

INSPECTION REPORT

Weir Training Limited

28 October 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

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

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

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

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

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

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

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Overall judgement

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

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

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

INSPECTION REPORT

Weir Training Limited

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Scope of provision	1
About the inspection	2
Overall judgement	2
Grades	2
Key findings	3
What learners like about Weir Training Limited	9
What learners think Weir Training Limited could improve	9
Key challenges for Weir Training Limited	10

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	11
Equality of opportunity	13
Quality assurance	14
Business administration, management & professional	16
Retailing, customer service & transportation	21

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Weir Training Limited (Weir Training) was established in May 2000, and was incorporated in December 2002. Based in Chertsey, Surrey, the company has three directors and nine members of staff. Some members of staff work part time. The company has been a subcontractor providing national vocational qualifications (NVQs) since 2000. The company's contract with Surrey Learning and Skills Council (LSC) began in July 2003. It offers training for modern apprenticeships and NVQs in business administration, customer services, distribution and warehouse operations, management, sales, telesales, team leading, accounting, key skills, information technology (IT), retailing, international trade and services, and learning and development. Learners are employed in a range of companies throughout Surrey.
2. Weir Training still operates as a subcontractor for two organisations in the London area, for whom it provides training for a substantial number of learners. It also subcontracts provision for 13 learners to a local company.
3. All learners are employed before they start their programmes with Weir Training. Employers range from large multinational companies to small shops with a few employees.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

4. There are 32 learners in this area of learning, of whom 14 are on apprenticeship programmes in business administration. Ten learners are working towards advanced apprenticeships in management and two learners are working towards advanced apprenticeships in business administration. Six learners are working towards an NVQ at level 2 in team leading. All learners are employed. Those on apprenticeship programmes attend the training centre for one day for technical certificate training. All other training is delivered in the workplace. Weir Training provides training for key skills, portfolio-building, and other skills and knowledge requirements. Weir Training's staff visit learners in the workplace to give coaching, guidance and support, to observe learners at work and carry out assessments on all programmes every month. Staff are well qualified occupationally and vocationally.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

5. Weir Training offers training in retail, customer service, warehouse and distribution, international trade and services, sales and telesales. Most learners are working towards customer service qualifications. Twenty-one learners are on apprenticeship programmes and 17 are on advanced apprenticeship programmes. There are also nine distribution and warehouse apprentices, six retail apprentices, one international trade and services apprentice and two sales apprentices. One learner is working towards an NVQ at level 2 in sales. All learners are employed. There are nine assessors and eight internal verifiers who are occupationally competent. Eight of the assessors have relevant assessor awards with one working towards an assessor qualification. Most training takes place in the workplace and is carried out by employers, although assessors offer individual training and coaching as required. Weir Training is now offering workshops at the training centre and at some employers' premises for training towards the key skills qualification and technical certificates.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learner interviews	19
Number of staff interviews	24
Number of employer interviews	14
Number of subcontractor interviews	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	2
Number of partner/external agency interviews	1
Number of visits	17

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. The provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Weir Training's arrangements for leadership and management are good, including those for equality of opportunity. However, the company's arrangements for quality assurance are satisfactory. Training in business administration, management and professional, and retailing, customer service and transportation is good.

GRADES

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	2
Quality assurance	3

Business administration, management & professional		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Business administration</i> - Work-based learning for young people	24	None
<i>Management</i> - Work-based learning for young people	2	None
<i>Other contributory areas</i> - Work-based learning for young people	6	None

Retailing, customer service & transportation		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Retailing</i> - Work-based learning for young people	6	None
<i>Customer service</i> - Work-based learning for young people	38	None
<i>Warehousing and distribution</i> - Work-based learning for young people	9	None
<i>Other contributory areas</i> - Work-based learning for young people	3	None

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. **Retention rates are good in both areas of learning.** Since Weir Training started business in 2003, 78 per cent of learners have been retained. Of those learners on advanced apprenticeships, 74 per cent are still in learning. Eighty-five per cent of apprentices are still in learning. None of the learners starting in 2004-05 have left the programme.

8. It is too early in the contract to give any judgement on framework completion rates. However, **learners are making good progress towards their qualifications.** Some management learners have completed advanced technical certificates before the target date. Key skills training and assessment are introduced early in the programme for most learners. Most learners are completing units ahead of target dates.

9. **Learners are developing useful skills in the workplace.** For some, this has led to promotion. Some learners who completed apprenticeships under the previous subcontract arrangement have progressed on to Weir Training's own advanced apprenticeship training programme.

10. **Business administration learners' portfolios are good**, containing a wide range of well-referenced evidence.

Quality of education and training

11. **Off-the-job training is structured and well planned.** Learning is flexible. In some workplaces, small groups are taught together. Some learners are following an online e-NVQ assessment system with coaching from their assessor. In other workplaces, trainers provide customised individual coaching to help learners gain essential knowledge and skills.

12. **Some targets set for learners are not challenging enough or are too vague.** In business administration, most short-term targets are based on expected progress and do not sufficiently stretch learners. In retailing, customer service and transportation, many progress reviews do not set clear and specific medium-term action-planning targets for learners. Some individual learning plans are incomplete or do not record target dates for the achievement of NVQ units.

13. There are adequate learning resources. Trainers are occupationally competent and are all employed by Weir Training. Some are working towards teaching and further academic qualifications. All assessors are appropriately qualified or working towards assessor qualifications. Retailing, customer service and transportation learners do not have sufficient occupationally specific reference materials.

14. **Assessment is particularly well managed in business administration, management and professional.** There are detailed written records including well-thought-out assessment plans. Evidence is effectively cross-referenced to units to monitor learners' progress. Some learners cross-reference their evidence before the assessor arrives. Evidence is appropriately assessed across units, not just those in the individual learning plan. Completed units are accredited and employers are informed of learners' success.

15. **Learners receive particularly effective support in the workplace from their employers.** Employers are very closely involved in helping learners to progress. All employers participate fully in the progress review process and many also take part in assessment activity. Some employers provide spaces for learners to study. Others work co-operatively with assessors to ensure that learners are able to gather evidence for the tasks set. Workplace supervisors for customer service learners showed a very good knowledge of the training programmes and their requirements. However, some workplace supervisors for business administration learners had too little knowledge of what the learners were trying to achieve.

16. **Learners receive comprehensive advice before they start their training programmes.**

17. Support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs is satisfactory.

Individual learning needs are accurately diagnosed and students have access to effective additional support throughout their programme. Audio versions of some key documents are available for learners with dyslexia or impaired vision, and professional discussions and extra observations are used to help learners who have difficulties with writing to achieve their qualification.

Leadership and management

18. Programmes are very responsive and flexible to learners' needs. They are customised to meet learners' and employers' needs. Staff understand employers' business priorities. There is minimum disruption to their working pattern. Weir Training has taken over responsibility for several groups of learners who are making slow progress from other providers. Very positive troubleshooting has maintained learners' motivation and progress. When problems are encountered, remedial action is agreed and taken swiftly and all parties are kept informed.

19. There are very strong working partnerships with a wide range of other organisations. The directors are very active in local consultative groups and Weir Training attends local training events. Very successful subcontract relationships with other providers have enabled Weir Training to provide accredited learning since 2000. Learners on those programmes achieved well. The partnerships continue to flourish. Weir Training now subcontracts some of its own provision and this is well managed. The company communicates openly with its partners and is always willing to share good practice.

20. Communication is good internally and externally. Effective meetings share information appropriately at each level. Staff and line managers meet individually every two weeks. These meetings are particularly effective. Discussions about each aspect of the work are recorded thoroughly and actions are followed up. This approach is also used to engage employers. Employers' senior managers meet Weir Training's managers every three months to discuss learners' programmes. Workplace supervisors participate in the progress reviews that take place every three months and set goals that focus on the workplace. Workplace supervisors also have regular telephone contact with Weir Training. Good explanations and well-written information packs help employers to understand the programmes. Trainers and assessors have a good rapport with learners and provide good support, either in person, on the telephone or by e-mail. Success is celebrated with the learner and their employer is notified.

21. Staff development is exceptionally good. All staff take part in continuous professional development activity. Well-implemented strategies build the company's capability. Development needs are agreed when roles change and training is started promptly. A well-structured and recorded system of appraisal sets targets that are monitored and reviewed every three months. Most of the staff training allows them to work towards accredited qualifications.

22. Strategies to promote equality and diversity in the workplace are very effective. Weir Training uses diversity data well. Regular meetings with employers' senior managers monitor equality of access and generate good opportunities for young people to

WEIR TRAINING LIMITED

participate in training programmes. A lively newsletter is used very creatively to communicate ideas about equality, and health and safety, as well as interesting news items and achievement statistics. Learners have access to anonymous advice and support by e-mail or telephone. All new staff and learners work through comprehensive equality and diversity workbooks to reinforce their knowledge and test their understanding. Assessors visiting learners in the workplace also regularly reinforce equality and diversity issues.

23. Management information is not used in sufficient detail to monitor progress.

Element achievement is not recorded, so it is difficult for managers to look at the effectiveness of the different parts of the programme. They have no overview of unit achievement by which to set targets for staff or learners. Monitoring is frequent and detailed but focuses on individual learners too much, rather than on achievement for the whole group.

24. Quality assurance is satisfactory. However, some parts of the quality assurance system are too recent to be fully effective.

25. The self-assessment report was useful in generating a good development plan, but the judgements were not sufficiently focused.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very responsive and flexible programmes
- very strong partnership working
- good communications
- exceptionally good staff development
- very effective strategies to promote equality and diversity in the workplace

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed quality assurance systems
- insufficient use of management information to monitor progress

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration

Strengths

- well-managed assessment
- particularly effective support for learning in the workplace
- good portfolios
- good retention rates
- good progress towards qualifications

Weaknesses

- ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors
- some unchallenging short-term targets

Management

Strengths

- well-managed assessment
- particularly effective support for learning in the workplace
- good portfolios
- good retention rates
- good progress towards qualifications

Weaknesses

- ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors
- some unchallenging short-term targets

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- well-managed assessment
- particularly effective support for learning in the workplace
- good portfolios
- good retention rates
- good progress towards qualifications

Weaknesses

- ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors
- some unchallenging short-term targets

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Customer service

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Warehousing and distribution

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT WEIR TRAINING LIMITED:

- the pace of the training programme - 'I can study at my own pace - there's no rush to it'
- friendly, supportive and helpful assessors - 'I think my assessor is the best!'
- staff are firm but fair
- the staff - 'the way they care about me reaching my goals'
- the support they receive - 'it doesn't matter what I need, they'll do it'
- the good feedback provided
- the emergency contact card - 'I can get help whenever I need it'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK WEIR TRAINING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the frequency of visits
- the distance to the training centre
- less NVQ-speak

KEY CHALLENGES FOR WEIR TRAINING LIMITED:

- complete the implementation of the quality assurance systems
- more thorough use of management information
- more consistent target-setting
- improve staff understanding of self-assessment
- maintain the good retention rates

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- very responsive and flexible programmes
- very strong partnership working
- good communications
- exceptionally good staff development
- very effective strategies to promote equality and diversity in the workplace

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed quality assurance systems
- insufficient use of management information to monitor progress

26. The three directors of Weir Training are good leaders and have drive and energy. They set very ambitious targets. They work closely with employers and partners to encourage and support learners.

27. Programmes are very responsive and flexible to learners' and employers' needs. Weir Training collaborates closely with employers to anticipate their needs and respond to their training requirements. All staff have a very good understanding of the business world. Programmes are customised to fit learners' and employers' needs. For some employers, group training has been set up in their branches where the employer provides space, equipment and time for learners to complete coursework. For others, visits to learners are shorter and more frequent so that there is less disruption to their working pattern. Weir Training has taken responsibility for several groups of learners who are making slow progress with other providers. Very positive troubleshooting in these cases has maintained learners' motivation, building on what they had already done. All these learners have stayed on the programme and they are now making very good progress. When problems are encountered, remedial action is agreed and taken swiftly, with all parties kept informed.

28. Communication is good internally and externally. There is a very effective meetings structure which shares information and makes decisions appropriately at each level of the company. All meetings are minuted in a standard way and actions are assigned and followed up. Staff meet with their line manager every two weeks. These meetings are particularly effective. A very well-designed form prompts discussions about each aspect of the job role. These are recorded with any problems or actions which must be referred to a higher level. For assessors and trainers this means a full case conference every two weeks and a chance to deal with issues promptly. For managers it gives a very clear picture about how the company is performing. This approach is also used to engage employers. Employers' senior managers meet with Weir Training every three months to

WEIR TRAINING LIMITED

ensure that they are kept informed about their learners' programmes. These managers appreciate the open and honest feedback that they receive. Workplace supervisors participate in the progress reviews that take place every three months and set goals that focus on the workplace. They are often also present at assessments and are in regular telephone contact with the company. Good explanations and well-written information packs help employers to understand the programmes. The newsletter 'Weir Talking' is informative and attractive. Trainers and assessors have a good rapport with learners. They encourage them by setting realistic goals and providing good support, either in person, on the telephone or by e-mail. Success is celebrated with the learner and the employer is notified.

29. There are very strong working partnerships with a wide range of other organisations. The directors are very active in local consultative groups and Weir Training attends local training events. When Weir Training started in business, the company had no contract of its own, but it quickly developed very successful subcontract relationships with other training providers. Weir Training has provided training in business administration, retailing and customer service since 2000. Learners on these programmes have a high rate of achievement and the partnerships continue to flourish. Weir Training now subcontracts some of its own provision and this is well managed. The company communicates openly with its partners and is always willing to share good practice. For instance, Weir Training worked in collaboration with another subcontractor to share information about technical certificates. It also developed and taught some key skills sessions for another training provider who could not accommodate this provision.

30. Staff development is exceptionally good. All staff are required to take part in continuous professional development activity. There are well-implemented strategies to build staff capability so that the company can grow. When people are promoted or their role changes they agree the development and training needed, and training is started promptly. A well-structured and recorded system of appraisal sets targets that are monitored and reviewed every three months. Most of the staff training allows them to work towards accredited qualifications. Many staff have taken extra numeracy qualifications and all have completed a level 2 technical certificate in business administration. Two assessors are starting teacher training in January 2005. Retailing assessors, including two directors, updated their occupational competence by working in a shop alongside a learner.

31. Management information systems are not used in sufficient detail to monitor progress. Regular analysis of retention and achievement, and demographic data is used in management planning. Every two weeks, managers meet with individual assessors where they discuss learners' progress and record the proportion of learners who have completed their framework or achieved their qualification. This information is helpful for managers. However, element achievement is not recorded, so it is difficult for managers to look at the effectiveness of the different parts of the programme. They have no overview of unit achievement by which to set targets for staff or learners. Monitoring is frequent and detailed but focuses on individual learners too much, rather than on achievement for the whole group.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 2**

32. Strategies to promote equality and diversity in the workplace are very effective. Data on ethnicity, gender and other diversity issues is routinely analysed and is used for monitoring and planning. Weir Training emphasises diversity very strongly in its meetings with employers' senior managers, which take place every three months. In addition to a well-planned discussion of general equality and diversity issues, a customised report is produced for each employer, comparing the company's overall demographics against those for learners, to ensure equality of access to training for eligible learners. These meetings are also very effective in identifying vacancies and further opportunities for young people to participate in training programmes. The lively newsletter sent to employers, partners and learners is used very creatively to communicate ideas about equality, and health and safety. Every issue has a fun item such as a quiz or a competition, and many of the news items also promote equality and diversity in more subtle ways. Learners are given a card containing contact details for access to anonymous support and advice.

33. There is a comprehensive and detailed set of equal opportunities policies and procedures which are maintained by an equality and diversity steering group. All learners and employers have simplified versions of these in their handbook, which also includes the health and safety policy. All new staff and learners work through attractive and comprehensive workbooks to reinforce their knowledge and test their understanding. These also provide good sources of evidence for learners' qualifications. Assessors visiting learners in the workplace regularly monitor their understanding of equality and diversity. They choose appropriate questions from a prompt sheet and clearly record any gaps in knowledge as development points. A similar process is in place for health and safety.

34. The complaints and grievance procedures are satisfactory but have never been used. However, any problems in the workplace indicated on learners' or employers' surveys or questionnaires are thoroughly investigated and remedied. Assessors work hard to identify appropriate support to resolve problems in the workplace and remove barriers to achievement. For example, where appropriate, assessors spend more time with learners or they visit more frequently. Learners can telephone their assessor or communicate by e-mail, and they always get a response even when their own assessor is away. However, when learners leave an employer before achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan, assessors and managers work very flexibly with them to identify and supply the support needed to enable them to achieve all their targets.

35. Staff have the opportunity to air their concerns. Regular staff surveys are analysed and the company acts on the results. Each meeting for training staff ends with an open forum session which is not attended by directors.

36. Although access to the Chertsey premises would be difficult for people with restricted mobility, there is a satisfactory range of other premises where learners can take tests and attend off-the-job training. All other training activities take place in the workplace. Audio versions of some key documents are available for learners with dyslexia or impaired vision. Professional discussions and extra observations are used to

help learners who have difficulties with writing to achieve their qualification. Learners with identified additional learning needs are offered specialist support from a partner organisation in addition to individual support from their own assessor.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

37. One of the directors leads the quality assurance working group which meets every three months to monitor standards. All staff have clearly defined job descriptions which outline their responsibilities. Internal verification is satisfactory. Standardisation meetings are regular and actions are carried out and evaluated thoroughly. Internal and external verification arrangements are thorough and effective in improving the quality of the provision. Staff have attended training sessions with awarding bodies and for quality assurance issues, such as self-assessment. One member of staff is involved in the production of technical certificate specifications with an awarding body.

38. Portfolios are regularly audited and cross-checked to ensure that they are completed correctly. A comprehensive set of tightly controlled policies, and procedures and forms are held centrally and reviewed regularly. These have been refined in the past four months. A workshop was held in July with each member of staff responsible for presenting a different aspect of the procedures and policies. The whole team revised them before collating and standardising their format. Many improvements were made to improve the quality of information recorded. For example, progress review forms now have extra checks to ensure that key skills diagnostic tests are carried out on time. Staff use a very simple and effective progress review document to measure progress, record concerns and set new targets in meetings with their managers. Standard topics appropriate to the person's job role prompt a very structured individual discussion each month. They also help teams to disseminate information and raise concerns. Actions raised in these discussions are dealt with swiftly and evaluated.

39. Learners and employers complete questionnaires regularly to assess the quality of programmes. Administrative staff also survey employers by telephone. Analysis of the results is thorough and detailed. Identified problems are followed up and dealt with. For instance, assessment feedback has been improved after some employers identified it as a problem.

40. The quality assurance systems are not sufficiently established and are not yet fully effective. Although new learners will use them fully, those who have been in training for some time do not yet benefit from the changes that have been introduced. Elements of some learners' programmes are late, inaccurate or missing. Individual learning plans are not always completed correctly. Only one observation of training has taken place. Reports on observations of assessment are sometimes too descriptive and do not sufficiently evaluate the quality of the decisions.

41. All staff participated in the self-assessment process. The directors met separately from other staff to ensure that all staff could discuss the provision openly and honestly. The separate judgements were brought together and revised several times before publication. Many of the points mentioned in the self-assessment report were also

identified by inspectors. However, the report was not sufficiently focused. Many of the actions in the development plan have been completed and have made effective improvements.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration, management & professional		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration - Work-based learning for young people	24	None
Management - Work-based learning for young people	2	None
Other contributory areas - Work-based learning for young people	6	None

Business administration

Strengths

- well-managed assessment
- particularly effective support for learning in the workplace
- good portfolios
- good retention rates
- good progress towards qualifications

Weaknesses

- ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors
- some unchallenging short-term targets

Management

Strengths

- well-managed assessment
- particularly effective support for learning in the workplace
- good portfolios
- good retention rates
- good progress towards qualifications

Weaknesses

- ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors
- some unchallenging short-term targets

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- well-managed assessment
- particularly effective support for learning in the workplace
- good portfolios
- good retention rates
- good progress towards qualifications

Weaknesses

- ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors
- some unchallenging short-term targets

Achievement and standards

42. Learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Some advanced apprentices have achieved the technical certificate before their target completion date. Key skills training and assessment form an integral part of the first six months of the vocational training programme. Some learners have progressed with Weir Training from the apprenticeship training programme, offered under the previous subcontract arrangement, to an advanced apprenticeship training programme, offered directly by Weir Training. Some other learners have progressed from a customer service qualification to a business administration modern apprenticeship. Most learners are achieving units ahead of target dates. Learners are acquiring a wide range of skills and management techniques, which they are able to use in their work roles. Since Weir Training has only held its contract with the Surrey LSC for a year, it is too early in the programme to judge achievement.

43. Retention rates are good. The retention rate for learners starting programmes in 2003-04 is 80 per cent for learners on advanced apprenticeship programmes, 82 per cent for learners on apprenticeship programmes and 75 per cent for learners on NVQ training programmes. The retention rate for learners starting all training programmes in 2004-05 is 100 per cent.

44. Learners are encouraged to achieve the highest level of key skills qualification possible, as indicated by the results of their initial assessment. Some learners use effective learning methods to improve their key skills. Some learners who are exempt from key skills training are practising higher-level key skills to enhance and support progression to higher-level qualifications in the future.

Quality of education and training

45. Learners' portfolios are good. They are well structured, clear and concise. A wide range of well-presented evidence is used. Good use is made of IT to produce evidence of a professional standard. Some evidence exceeds the requirements of the awarding body. There are detailed observation records of learners carrying out tasks. Most individual learning plans are effective and some learners use them to monitor their progress. Detailed assessment plans clearly identify what evidence learners still need to gather and how they can do this easily to demonstrate competence for performance criteria.

46. There is particularly effective support for learning in the workplace. Employers are enthusiastic and fully support learners' programmes. Most employers are involved in the assessment and review process, and consider the training beneficial to their organisation. Employers are very supportive and help learners to gather evidence. Some set learners specific tasks to aid this process. Some employers identify other employees who would benefit from the training programmes. Some have also asked Weir Training to provide other training for their employees. Some learners have successfully used their training in the workplace, to the benefit of work processes. Learners gain confidence at work and develop a more assertive attitude which helps them to do their job better.

47. Assessment is well managed. Initial assessment provides an accurate basis to plan support for learners' needs. Learners are assessed in the workplace every month. Assessors regularly visit the workplace to observe learners and confirm competence. There are detailed written records of these visits, including assessment plans. Employers receive comprehensive feedback on learners' progress. Some learners claim appropriate competency for accredited prior achievement or learning against NVQ units and key skills. This is encouraged. Learners show a good understanding of their modern apprenticeship framework. Some also demonstrate good initiative by independently gathering and cross-referencing evidence against assessment requirements. Evidence is comprehensively cross-referenced to units to monitor progress. Some employers are fully involved in the process of assessment and consider it effective in identifying learners' competence. When an assessment is carried out, evidence is appropriately assessed across units, not just those in the plan. On completion of a unit, accreditation is awarded to increase learners' motivation. Employers are informed of learners' successes.

48. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Training activities are effectively planned and structured. Teaching plans have clear objectives. Training is correctly paced to meet learners' needs. A range of teaching methods is employed to maintain learners' interest and involvement. A good range of practical activities allow learners to practise and develop business skills. Tutors use appropriate teaching methods and body language. A variety of tasks is carried out which focus on the learners. Visual aids are used well. Appropriate questioning techniques are used. However, trainers sometimes spend too long reading text to learners. Some learners are not fully engaged in training sessions.

49. There are adequate learning resources. Trainers are occupationally competent and

are all employed by Weir Training. Some are working towards teaching and further academic qualifications. All assessors are appropriately qualified or working towards their assessor qualifications. Two training rooms are well lit and airy. One training room is too large when small numbers of learners are present. There are good seating and desk arrangements. Handouts and visual aids are clear and concise. One training room does not have access for learners with restricted mobility.

50. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are met. Assessors are well qualified to assess learners' needs. Four assessors have key skills qualifications at level 3. All new learners are adequately screened for their literacy and numeracy needs at the start of their programme. For learners starting training in July 2003 there was an inconsistency in assessment. Some learners were assessed early, while a small number were assessed late in their programme. New learners, however, have their key skills diagnostic test within two months of starting their programme. Many learners are exempted from key skills. Learners are informed of their results. No learners are currently receiving support for literacy or numeracy skills.

51. Some short-term targets are unchallenging. Many learners achieve targets for their next assessment before the target completion date. Some learners say that targets for the next assessment are too easy to achieve. Short-term targets are based on expected progress and some do not sufficiently challenge learners.

52. There is ineffective communication with some workplace supervisors. One workplace supervisor has no knowledge of the learners' programme content. One workplace supervisor understands NVQs but has no awareness of the modern apprenticeship programme. Some workplace supervisors do not have the employer handbook. A few workplace supervisors are not involved in the progress review process.

Leadership and management

53. The operational management of the business administration provision is good. Strategies have been developed to remedy identified weaknesses. There are frequent team meetings with detailed minutes and action plans. Staff are regularly appraised and a detailed feedback report and action plan is prepared and implemented. Effective course evaluation is carried out at the end of each training programme, and improvements have been made in response to the evaluation.

54. Equality of opportunity is good. Learners have a direct number to call if they have any problems. Learners are informed at induction about the anti-harassment, complaints and appeals policies and procedures. All learners work in organisations that have detailed policies and procedures for equality and diversity. Learners have a good understanding of health and safety.

55. Some quality assurance systems are new and have not had time to be effective. Internal verification sampling rates meet or exceed the requirements of the awarding body. Although assessments in the workplace are observed as part of internal verification, none of the training sessions in the workplace have been observed.

WEIR TRAINING LIMITED

56. Staff were involved in producing the self-assessment report. The report did not identify many of the strengths or weaknesses identified by inspectors in this area of learning.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing, customer service & transportation		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Retailing</i> - Work-based learning for young people	6	None
<i>Customer service</i> - Work-based learning for young people	38	None
<i>Warehousing and distribution</i> - Work-based learning for young people	9	None
<i>Other contributory areas</i> - Work-based learning for young people	3	None

Retailing*Strengths*

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Customer service*Strengths*

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Warehousing and distribution*Strengths*

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- good retention rates
- very good involvement by employers in learners' progress
- good management to continuously improve the provision and learners' experiences

Weaknesses

- some insufficient target-setting

Achievement and standards

57. Retention rates are good. Sixty-seven per cent of those learners who started training in 2003-04 are still on programme. All of those learners who started training in 2004-05 are still on programme.

58. As Weir Training has held its own contract for only a year, it is too early to make judgements on achievement. However, most learners are progressing at a satisfactory rate and are on target to complete the framework by their target date. One learner has achieved an NVQ at level 2 in sales. Three learners have achieved the key skills element of their framework and many are exempted from key skills. Assessors and managers monitor progress effectively and are quick to react to potential problems. Learners gain confidence in their job roles and develop good skills that are usefully applied in their work. Some learners progress to supervisory positions as a result of their increase in knowledge and confidence.

Quality of education and training

59. Employers are very involved in helping learners to progress. Many employers are large retail organisations such as furniture retailers or do-it-yourself stores. Weir Training works assertively with their senior regional managers to ensure that programmes have their full support. Branch staff are also kept fully informed by Weir Training about framework requirements and take a very active role in supporting their learners. Links between assessors and employers are good and workplace supervisors value the regular contact with assessors. Employers respond flexibly to learners' needs and provide good on-the-job training when the need for it is identified through progress reviews and assessments. Communication between assessors, learners and line managers is good. Learners' line managers are involved in the progress review process.

60. Learners receive comprehensive advice before they start their programmes. They appreciate the helpful and supportive staff. Individual learning needs are accurately identified. Learners can access effective additional support throughout their programme. Learners receive effective personal support to help them complete their programme, including access to specialist support services such as counselling. Assessors are well qualified to assess learners' needs; four have key skills qualifications at level 3.

61. Assessors and trainers are appropriately qualified and vocationally experienced. There is well-structured and effective staff development. For example, all retail assessors have recently gone on commercial placements to update their skills. A number of staff have completed or are currently studying for assessor awards for key skills at level 3. Laptop computers and a projector are deployed effectively to deliver training at employers' premises. Online key skills learning resources with interactive learning packages are available for students to develop their skills. Accommodation and equipment used for training are satisfactory. However, there are insufficient course reference resources such as professional journals and textbooks to enable learners to research and explore customer service and retailing and warehousing and, to examine good practice and extend their studies.

62. Off-the-job training sessions are well planned with clear, purposeful structures and activities. Learning is flexible. In some workplaces, small groups are taught together. Some learners are following an online e-NVQ assessment system with coaching from their assessor. In other workplaces, trainers provide customised individual coaching to help learners gain essential knowledge and skills. In one group session there was good rapport between the trainer and learners that created an open classroom environment where learners felt confident and enthusiastically participated in the workshop activities. Learners were involved in the session by making useful contributions to discussions. However, some learners struggled to understand concepts and how they relate in the workplace.

63. Weir Training carries out satisfactory internal verification sampling to cover all the requirements of the qualifications and curriculum authority. The sampling covers all learners. Learners are visited in the workplace and all assessors are observed regularly. Portfolios are verified at three stages during the programme. However, some internal verification observation records are too descriptive and do not sufficiently evaluate assessment decisions. A procedure is in place to observe training sessions, and Weir Training's staff have been observed for some time by a partner organisation as part of the subcontract arrangement. However, Weir Training's own system is new, and only one observation had been carried out at the time of inspection.

64. Support for learners' literacy, numeracy, and language needs is satisfactory. Learners are adequately screened for their literacy and numeracy needs at the start of their programme. Later on, they sit a key skills diagnostic test. There have been some inconsistencies in this process, with some learners assessed early, while a small number were assessed late in their programme. Learners are informed of their results. No learners currently in training are receiving support for literacy or numeracy skills.

65. Some target-setting is insufficient. Some learners could not recall having progress reviews, and some planned reviews did not take place. Many reviews do not set clear and specific medium-term action-planning targets for learners. Some individual learning plans are incomplete or do not record target dates for the achievement of NVQ units. Key skills qualifications and technical certificates, and target dates for their achievement, are not always listed in the individual learning plan. Targets set for units to be completed

are not sufficiently individual. Often, all units have the same target completion date with no variation to reflect when a learner started a particular unit and how long it should take to complete it.

Leadership and management

66. Weir Training responds quickly and effectively to learners' problems. All assessors have an individual meeting with their manager every two weeks to discuss each of their learners' progress. If learners appear to be at risk of leaving the programme, managers and assessors are quick to respond and offer advice and support. Learners who are not progressing at a satisfactory rate are discussed and appropriate measures put in place to rectify the situation, such as the provision of more frequent visits by the assessor, or additional visits by the manager. Managers have a good understanding of each learner's situation and progress, and are quick to react to any problems. Weir Training recently took responsibility for 10 learners from another training provider that went out of business. Weir Training decided to put an assessor in place immediately to keep these learners progressing and on programme. This is appreciated by the learners and their employer.

67. Equality of opportunity is very well promoted to learners. Each learner is given an equality and diversity workbook that covers all the main current legislation. Learners work through the book during their time on the programme and this has considerably raised their awareness of equality issues including bullying and harassment.