

REINSPECTION REPORT

Vocational Training Services Limited Reinspection

11 November 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

VOCATIONAL TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED REINSPECTION

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

REINSPECTION REPORT

Vocational Training Services Limited Reinspection

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Vocational Training Services Limited (VTS) is a private company in Essex. It was set up in 1994. It provides apprenticeships in care and early years care and education. The senior management team is made up of the managing director, general manager, business development manager, area manager and finance manager. Other senior staff include the quality assurance co-ordinator, training co-ordinator, early years team leader and care team leader. VTS employs 26 staff and uses 30 work-based assessors. It has a head office and training centre in Westcliff-on-Sea and another training centre in Colchester.

2. Since the previous inspection, VTS has joined the NOVA partnership to meet the requirements of the Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). LSC funding for VTS is now through the contract between Essex LSC and NOVA. Just over 300 apprentices and modern apprentices are following LSC-funded training programmes. At the time of the reinspection, an LSC-funded employment training programme, Profit from Learning, was coming to an end. Profit from Learning and VTS's privately funded programmes were not included in the reinspection.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Health, social care & public services

3. VTS has 160 apprentices. Sixty-nine of these are following programmes in care and 91 are following programmes in early years care and education. There are 146 advanced apprentices. Forty-one of these are following programmes in care and 105 are following programmes in early years care and education. All the learners are employed. They work in hospitals, residential and nursing homes and private and community-run nurseries. Off-the-job training is provided at VTS's training centres. Learners attend the training centres for one or two days each week. Some workplaces have work-based assessors. VTS also offers an alternative education programme for 14-16 year olds and national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes for privately funded learners. VTS introduced training for technical certificates in August 2005.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	8
Number of learners interviewed	51
Number of staff interviewed	32
Number of employers interviewed	7
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	15
Number of visits	3

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

4. At the previous inspection, health, social care and public services and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Leadership and management and equality of opportunity were satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection, all aspects of provision were satisfactory.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

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

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

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

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

Health, social care & public services	3
Contributory grades:	
Apprenticeships for young people	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

5. **Rates of completion of apprenticeship frameworks are poor.** Although they have improved since the previous inspection, they remain poor. Few learners achieve the key skills qualifications they need to complete their apprenticeships. More learners are now achieving their NVQs and the rate of NVQ achievement is satisfactory. Retention rates are satisfactory and have improved since the previous inspection.

6. Learners' work is satisfactory. They work well in groups and take part confidently in discussions. Learners enjoy their work. They do their tasks competently and safely.

Quality of education and training

7. **Learners continue to benefit from good training from VTS, both at the training centres and at work, and from their employers.** Training sessions are well planned and taught. Good links are made between background knowledge and learners' experience at work. Learners who do not attend the training centres have individual training sessions with their assessors. Employers provide valuable extra training courses that are related to learners' NVQs. Resources for training and learning are satisfactory.

8. **Employers and learners work together closely in productive partnerships.** There are good communications between all those involved in training. Learners benefit from well-co-ordinated training, assessment and support.

9. Guidance and support for learners remain satisfactory. Assessors work effectively. A thorough initial assessment accurately identifies individual needs for help with literacy and numeracy. Literacy and numeracy help has improved since the previous inspection, but it is not always sufficiently prompt or sufficiently good.

10. Assessment and internal verification have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. Learners are assessed regularly at work. There is some good assessment planning and there is more assessment by observation. However, some learners' knowledge is not tested thoroughly. Feedback from assessors is not always evaluative and is sometimes imprecise about future activities to be planned.

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11. Key skills provision is now satisfactory. Staff have been given training and are more aware that they must integrate learners' key skills and vocational learning. However, learners often miss opportunities to collect key skills evidence as part of their NVQ work.

Leadership and management

12. **VTS has clear priorities for making improvements and has pursued these effectively.** It has built on the work underway at the previous inspection to re-establish a stable and capable management team. Many aspects of provision that were unsatisfactory at the previous inspection are now satisfactory. Provision is continuing to improve.

13. **Partnerships with other organisations remain strong. Partnerships benefit all stages of learners' programmes.**

14. VTS has developed its key skills strategy, which is now satisfactory. For new learners, key skills are now explained earlier and more explicitly and key skills are increasingly being taught as part of learners' overall programmes. Learners who started less recently are failing to achieve the key skills qualifications that are required for them to complete their framework.

15. **There has been some improvement in completion of apprenticeship frameworks, but progress remains slow.**

16. **VTS continues to promote social inclusion effectively.** It has continued previous initiatives and further developed its work with the local community.

17. Equality of opportunity has improved since the previous inspection. VTS now has up-to-date policies and procedures, which are thoroughly monitored. VTS does much analysis of data on learners to identify patterns in relation to gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic group and has introduced initiatives to correct imbalances. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

18. Since the previous inspection, quality assurance and quality improvement have been strongly promoted by senior managers. Arrangements for monitoring training are now satisfactory. The company has produced up-to-date policies, procedures and guidance and has a clear programme for reviewing them.

19. **Self-assessment remains good.** Staff are involved in developing the report and are aware of the priorities for quality improvement.

20. Internal verification and assessment have greatly improved and are now satisfactory. VTS has effective internal verification arrangements and a clear strategy for internal verification. It recognises the role of internal verification in monitoring and standardising assessment.

21. **Some important aspects of quality assurance require further development.** These include the scheme of observation of training and learning. Some quality assurance

policies are not applied consistently. These include the analysis and use of data on framework completion, and policies for assuring the quality of assessment and target-setting.

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

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good management of improvement
- strong partnerships with external organisations
- good social inclusion
- good self-assessment

Weaknesses

- continuing slow progress in improving framework completion rates
- underdeveloped aspects of quality assurance

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good training
- productive links with employers

Weaknesses

- poor framework completion rates

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

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

Strengths

- good management of improvement
- strong partnerships with external organisations
- good social inclusion
- good self-assessment

Weaknesses

- continuing slow progress in improving framework completion rates
- underdeveloped aspects of quality assurance

22. VTS has clear priorities for making improvements and has pursued these effectively. It has built on the work underway at the previous inspection to re-establish a stable and capable management team. The priority is to improve the provision for learners. Many aspects of provision that were unsatisfactory at the previous inspection are now satisfactory and are continuing to improve. These include internal verification, the monitoring of equality of opportunity measures and the monitoring of quality assurance. These improvements have been achieved in an unsettling context of reduced training budgets and changed contractual arrangements.

23. Partnerships with outside organisations remain strong. Partnerships benefit all stages of learners' programmes. As at the previous inspection, VTS works very effectively with employers, Connexions and local schools. Business development has its roots in meeting learners' needs and promoting social inclusion.

24. Strategic and business planning remain effective. Staff are aware of the company's aims and priorities. The collection and use of data are satisfactory. Managers continue to receive a good range of information and data is regularly analysed to guide target-setting and business planning. Day-to-day management is satisfactory. Internal communications are good. An effective structure of meetings aids strategic and operational management and promotes quality improvement. Staff development has improved since the previous inspection. Staff development is now more closely related to the company's main goals. For example, much training has focused on improving key skills provision and the management of assessment. Resources and their management remain satisfactory. A thorough initial assessment accurately identifies individual needs for support with literacy and numeracy.

25. VTS has developed its key skills strategy since the previous inspection. An up-to-date key skills strategy includes a suitable statement of intent, policy and development plan. These were developed after wide consultation with expert groups. Learners are given a key skills workbook, a sample key skills portfolio and a support pack. The training co-ordinator works with assessors and learners to improve their understanding of key skills and to help them produce evidence. For new learners, key skills are explained earlier and more explicitly and key skills are increasingly being taught as part of learners' overall programmes with scheduled sessions and activities. Learners who started less recently are failing to achieve the key skills qualifications that are required for them to complete their framework.

26. There has been some improvement in rates of completion of apprenticeship frameworks, but progress remains slow. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. Managers and staff are putting much effort into achieving further improvement. The introduction of technical certificates has been greatly delayed. All current learners are prepared for the technical certificate. However, many learners who started less recently have not benefited from this.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

27. VTS continues to promote social inclusion effectively. It has continued existing initiatives and further developed its work with young people aged 14 to 16 who are at risk of being excluded from school. This work is guided effectively by surveys and local market intelligence. Since the previous inspection, promotional material has been thoroughly revised. The new material uses case studies that reflect the diversity of VTS's learners. VTS has also recently obtained accreditation in recognition of its ability to support learners whatever their sexual orientation.

28. VTS has made good progress with developing equality of opportunity since the previous inspection. At the previous inspection, policies were not up-to-date and VTS did no monitoring to ensure that the equal opportunities procedures were followed. VTS now has an up-to-date and thorough equal opportunities policy, which also deals with aspects of bullying and harassment. VTS provides good printed guidance and good guidance on its intranet to help staff follow the policies.

29. VTS does much analysis of data on learners to identify patterns in relation to gender, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic group and has introduced initiatives to put right imbalances. Data is also used by the management committee to measure the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy. Managers receive detailed reports each month on learners' gender, age, destinations and progression and on the proportions of learners with additional learning needs and from under-represented groups. Equality of opportunity is discussed in detail at meetings and the discussions are minuted. More detailed three-monthly reports consolidate monthly data.

30. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. VTS has produced

a useful summary of the equal opportunities policy for learners. Equality of opportunity is covered at induction. Learners are now asked about aspects of equality and diversity at their progress reviews. A new programme of reviews involves 10 questions on equality of opportunity that are put to learners at each review. These provide a useful prompt for a broader discussion of equality and diversity.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

31. Since the previous inspection, quality assurance and quality improvement have been strongly promoted by senior managers. The company has produced up-to-date policies, procedures and guidance and has a clear programme for reviewing them. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of training are now satisfactory. Self-assessment remains good. Staff are involved in developing the report and are aware of the priorities for quality improvement.

32. Quality assurance and improvement are central to the work of key committees. The management meeting sets the agenda and reviews performance. It has a larger membership for the first part of its agenda. This allows for wider discussion and communication about key issues, including quality. Open debate and constructive criticism are encouraged. Staff account for their performance in doing key quality assurance tasks. This happens in a professional and pleasant environment.

33. Staff meet to share good practice and to do detailed reviews of the wide range of data on learners. Team meetings discuss the content and delivery of programmes and review performance. Standardisation meetings do more than manage assessment and internal verification. They are also a valuable forum for reviewing and developing quality assurance and improvement.

34. A range of monthly reports is used at committees of all levels. These give details of performance against target, especially in relation to the completion of units. They can be analysed by individual learner or by individual assessor or assessor team. The learners' 10-weekly progress reviews are used to keep individual learning plans up to date.

35. Internal verification and assessment were thoroughly revised after the previous inspection and have improved greatly. VTS has a clear strategy for internal verification and effective internal verification arrangements. Standardisation meetings are used to improve assessment and assure quality. To aid this process, staff are given in-house and outside training.

36. Some aspects of quality assurance need further development. VTS does not have an informed, first-hand view of the quality of training and learning. Although there is some observation of training, this is insufficient. VTS has no overall plan for observing training. Inconsistencies remain in the way staff apply quality assurance policies. For example, assessors do not strictly adhere to new arrangements. Since the previous inspection, greater attention has been paid to setting targets for improvement, but inspectors noted that some short-term target-setting was inadequate. Although VTS was able to respond rapidly to requests for data during the inspection, it does not prepare and use data on

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apprenticeship completion for each contract year. This makes it impossible to identify trends in achievement and retention.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Apprenticeships for young people	306	3

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

Strengths

- good training
- productive links with employers

Weaknesses

- poor framework completion rates

Achievement and standards

37. Rates of completion of apprenticeship frameworks are poor. Although they have improved since the previous inspection, they remain poor. Few learners achieve the key skills qualifications they need to complete their apprenticeships. More learners are now achieving their NVQs and the rate of NVQ achievement is satisfactory. In 2003-04, 16 per cent of learners completed their apprenticeship frameworks and 43 per cent achieved their NVQ. A further 117 learners are still on their programmes. The management of key skills has improved and current learners are making satisfactory progress with their key skills. If all the learners who are still in training complete their frameworks, the completion rates will be 54 per cent for 2003-04 and 80 per cent for 2004-05.

38. Retention rates are satisfactory and have continued to improve since the previous inspection. In 2004-05, the retention rate for advanced apprentices was 86 per cent, compared with 36 per cent for 2002-03 and 66 per cent for 2003-04. The retention rate for apprentices has also improved, from 56 per cent in 2002-03 to 62 per cent in 2003-04. Eighty-three per cent of apprentices who started in 2004-05 are still in learning.

39. Learners' work is satisfactory. They work well in groups and take part confidently in discussions. Learners enjoy their work. They do their tasks competently and safely.

Quality of education and training

40. Learners continue to benefit from good training from VTS, both at the training centres and at work, and from their employers. Training sessions are well planned and

taught. All the classroom-based learning observed by inspectors was satisfactory or better. Lesson plans provide details of the learning to take place. Good links are made between background knowledge and learners' experience at work. Learners who do not attend VTS's training centres have individual training sessions with their assessors. Employers provide valuable extra training courses that are related to learners' NVQs. These have included courses on dealing with difficult behaviour and courses leading to qualifications in health and safety. Some employers provide mentors who give coaching, support and guidance to learners.

41. VTS, learners and employers work together closely in productive partnerships. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report. Communications between staff, employers and learners are good. Employers regularly and frequently discuss learners' progress with assessors and take the initiative in arranging opportunities for assessment and gathering of evidence. They help learners to increase their confidence and self-esteem in the workplace. Many workplaces offer a range of opportunities that enable learners to enhance their professional skills and knowledge. Some employers link pay and promotions to the achievement of NVQs. One employer holds an awards ceremony to reward learners who have achieved qualifications.

42. Guidance and support remain satisfactory. A thorough initial assessment accurately identifies individual needs for help with literacy and numeracy. Support with literacy and numeracy has improved since the previous inspection. However, it is not always sufficiently prompt or sufficiently good. Assessors work flexibly and respond to individual learners' circumstances. Learning sessions and assessment are offered at weekends and evenings for learners who cannot attend during office hours. Extra time and individual support are provided for learners with additional learning needs or other needs for support. Learners find VTS's staff approachable. All learners have assessors' mobile telephone numbers and can contact them for guidance and support.

43. Assessment and internal verification have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. Learners are assessed regularly at work. There is some good assessment planning which clearly sets out the evidence required for each unit. More assessment is being done by observation than at the previous inspection, although the testing of knowledge is not always thorough. Assessors support learners effectively, recording their answers to spoken questions. Learners get feedback at the end of each unit but this is not always evaluative. Some feedback is insufficiently clear about how much progress the learner is making and about how they should plan their future work. VTS issues all learners with certificates for individual NVQ units.

44. Resources are satisfactory. Staff have suitable qualifications and relevant experience, which they use well to enhance learners' vocational skills and knowledge. Teaching rooms at VTS are good. Learners can use the internet and a range of learning materials. In both early years and care, learners can use textbooks and themed files to help them develop the knowledge required for their vocational qualifications.

45. Key skills provision has improved since the previous inspection. Staff have been given training and are more aware of the need to integrate key skills into vocational

learning sessions. However, learners often miss opportunities to collect key skills evidence as part of their NVQ work. The recently appointed training co-ordinator is providing more support with key skills, to learners and to staff. Learning materials are available and learners are encouraged to attend key skills workshops.

Leadership and management

46. Since the previous inspection, staff have worked well together to improve the provision. Most of the main weakness identified at the previous inspection have been put right. It is too early for the improvements to have had any great effect on rates of framework completion. Systems to monitor learners' progress have improved. However, learning plans do not sufficiently reflect individual learners' requirements. Some learners are not adequately motivated or set sufficient targets for achievement.

47. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report. All staff contribute to the self-assessment report and are aware of organisational priorities. Of six improvements identified in the action plan, five have been achieved. Learners' understanding of aspects of equality of opportunity is thoroughly reinforced at their 10-weekly progress reviews.