often do not have timescales attributed to them.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good staff participation in business planning and review
- good staff development
- successful promotion of equal opportunities for people with disabilities

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough management of performance
- weak target-setting for staff and subcontractors
- insufficient guidelines to implement the equal opportunities policy

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good occupational and key skills development
- good response by staff to learners' individual needs
- well-motivated and enthusiastic learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress in completing modern apprenticeship frameworks
- ineffective target-setting

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good key skills demonstrated by learners
- good support for learning
- very well-motivated learners

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rate
- unsatisfactory retention rates
- ineffective planning of training and assessment for learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NRS TRAINING:

- staff are very approachable
- staff are friendly and flexible
- staff encourage and motivate
- 'NRS makes you feel like you can achieve anything'
- 'there are lots of opportunities to go on workshops'
- good information provided about workshops
- 'staff are contactable whenever I need help'
- 'I get on really well with NRS's staff when they visit me - they are really helpful'
- 'key skills training has been very helpful'
- NRS is very supportive and provide additional help and training
- learning materials are adapted for people with specific needs, for example large print

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NRS TRAINING COULD IMPROVE:

- the time available to do NVQ portfolios at work - one learner wanted more time to work on their portfolio
- the amount and speed of feedback about key skills test results
- employer involvement
- clarity of progress review objectives

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NRS TRAINING:

- improve retention levels and achievement rates
- increase the rate at which learners progress towards modern apprenticeship framework completion
- make performance management more thorough
- improve target-setting
- improve the planning of training and assessment
- provide more guidelines for the implementation of the equal opportunities policy
- further develop evaluation methods to identify quality improvement priorities

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good staff participation in business planning and review
- good staff development
- successful promotion of equal opportunities for people with disabilities

Weaknesses

- insufficiently thorough management of performance
- weak target-setting for staff and subcontractors
- insufficient guidelines to implement the equal opportunities policy

28. Staff participate well in business planning and reviews. NRS's staff are very clear and well informed about the aims of the company, its current plans and any planned developments. This is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. The business plan is well-supported by an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. All staff are involved in this process. Their views and ideas contribute to the business plan. Other stakeholders' views, such as those of employers and learners are considered. Communications among the staff teams and with subcontractors are good. Regular weekly and monthly team meetings which include subcontractors, record actions to be taken, although not in a standard format. Managers, staff and subcontractors work effectively together. There is a shared sense of purpose and teamwork is good. NRS has good links with employers. Employers are given a helpful handbook, which details the responsibilities of NRS and the responsibilities of the employer in terms of the learner. However, use of the handbook by employers is not monitored sufficiently. Employers also receive a monthly newsletter from NRS.

29. Staff development is good. Members of staff make good progress in their career development. This is partly recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Managers discuss development needs with individual staff, reflecting both personal development and business requirements. These are recorded at four-monthly appraisal interviews. The appraisal procedure is highly valued by staff. It includes the staff member and the manager providing a written review of progress from the last meeting and potential actions and developments for the future. These reviews are discussed and future actions are agreed. Each appraisal results in the prioritisation of up to three action points by each participant. Staff training is regularly provided in a range of relevant courses. Staff also are involved in local networks promoting the sharing of good practice. Much of the staff training and development is directly relevant to teaching and learning.

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30. The management information system is satisfactory. As well as using standard computerised operating systems, NRS has developed its own access database, which allows the monitoring of individual learners. Health and safety practices are satisfactorily monitored in learners' workplaces.

31. All learners are initially assessed for literacy and numeracy skills. If required, learners take part in in-house workshops for specific areas; for example, spelling, grammar or long multiplication. For learners with specific needs, NRS employs specialists with appropriate qualifications. Two of NRS's staff also have recent and appropriate literacy and numeracy skills teaching qualifications, and others hold key skills practitioners' awards.

32. Management of NRS's performance is not thorough enough. Managers do not monitor and review sufficiently actions taken to measure their impact. This is not recognised in the self-assessment report. Staff and subcontractors understand their overall responsibilities and how they contribute to the business aims. However, objectives are not formally set and actions taken are not reviewed systematically. Subcontractors are managed through regular reviews and by being involved in team meetings. However, there are no formally recorded objectives covering their activities or monitoring systems for their performance. Recent actions have been taken to improve retention levels and achievement rates by, for example, incentives for assessors and a visual monitoring system for learners' status and progress. Both these measures are relatively new and at too early a stage to be able to judge their effect on learners.

33. Target-setting by NRS's management is weak. Targets that are used are not specific enough or measurable, and often do not have set timescales. This is not recognised in the self-assessment report. There are some general targets for compliance to external requirements, but no specific, business-related short- medium- or long-term targets by which staff and managers can plan and review progress. Assessors, including subcontracted assessors, are not given specific and measurable targets for learners' progress and completion of programmes. The targets used are too general, insufficiently demanding and not linked effectively to a process of continuous improvement.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

34. NRS is successfully involved and committed to an initiative which promotes the inclusion of disabled learners in training and employment. Regular reviews are held with an external assessor as part of this initiative. NRS has resources and systems which effectively promote opportunities for people with disabilities. NRS has successfully included learners with disabilities in training. Physical access for people with restricted mobility is satisfactory. Extra support is provided for learners for whom English is an additional language.

35. Overall, NRS's approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory. NRS has a clear commitment to equality of opportunity and widening participation in learning. This is communicated to staff, learners and employers. NRS has developed a range of actions through its business activities to support this commitment. Formal monitoring of recruitment is carried out. The current intake of learners reflects the profile of the local

community. Promotional materials and recruitment strategies are used to target under-represented groups.

36. Appropriate equal opportunities data are collected and monitored regularly at monthly meetings and by the management team. Actions and targets are agreed, some of which are realised, others are identified for further action.

37. The equal opportunities policy and equality of opportunity are regular agenda items at staff meetings. Staff have a good appreciation of equality of opportunity. Actions are agreed to promote inclusion and to widen participation. NRS has recognised that the number of men joining the programmes has declined and actions have been identified to resolve this problem.

38. Learners' inductions include an NRS equal opportunities statement and the offer of the full policy if required. Equal opportunities, bullying and harassment are all covered in induction. Assessors monitor learners' understanding by checking the work carried out for the employment rights and responsibilities workbook, through regular reviews with learners, and as part of training sessions. The discussion of equal opportunities with employers and learners at progress reviews is recorded.

39. NRS does not have sufficient staff guidelines to support the effective implementation of its equal opportunities policy. The company has a written policy stating its commitment to providing equality of opportunity which is given to all staff and learners on joining NRS. Employers also receive a copy of the policy and some guidelines. There are some procedures for implementing equality of opportunity; staff and learner recruitment and selection is based on a set of guidelines which provide for a fair and equal approach. However, there are no other written procedures, or guidance for staff. For example, the procedures for staff to follow in order to review and reinforce learners' induction to equal opportunities are not written down, or formally reviewed by managers. The guidelines for introducing NRS's policy to employers and reviewing employers' implementation of equal opportunities are not recorded.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

40. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The quality assurance of training is supported by written procedures which are clearly communicated to staff and subcontractors. This is stated as a strength in the self-assessment report. The procedures cover most aspects of the provider's business. Issues relating to quality assurance are fully discussed at the monthly management quality review meetings. These have standard agendas which ensure that all aspects of the quality assurance procedures are reviewed. Actions are noted and completed, promptly and regularly. The progress made in implementing quality assurance procedures is monitored. Arrangements are regularly updated for new legislation, or changing circumstances. Managers and staff regularly review learners' and employers' feedback about the service they receive. Feedback is gathered by questionnaires. The responses are not sufficiently detailed and do not enable specific areas to be targeted for quality improvement.

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41. The self-assessment process is satisfactory, and involves all staff. It identifies the current position and areas for improvement. This leads to a development plan which contains a record of actions and who is responsible for the implementation of each action. However, inspectors found weaknesses which were not identified in the report, and some strengths identified by the provider were found to be satisfactory.

42. The appeals and complaints procedure is satisfactory. All complaints, including negative comments from questionnaires, are thoroughly investigated, and relevant action is taken. The monthly quality assurance review meetings consider the complaints and the outcomes of each complaint as standing items on the agendas.

43. Subcontractors are not managed thoroughly enough. NRS has no formal, service level agreement with them.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	33	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good occupational and key skills development
- good response by staff to learners' individual needs
- well-motivated and enthusiastic learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress in completing modern apprenticeship frameworks
- ineffective target-setting

Achievement and standards

44. Learners are all employed. They gain good skills and demonstrate a level of knowledge and understanding, appropriate to their job roles. They are confident in carrying out their duties, articulate, and demonstrate good communication skills. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Many of the learners interviewed place significant value on the on- and off-the-job training they receive. They work in a variety of settings and have good opportunities to learn appropriate skills. Learners' contributions to teamworking are effective and employers are positive about the progress learners make at work. Learners show good development of key skills.

45. Only small numbers of learners started training before 2001-02, and there is insufficient evidence upon which to base judgments about retention and achievement for the advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Two of the four foundation modern apprentices who started in 2001-02 have completed their frameworks, which is satisfactory and all four were retained to the end of their programme which is good. Only one advanced modern apprentice started before 2001 and was retained for the duration of the programmes, but did not complete the full framework.

46. Slow progress is made by some learners in achieving their modern apprenticeship frameworks. The pace at which some learners progressed during the 2001-03 period is unsatisfactory. Of 33 advanced modern apprentices who started between 2001 and 2003, 16 are still in training, three completed the full framework, and 14 have left without completing it. Of those 14, over half were in training for the full duration of their programmes, but left without completing the full apprenticeship framework. Four learners beginning the advanced modern apprenticeship course in 2001 are still in

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learning, with an anticipated completion date of June 2004. Twelve of the 18 learners who started the foundation modern apprenticeship programme between 2002 and 2003 are still in training, with completion anticipated for June 2004. Ten learners reached the conclusion of their programmes, but only one has completed the full modern apprenticeship framework. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		17		16		1									
Retained*	0		1		6		1	100								
Successfully completed	0		0		3		0	0								
Still in learning	1		11		4		0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4		18		4											
Retained*	0		1		4											
Successfully completed	0		1		2											
Still in learning	4		12		1											

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

47. NRS's staff respond very effectively to individual learners in meeting their needs. The staff are very flexible and communicate well with the learners, having regular and frequent contact with them individually in the workplace. Good communications also include contacts by telephone, fax and e-mail. Staff effectively identify and respond well to the individual learning, employment and personal needs of learners. All learners interviewed valued the way in which NRS's staff work with them. Induction and initial assessment are provided on a flexible basis. They are carried out at NRS and in the workplace, and include individual sessions. Daytime, twilight and evening training sessions are offered, meeting the needs of learners and their employers. NRS's staff have developed good key skills training materials and workshop training sessions to support

learners. They are provided both at the NRS training centre and in the workplace by experienced and appropriately qualified NRS staff. Staff provide appropriate project materials for learners at work.

48. Learners are well motivated, interested and enthusiastic in their training, both on and off the job. They participate very effectively in workshops and other training sessions. Learners contribute in workshops and other training sessions to a good standard. Attendance and punctuality at training sessions are good. Many learners are involved with projects at work which motivate them and enable them to develop a good understanding of work-related topics. NRS recognise and regularly celebrate learners' achievements. All learners who achieve NVQs and complete modern apprenticeship frameworks take part in award ceremonies held at the learners' workplaces. Learners at NRS have regularly won external competitions for their achievements and taken part in regional modern apprenticeship award ceremonies.

49. Learners take part, where appropriate, in a range of additional, short training courses offered by NRS. In some cases, learners gain additional qualifications. For example, one learner needed to develop telephone skills and successfully completed a telephone techniques course provided by NRS. Other learners participate in the off-the-job training courses held at NRS, for example in spreadsheet and database applications.

50. Training facilities and resources are satisfactory. Learners' training needs are kept under regular review. Learners attending off-the-job training are provided with satisfactory training materials. Access to additional reference materials is limited.

51. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Learners are observed sufficiently in the workplace and they are given constructive feedback. A range of evidence is used to support assessment. Learners' NVQ portfolio work is satisfactory or better. There is appropriate use of witness testimonies, documentary and product evidence and professional discussions. Learners' progress is reviewed by staff and discussed with employers. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the planning of training and assessment to improve learners' progression rates.

52. Learning is supported by a range of nationally recognised worksheets, and websites. English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) training is available when appropriate. The provider subcontracts a literacy and numeracy specialist if learners have significant basic skills requirements.

53. NRS's target-setting for learners is poor. Short-term plans are not clear enough about the specific tasks, deadlines and assessment opportunities which enable learners to progress with their NVQs and modern apprenticeship frameworks. The short-term plans proposed by trainers do not always provide enough of a challenge for some learners. Learners are not made aware often enough that they can progress more quickly. Some learners are experienced and proficient in certain tasks, but this is not recognised or considered sufficiently by NRS's staff when they set targets or arrange projects. The learner is not encouraged to identify work-related tasks during reviews that could contribute to their NVQ progress. The learner has insufficient input into the target-setting.

Leadership and management

54. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and organise their work effectively. They are suitably qualified and take part in appropriate staff development activities regularly. They are well supported and directed by managers. Suitable training programmes and effective materials are developed and kept under review by staff. Communication between training staff and managers is effective. Communication between subcontracted assessors and NRS's staff is also effective. Details regarding learners are recorded satisfactorily and supporting information systems are sound. However, the information is not used effectively by managers to improve the pace of individual learners' programmes. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Staff regularly review their work and make improvements.

55. Equal opportunities is introduced at learners' inductions, and mentioned at each progress review by staff. Learners have a basic understanding of equality of opportunity in the context of the workplace. However, neither they nor their employers have been engaged in regular, meaningful discussions with NRS's staff to promote a good level of understanding.

56. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. Staff were involved in the self-assessment process. The findings in the self-assessment report clearly identified NRS's main weaknesses, but some of the features described as strengths were judged to be satisfactory by inspectors.

57. Managers have recognised that learners are not progressing at a satisfactory rate. They have introduced initiatives to resolve this slow progress. For example, there is now a much clearer method of progress monitoring by managers and risk banding of learners, in terms of progress and retention. Incentives for assessors have been introduced and learners who make good progress are used as role models for others. Evidence shows that learners are now progressing at a more satisfactory rate.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	35	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good key skills demonstrated by learners
- good support for learning
- very well-motivated learners

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rate
- unsatisfactory retention rates
- ineffective planning of training and assessment for learners

Achievement and standards

58. Learners demonstrate good key skills at work. They develop good working practices. Learners are able to perform confidently a range of retailing and customer service tasks with minimal supervision in many cases; they can communicate effectively, carry out relevant calculations and sales transactions, and use ICT to a good standard. Learners are able to apply their off-the-job learning effectively in their jobs.

59. Completion rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks are poor. Retention levels are unsatisfactory. Only 25 per cent of learners who started in 2000-01 completed their advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks. Forty-five per cent of the learners who started during the same period were retained. Completion rates for those who left in 2001-02 are poor. Of the 32 learners who started in 2001-02, six are still in training and only two completed advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks. Of the 23 learners who began advanced modern apprenticeship programmes in 2002-03, 11 have left the programme early without completion. Of the 25 foundation modern apprentices who began training in 2002-03, none have completed their frameworks.

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The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		23		32		20									
Retained*	0		0		7		9	45								
Successfully completed	0		0		2		5	25								
Still in learning	3		12		6		0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2003-04		2002-03													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		25													
Retained*	0		8													
Successfully completed	0		0													
Still in learning	1		13													

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

60. Training is very effectively supported by well-planned workshops, provided periodically and flexibly by NRS; learners have good access to staff for learning support. Learners are given a comprehensive key skills initial assessment which is analysed and the results fed back to the learner. Visiting assessors are very supportive of learners in the workplace; they are good at working with learners and helping them to gain skills and confidence. From the beginning of the programme learners are encouraged to consider and collect key skills evidence from the workplace and to use any previous learning or experience. Key skills workshops are offered throughout the learners' programmes. Workshops have appropriate materials and satisfactorily planned lessons. The training facilities are satisfactory.

61. Workshops are also provided at work on those occasions when learners are unable to attend centre-based sessions. These include individual learning sessions in the workplace. Learners who have literacy or numeracy difficulties are given individual support through the key skills workshops. Learners have additional training sessions at the NRS training centre, including courses in customer care, presentation skills, time management, sales techniques, product knowledge, health and safety, and telephone

techniques. The learners who have attended these courses have been able to apply the skills learnt and have gained confidence by attending. Any training that a learner has received from the workplace is recorded at the monthly progress review. NRS collects this information so that training hours can be recorded for the technical certificates. Learners use a training log to record any additional training they are given in the workplace.

62. Learners are very well motivated. They contribute and participate very effectively in workshops. Learners express a keen interest in their training; they are very enthusiastic and willing to learn. Many learners are involved with projects at work which motivate them and enable them to develop a good understanding of work-related topics. They have good access to industry-standard resources at work and are often involved in additional training with their employers. Learners are very positive about NRS's staff and the encouragement they receive from them and the experienced members of staff at work.

63. Learners' achievements are regularly celebrated at awards ceremonies by NRS and employers. NRS's learners have won external regional awards for achievements as apprentices. Assessment is satisfactory and judgements made are based on a satisfactory range of evidence. Learners' NVQ portfolios are at least satisfactory.

64. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are met satisfactorily. The initial assessment in literacy and numeracy at induction identifies areas for improvement. Learners are then offered places in NRS workshops, or given individual help in the workplace. Learning is supported by a range of nationally recognised worksheets, and websites. ESOL training is available when needed. The provider subcontracts to a literacy and numeracy skills specialist if learners have significant skills requirements.

65. Some of the planning of training and assessment carried out with learners is ineffective. It is not detailed specifically enough regarding tasks, timescales and assessment opportunities. Better plans are produced for learners on work-based projects. All learners complete an occupational skills assessment linked to the NVQ unit, but this is not used in the learning plan or reviewed. Assessors and reviewers frequently refer to the unit numbers rather than tasks or elements to be achieved when they review progress and plan training with the learner. The four-monthly reviews do not produce any further long-term planning of training or assessment for learners, and only repeat the short-term planning process. Learners' progress is reviewed by staff and discussed with employers, but employers are not sufficiently involved in the planning of training and assessment to improve learners' progression rates.

Leadership and management

66. Staff work to well-defined guidelines and understand their roles and responsibilities. They have good access to managers and take part in business planning and reviews. Staff develop appropriate workshop materials and lesson plans. Internal communications are adequate and there is some good teamwork among both NRS and subcontracted staff. Training administration systems are sound. Management information regarding

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learners' progress is available, but is not used effectively by managers to improve achievement rates and completion of the frameworks.

67. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets the requirements of awarding bodies. Staff regularly review their work and make improvements. However, NRS managers do not set clear targets for the subcontractor, to ensure the completion of full frameworks within specific times. NRS does not have a written service level agreement with the subcontractor.

68. Equality of opportunity is covered at induction with learners and reviewed by staff with learners in their workplaces. Learners have a basic understanding of equal opportunities in the context of the workplace.

69. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. Staff were involved in the self-assessment process, the findings of which clearly identified the main weaknesses, but some of the features described as strengths were found to be satisfactory.

70. The poor retention levels and achievement rates are concerning managers and actions have been taken to improve matters. Analysis of learners leaving their programmes before completion is carried out. A significant number of leavers have changed jobs and progressed in their careers. Other initiatives include providing incentives and highlighting good-progress role models among learners. Improvements have been introduced in induction, initial assessment and the process of entering training. There is evidence that these initiatives are working and that learners are progressing towards completion of their frameworks more quickly.