

REINSPECTION REPORT

Prostart Reinspection

16 March 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

PROSTART 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

Prostart Reinspection

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Prostart was established in July 1999 as a trading arm of Millbrook Management Services Limited. Prostart is based in Long Eaton, where it has its administrative offices and training facilities. The company has two directors and 13 full-time and three part-time staff. It also has two contract staff. The company has expanded recently and has reorganised to accommodate the increased number of staff and learners. The company is managed by a managing director who is supported by the finance director. Four co-ordinators report to the managing director and are responsible for managing the administrators, trainers and assessors.

2. Prostart has contracts with Nottingham Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Derbyshire LSC to provide training for advanced and foundation modern apprentices, national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and Entry to Employment (E2E). Training is provided in business administration, accounting, information and communications technology (ICT), retailing, customer service and sales, foundation programmes, and early years care and education. Provision in early years care and education was not inspected as there were too few learners.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

3. Prostart provides work-based learning programmes in administration, accounting and management for 111 learners. There are nine administration, eight accounting and four management advanced modern apprentices. Fifty administration, 14 accounting and seven team leading learners are on a foundation apprenticeship programme. Nineteen learners are on an NVQ-only programme. Accounting learners attend off-the-job training either at Prostart or at a local subcontracted college. Administration learners are visited in the workplace each month for training and assessment and some attend training sessions at Prostart. Learners have a progress review every 12 weeks. Ninety-three per cent of learners are employed. Learners who do not have a work placement attend the training centre full time. Learners are recruited through referrals from Connexions or by direct application from learners or by employers and can start at any time of the year. The recruitment process includes an initial assessment of key skills, literacy and numeracy and an interview. Learners receive an induction either at Prostart's premises or in the workplace. The company employs nine administration assessors and one part-time accounting assessor.

Information & communications technology

4. There are six foundation modern apprentices and one advanced modern apprentice on work-based learning programmes in using information technology (IT). Learners are recruited mostly through Connexions or referral by local employers. Applicants are interviewed by Prostart, and if unemployed are helped to find appropriate employment. At the time of the reinspection, all learners were employed. Induction is carried out either at Prostart's centre or in the workplace. All learners are given an assessment for literacy and numeracy needs. A team of four assessors visits learners in the workplace, at least every month, to carry out training and assessment of NVQ and key skills and provide support for literacy or numeracy needs. A separate member of staff visits learners at least every 12 weeks to carry out progress reviews.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

5. There are 83 learners on retailing, customer service, call handling, sales and warehousing programmes. There are 18 learners on retailing advanced or foundation modern apprenticeships and four learners following a sales and distribution NVQ-only programme. There are 43 learners on customer services advanced or foundation modern apprenticeships and five following NVQ-only programmes. A further nine learners are on modern apprenticeship programmes in call handling and four learners are following NVQ-only programmes. Some learners are placed with employers after an induction at Prostart. Most of the learners are recruited direct from employers. Training is mostly delivered on the job by employers or by visiting assessors from Prostart. Assessors visit learners at least once a month and learning is reviewed every 10 to 12 weeks. There are seven assessors or internal verifiers. The learners on the call handling programme are assessed and verified by a subcontractor.

Foundation programmes

6. In August 2003, Prostart's E2E programme replaced a previous preparation for work programme. Most learners are referred to Prostart by Connexions and have left school with few or no qualifications, or have only held jobs for short periods since leaving education. Currently there are 11 learners, most of whom have declared additional social needs or learning difficulties. All learners may choose from a variety of modules including interview techniques, how to produce a relevant curriculum vitae, drug and alcohol misuse avoidance, and health and safety.

7. There is an ongoing programme of guest speakers from external agencies. Links are established with local colleges and other training providers to offer additional pathways for learners to progress. At the time of the inspection, two learners were in employment and were preparing for an NVQ at level 1. All of the other learners are unemployed. Induction is carried out at Prostart's training centre for all learners. They are assessed for literacy and numeracy needs as part of their initial assessment as well as a diagnostic test to identify specific learning needs. There are two full-time tutors, and each learner is assigned an assessor, who is not one of the E2E tutors.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	27
Number of learners interviewed	37
Number of staff interviewed	35
Number of employers interviewed	13
Number of subcontractors interviewed	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	26

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

8. At the previous inspection, leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity were found to be unsatisfactory. Training in retailing, customer service and transportation was also unsatisfactory. Provision in business administration, management and professional, information and communication technology and foundation programmes, was satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory.

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

Business administration, management & professional		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Business administration</i> - Apprenticeships for young people	89	3
<i>Accounting and economics</i> - Apprenticeships for young people	55	3

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Using IT</i> - Apprenticeships for young people	11	3

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Retailing, customer service & transportation		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing - Apprenticeships for young people	10	4
Customer service - Apprenticeships for young people	43	4
Call centre operations - Apprenticeships for young people	14	4

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Employability/employment training - Apprenticeships for young people	17	3

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

Business administration, management & professional		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration - Apprenticeships for young people	89	3
Accounting and economics - Apprenticeships for young people	22	3

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Apprenticeships for young people	7	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing - Apprenticeships for young people	22	3
Customer service - Apprenticeships for young people	48	3
Call centre operations - Apprenticeships for young people	13	3
Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Employability/employment training - Apprenticeships for young people	11	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

9. **There is good development of skills for learners in administration, accounting and IT.**

Workplace learning opportunities in administration and accounting are good and learners receive good on-the-job training. Most employers give learners good opportunities to progress in their job roles and provide them with a wide range of activities to broaden their experience. In IT, learners use a wide range of office software to complete business tasks competently. Some learners use computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture programmes extensively in their job. Effective use is made of work-based evidence for key skills and for the NVQ. For example, engineering scale drawings are used to provide evidence for application of number.

10. **Retention rates for learners on the E2E programme and call centre operations programmes are good.**

They are satisfactory in the other areas of learning. Framework achievements are poor in business administration. They are slow in retailing and customer service. In 2001-02, the achievement rate for advanced modern apprentices in business administration was 48 per cent. In 2002-03, 21 per cent of learners completed the framework, with 36 per cent still in learning and in 2003-04, 20 per cent completed the framework with 40 per cent still in learning. In retailing, 14 learners have exceeded the duration of their planned programme of study and have still not achieved their target qualification. In the past three years, from 2001-02 to 2003-04, 48 learners started training, but only 23 per cent completed the framework. Twenty-nine per cent of these learners are still in learning. In customer service, achievement has improved since the previous inspection, but there are too many learners who are making slow progress.

Quality of education and training

11. E2E learners benefit from good learning sessions at Prostart's training centre.

Lessons are well planned and include a range of activities, such as group work, individual written work and practical tasks. Learners' interest is maintained and learning is placed in a real-life context. In one session, the learners calculated the distance of a marathon race using various units of measurement. They made confident use of calculators, rulers and tapes. Learners concentrate very well and learn to take turns, to listen to instructions and to communicate verbally.

12. There are good progress reviews for business administration learners. Assessors visit learners every two weeks to carry out assessments and training. Records of visits and action plans recording short-term targets are produced. Portfolios are updated after each assessment. Quality assurance reviews are carried out every three months and involve the learner and employer.

13. There are good work placements for retailing, customer service and call centre operations learners. Prostart selects and contracts with local employers, which are committed to training and to the achievement of NVQs. Assessors build effective partnerships with these employers and ensure that a good standard of work experience is provided. This enables learners to meet the framework requirements. Employers provide opportunities for learners to do tasks at work which help them to widen their experience and contribute to evidence for their NVQ. Employers give learners sufficient time to complete their portfolios. Employers have well-qualified and experienced supervisors who provide effective coaching and oversee learners' work.

14. Support for learners in administration, accounting, retailing, customer service and foundation programmes is good. In administration and accounting, assessors provide good pastoral support for learners and offer guidance to those who experience personal difficulties. Assessors work closely with employers to identify learning opportunities that will provide the necessary skills. In foundation programmes, staff are very supportive of learners and ensure that they are not experiencing any problems. Learners who have specific needs, receive individual support to overcome their difficulties. For example, staff have obtained baby equipment for a pregnant learner.

15. Procedures for initial assessment are weak in business administration, retailing, customer service and call centre operations. Business administration learners do not remember receiving feedback of the outcomes of assessments carried out when they started the programme. Additional work-related assessments are carried out through an analysis of the scheme of work which records work tasks that will be carried out in the workplace. This assessment is carried out within two weeks of a learner being placed in a company but is often not referred to again to update the individual learning plan. In retailing, customer service and call centre operations, Prostart has introduced a new initial assessment process as part of the learners' induction. Plans are in place to apply the new assessment to existing learners. However, implementation of this has been slow and many learners on the programme have not yet received an initial assessment.

Leadership and management

16. **There are particularly effective measures to ensure suitable work placements for learners.**

Prostart's staff carry out comprehensive assessments of the suitability of potential work placements. Staff develop good relationships with employers and visit them regularly to ensure that the employer and the learner benefit from the work placement. Prostart's health and safety policies and procedures are thorough. Prostart makes good use of up-to-date and accurate data to improve performance. Staff and managers use this data effectively to monitor the organisation's performance. A range of reports is produced each month, which managers use to discuss targets with staff. Reports are produced, which help assessors to monitor the progress of individual learners, and an effective colour-coding system is used to identify learners who are behind schedule or are at risk of withdrawing from the programme. Data is used well to monitor retention and achievement rates.

17. Quality assurance policies and procedures are now satisfactory. They are thorough and cover all aspects of the training process. Staff have a good understanding of quality assurance and are involved in quality assurance activities. A satisfactory observation of the training provision is now in place. All staff are observed regularly. A written report is produced and the trainer receives useful feedback.

18. The internal verification system has been completely revised and is now satisfactory. Two lead internal verifiers have been appointed. They produce comprehensive internal verification sampling plans, which cover all learners, assessors and units. Assessors receive detailed feedback from the internal verifiers. Equality of opportunity is now satisfactory. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and associated procedures, which are included in the handbooks for staff and learners. Clear direction is provided to employers and other partners about equality of opportunity and diversity. Employers are required to sign an equal opportunities statement and a copy is kept by Prostart staff. The company produces accurate data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. This information is used to help the company understand its learners and to set appropriate targets. Participation and achievement by under-represented groups are now analysed every month and compared with targets. The findings are published in a report and discussed at staff meetings.

19. **Implementation of management arrangements for initial assessment has been slow.**

Prostart has recently developed an effective system for initial assessment of new learners, but existing learners have not benefited from this. The company has started to carry out initial assessment of existing learners, but this process has not been completed.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- open management style
- particularly effective measures to ensure suitable work placements for learners
- good use of performance data to improve the provision

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Weaknesses

- slow implementation of management arrangements for initial assessment
- insufficient strategic planning

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration

Strengths

- good development of business and administration skills
- good pastoral support for learners
- good progress reviews

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- weak initial assessment for some learners

Accounting and economics

Strengths

- good development of accounting skills
- good management of off-the-job training
- good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- weak initial assessment for some learners

Information & communications technology

Using IT

Strengths

- good development of skills
- good support to secure employment

Weaknesses

- incomplete system for planning learning

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing

Strengths

- good work placements
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- slow application of new initial assessment process to existing learners

Customer service

Strengths

- good work placements
- good target-setting
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- slow application of new initial assessment process to existing learners

Call centre operations

Strengths

- good work placements
- good retention rates

Weaknesses

- poor framework completion
- slow application of new initial assessment process to existing learners

Foundation programmes

Employability/employment training

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good learning sessions at the training centre
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient work-related learning
- poor recording and monitoring of learners' progress

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDING

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- open management style
- particularly effective measures to ensure suitable work placements for learners
- good use of performance data to improve the provision

Weaknesses

- slow implementation of management arrangements for initial assessment
- insufficient strategic planning

20. The management style is open and transparent. A new management structure includes co-ordinators for administration, work-based learning and skills for life programmes. Staff are fully aware of the values of the organisation and have open access to managers at all times. They are supported by managers and are well informed. Learners have good access to all staff, including the managing director, who welcomes any learners who want to discuss any aspect of their programme.

21. The co-ordinators carry out individual progress meetings with each member of staff every month. These are effective and keep staff informed and monitor staff performance. Managers are approachable and open to suggestions from staff. All members of staff have copies of the self-assessment report, the three-year development plan and the action plan from the self-assessment. Staff have a good understanding of the organisation's quality assurance arrangements, even though some of these are new and not yet fully implemented. Staff meet regularly, including at a full team meeting every month, which is recorded.

22. There are particularly effective measures to ensure suitable work placements for learners. Prostart's staff carry out comprehensive assessments of the suitability of potential work placements. Staff develop good relationships with employers and visit them regularly to ensure that the employer and the learner benefit from the work placement. Prostart's health and safety policies and procedures are thorough. Employers' premises are monitored initially by Prostart's health and safety officer, and are then subject to regular monitoring by assessors. There have been instances where Prostart's procedures have identified points of non-compliance with health and safety regulations and ensured appropriate action was taken by the employer.

23. Prostart makes good use of up-to-date and accurate data to improve performance. Staff and managers use this data effectively to monitor the organisation's performance. A range of reports is produced each month, which managers use to discuss targets with staff. Reports are produced, which help assessors to monitor the progress of individual

learners, and an effective colour-coding system is used to identify learners who are behind schedule or are at risk of withdrawing from the programme. Data is used well to monitor retention and achievement rates and for the self-assessment process. Retention and achievement rates in retailing, customer service and in foundation programmes have improved since the previous inspection.

24. Many of the staff are taking professional qualifications and training, such as teacher training, a certificate in personnel practice, and NVQs in training and development. All staff have up-to-date job descriptions and all are clear about their job roles. All staff have an annual appraisal with their manager and an individual learning plan. A comprehensive organisation learning plan is maintained. This includes details of staff qualifications, training needs and a development plan. Training and development activity is evaluated by the managing director. Progress is monitored through monthly meetings between individual staff and managers. All staff have a continuous professional development logbook.

25. A strategy for literacy, numeracy and language is now in place. The strategy clearly outlines the arrangements for identifying and supporting learners who need help with literacy, numeracy or language. Additional support is provided for learners in the workplace by a tutor from an external organisation. Learners with dyslexia receive support from a local specialist organisation. Assessors help learners with literacy and numeracy problems, but not all assessors have a specialist qualification in teaching literacy and numeracy. The company is aware of the number of learners receiving additional support, but there is insufficient analysis of the effectiveness of additional support in raising retention and achievement rates.

26. Implementation of management arrangements for initial assessment has been slow. This weakness was identified by the company in the self-assessment report, but was not identified during the previous inspection. Prostart has recently developed an effective system for the initial assessment of new learners, but existing learners have not benefited from this. However, Prostart has started to carry out initial assessment of existing learners, but the process has not been completed.

27. There is insufficient strategic planning at Prostart. Strategic planning was judged to be inadequate at the previous inspection. Some progress has been made in addressing this weakness. A comprehensive three-year development plan was produced in September 2004, and a business plan was prepared just before the reinspection. These plans show some strategic planning and vision, but they are not yet sufficiently established. A new management structure was recently introduced and managers and staff now have a much clearer understanding of the strategic direction of the company.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

28. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and associated procedures, which are included in the handbooks for staff and learners. Clear direction is provided to employers and other partners about equality of opportunity and diversity. Employers are required to sign an equal opportunities statement and a copy is kept by Prostart's staff.

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The service level agreement for the subcontractor now includes a section on equality of opportunity and diversity. Quality assurance reviews take place every month and now cover monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace. There are equality and diversity and skills for life action plans that are reviewed every three months and evaluated every year. Progress against the action plan targets is monitored at staff and management meetings.

29. The company produces accurate data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. This information is used to help the company understand its learners and to set appropriate targets. Participation and achievement by under-represented groups are now analysed every month and compared with targets. The findings are published in a report and discussed at staff meetings. However, the company does not monitor retention rates by gender, ethnicity or disability.

30. A disability audit was recently carried out and its recommendations are being implemented. Access to the training centre is adequate. Learners who have restricted mobility have to use a mobile ramp to gain access.

31. At the previous inspection, the two members of staff responsible for equality of opportunity had received too little training in equality and diversity. These staff have now received appropriate training which includes information about current legislation. All staff have now received training from an external organisation in equality and diversity, specifically in relation to dyslexia, race, disability and gender. Some staff have achieved a level 2 qualification in equality of opportunity. Staff who did not attend this training have received in-house training. Staff deal with equal opportunities matters in a sensitive and appropriate way. An equal opportunities training session is included in the learners' induction and reinforced during learners' reviews. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

32. Quality assurance policies and procedures are now established and were amended again recently. They are thorough and cover all aspects of the training process. Staff have a good understanding of quality assurance and are involved in quality assurance activities. A new process for quality assurance has been implemented by two of Prostart's staff who visit work placements regularly to monitor quality, including that for health and safety, learners' and employers' satisfaction, equality of opportunity and learners' progress. The results of these reviews are used to make improvements in the provision. However, there is no systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of this activity. A satisfactory scheme to observe training is now in place. All staff are observed regularly. A written report is produced and the trainer receives useful feedback. Learning sessions are now graded. Most observation reports identify key strengths and weaknesses, but some do not contain sufficient judgements about the quality of teaching and others are too descriptive. The reports are used during appraisals to help staff to improve their performance. However, there is insufficient analysis of the effectiveness of the observation scheme in raising the standards of training.

33. The internal verification system has been completely revised and is now satisfactory. Two lead internal verifiers have been appointed. They produce comprehensive internal verification sampling plans, which cover all learners, assessors and units. Assessors receive detailed feedback from the internal verifiers. Assessment decisions made by staff who are working towards an assessor qualification, are countersigned by qualified assessors, who provide additional feedback. There is a system to ensure that feedback from the internal verifiers for the assessors is recorded and actions taken, where necessary. Each area of learning now has internal verification standardisation meetings every four months. These meetings are recorded. The minutes do not always sufficiently record when actions need to be completed. The internal verifiers carry out observations of assessment practice in the workplace. Concerns arising from these observations are summarised and discussed at the standardisation meetings.

34. Prostart subcontracts with a local college for background knowledge for training learners in accounts. The service level agreement between Prostart and the subcontractor has recently been reviewed. The agreement is comprehensive and clearly identifies arrangements for assuring the quality of the subcontractor's work and for promoting health and safety. There is regular and effective formal and informal communication between Prostart and the subcontractor.

35. Self-assessment has been carried out every year since 2000. The self-assessment process is inclusive and all staff have had the opportunity to contribute to the report. Learners and employers are asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the training programme. This is used to form the judgements in the self-assessment report. The action plan which is developed in response to the self-assessment report is used to help the company improve. Many of the actions are on target and the effect of these is evident. The latest report, which was produced in March 2005, accurately identified many of the key strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. The self-assessment grades were the same as those given by inspectors in all areas except for equality of opportunity where inspectors gave a lower grade.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration, management & professional		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration - Apprenticeships for young people	89	3
Accounting and economics - Apprenticeships for young people	22	3

Business administration

Strengths

- good development of business and administration skills
- good pastoral support for learners
- good progress reviews

Weaknesses

- poor achievement of advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- weak initial assessment for some learners

Accounting and economics

Strengths

- good development of accounting skills
- good management of off-the-job training
- good pastoral support for learners

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- weak initial assessment for some learners

Achievement and standards

36. Learners develop good administration or accounting skills that they are able to use effectively in the workplace. Workplace learning opportunities are good and learners receive good on-the-job training. Most employers give learners good opportunities to progress in their job roles and provide them with a wide range of activities to broaden their experience. Some learners have been promoted and some make important contributions to the work of their employers, such as developing new or revised systems to improve working practices.

37. Retention and achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices in administration are satisfactory. In 2002-03, 75 per cent of the foundation modern apprentices who started a programme in administration were retained, 50 per cent completed the framework and 8 per cent are still in learning. In 2003-04, 16 per cent of foundation modern apprentices have completed the framework and 59 per cent are still in learning. Eighty-six per cent of learners who started the foundation modern apprenticeship programme in 2004-05 are still in learning.

38. Achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices in administration are poor. In 2001-02, the achievement rate was 48 per cent. In 2002-03, the achievement rate was 21 per cent and 36 per cent of those learners starting the programme are still in learning. In 2003-04, five learners were recruited to the programme and one learner has completed the framework and two are still in learning.

39. Retention and achievement rates for learners on accounting programmes are satisfactory. In 2003-04, six learners started an NVQ programme in accounting. One learner has completed the framework and three are still in learning. Of the six learners who started a foundation modern apprenticeship programme in 2003-04, one has left the programme without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan and five are still in learning. Of the 10 learners who started NVQ or foundation modern apprenticeship programmes in accounting in 2004-05, nine are still in training.

Quality of education and training

40. Assessors provide good pastoral support for learners and offer guidance to those who experience personal difficulties. Staff are very caring and are responsive to learners' needs. Staff establish good working relationships with learners. Learners are confident in approaching staff at any time. Many learners have been able to remain on the programme after receiving individual help and guidance on personal issues from Prostart's staff. For example, learners receive good practical support such as transport to interviews, and childcare.

41. Progress reviews for administration learners are good. Assessors visit learners every two weeks to carry out assessments and training. Records of visits and action plans recording short-term targets are produced. Portfolios are updated after each assessment. Quality assurance reviews are carried out every three months and involve the learner and the employer. The progress review report contains information about the learners' achievement and plans for the next period of learning are completed. Some learners are now completing the action-planning part of this document themselves and feel in control of their learning. One learner who had been making slow progress at the beginning of his programme, has now made significant improvements and expects to complete his programme one month ahead of schedule. Health and safety and equal opportunities issues are discussed during the progress reviews. Employers complete a section on learners' progress. Employers have good relationships with Prostart. There is an effective system to monitor progress, which records progress and sets targets for the

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time the learner has left on the programme. Learners' progress is reviewed every month by the programme co-ordinator, who deals with problems identified by assessors. Copies of the review records are kept in learners' portfolios in date order. Learners can refer to these for guidance about the work they have to do before the next visit.

42. There is a good management of off-the-job training for accountancy learners. Most learners attend off-the-job training at a local college that has been subcontracted to provide this training. Alternative sessions are offered at Prostart's training centre for those who cannot attend. Learners attend off-the-job training for one day a week. Prostart's staff have worked well with the subcontractor to link off-the-job training with learners' on-the-job training. Teaching is good and learners work productively in class. Portfolio development activity takes place while learners are at the college. Learners can attend either in the evening or on Saturday. Schemes of work and lesson plans are comprehensive and use a range of teaching methods including lecture, computerised accounting, individual work and group activities.

43. Learners and employers are committed to the learning programme. Portfolios are well structured and contain a standard index and a copy of the appeals procedure. They contain a wide range of evidence, such as word-processed documents, invoices, and accountancy documents. This also includes an induction handbook from a national body for administration on employment rights and responsibilities, which are cross-referenced to other units, work-based observations, personal reports and witness testimony. Some of the evidence describes how learners have used feedback from work colleagues to help them improve their performance.

44. Resources are satisfactory. A team of experienced and skilled training staff supports learners in the workplace. Accommodation is satisfactory and meets the needs of learners.

45. Learners' confidence and self-esteem have improved through the development of their skills and knowledge. Assessors work closely with employers to identify learning opportunities that will help learners to develop the skills necessary for the NVQ. Where specific training needs are identified, this is carried out by assessors during their regular visits. Courses have been delivered to meet the individual learning needs of some learners in telephone techniques, computer skills and technical certificate development.

46. Individual learning plans are ineffective. They are used to record the list of units to be achieved and target dates for reviews. However, these are not always used to update learners' achievements and personal development. Learning goals are not always outlined and there are insufficient long-term targets. Administration learners have a copy of the individual learning plan in their portfolio.

47. Arrangements for meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are satisfactory. Appropriate additional support is provided for those identified with particular needs. Prostart has formed a partnership with an external organisation to provide a specialist tutor to support individual learners with literacy and numeracy needs and dyslexia. No learners with language needs had been identified at the time of the

reinspection.

48. There is weak initial assessment for some learners. Learners do not remember receiving feedback of the outcomes of assessments carried out when they started the programme. Additional work-related assessments are carried out through an analysis of the scheme of work which records work tasks that will be carried out in the workplace. This assessment is used within two weeks of a learner being placed in a company but is not often referred to again to update the individual learning plan. The company has recognised this weakness and has now put in place a more comprehensive initial assessment.

Leadership and management

49. Internal communication is good. Staff support each other well and are conscientious. Assessors have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and they understand the quality assurance procedures well. The curriculum co-ordinator effectively reviews learners' progress using a monitoring system, identifying slow progress and taking action when necessary. The internal verification system is satisfactory. There are evidence sampling plans that identify portfolio reviews to be carried out. There is a computerised system which records all activities and alerts the internal verifiers of learners who are not making satisfactory progress. Reviews of internal verification activities take place every month and actions for improvement for assessors are recorded and dealt with. There are regular internal verification standardisation meetings. Verification activity is accurately recorded on the management information system. Assessors are observed in their roles and given feedback by the lead internal verifier. Development needs are followed up by the curriculum co-ordinator. The self-assessment report correctly identified some of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors, but some strengths were overstated. Inspectors gave the same grade for this area of learning as that in the self-assessment report.

Information & communications technology

Information & communications technology		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Using IT - Apprenticeships for young people	7	3

Using IT

Strengths

- good development of skills
- good support to secure employment

Weaknesses

- incomplete system for planning learning

Achievement and standards

50. Learners develop a good range of practical IT skills. All learners use a wide range of office software to complete business tasks competently. Some learners use computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture programmes extensively in their job. Many are competent in using a range of computer software to solve business problems. Effective use is made of work-based evidence for key skills and for the NVQ. For example, engineering scale drawings are used to provide evidence in application of number. Learners are well motivated and take responsibility for the pace of their progression towards achievement. They develop independent study skills and understand the progress they are making.

51. The achievement rate on the apprenticeship programme remains satisfactory. Current learners are making satisfactory or better progress towards the achievement of the qualification. The one learner on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme is making good progress.

52. The retention rate is satisfactory. Of the 37 learners who started on ICT programmes between August 2001 and March 2005, 73 per cent have been retained or are still in learning.

Quality of education and training

53. Prostart matches learners to prospective employers well. It finds good opportunities for learners to gain and stay in employment, achieve the qualification and make good progress in their career. The company also helps learners who leave their jobs, to find suitable alternative employment. Prostart's staff have established better working

relationships with employers and they understand employers' and learners' requirements well. The company has worked with some employers for many years. However, Prostart has found it difficult to find sufficient good-quality employers. The number of learners who are able to join the programme is limited by this difficulty.

54. Employers now effectively contribute to progress reviews and are involved in the selection of optional units for the NVQ. Learners value this contribution.

55. Learners receive satisfactory on-the-job training. Prostart's staff deliver individual coaching sessions every month for learners in the workplace. Some learners receive support from their employer to obtain relevant additional qualifications.

56. Assessors are experienced, have appropriate qualifications and two are qualified teachers. One member of staff is working towards a level 3 literacy course. Learners have access to appropriate learning resources. The training room is well lit and has six modern personal computers that run up-to-date versions of appropriate software. These are networked to a local printer. Learners can access other printers through the wider network. All machines have internet access. However, there is insufficient desk space at the workstations.

57. Assessment is satisfactory. All learners have an initial interview and they complete diagnostic assessments of their literacy and numeracy skills. Previous achievements are used to exempt learners from the relevant key skills tests. Assessments are planned in advance and are carried out in the workplace. Portfolios are well organised and contain a range of evidence. Learners understand the structure and content of their portfolio. Insufficient target-setting for learners was identified as a weakness during the previous inspection. Target-setting is now satisfactory. Action plans now contain appropriate short-term targets and help learners to make progress.

58. Key skills training and assessment form an integral part of the vocational training programme. Learners start to collect key skills evidence early in their programmes. Learners are aware of how to claim exemptions from key skills tests and make good use of evidence for the accreditation of prior attainment.

59. Arrangements for meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs are satisfactory. The initial interview and assessment process now includes a literacy and numeracy diagnostic test. The results of this assessment are used in individual learning plans to meet learners' needs. Those who need additional support, receive it individually.

60. The system for planning learning is incomplete. All learners and employers have a copy of the individual learning plan, but the plans are too brief. They do not contain sufficient reference to learners' existing skills or experience. They do not identify training needs effectively. For example, initial assessment results are recorded on the plan but there is no information about how those who need support will receive it. Training is not planned. Training is only recorded on the progress review document after the training has taken place. When learners identify additional learning needs during their progress review, Prostart's staff do not record this on the individual learning plan.

Leadership and management

61. Members of staff are kept well informed of activities in the company through frequent formal and informal staff briefings. There is an effective system of monthly individual meetings between assessors and the work-based learning co-ordinator to review personal targets and learners' progress that takes place every month. Staff understand their work roles and the standards they are required to achieve. The internal verification system effectively quality assures qualifications. Standardisation meetings take place. Internal verifiers carry out frequent observations in the workplace.

62. There is satisfactory reinforcement of equality and diversity, and health and safety during learners' progress reviews.

63. Progress has been made against most of the actions recorded in the post-inspection action plan. The self-assessment report identified the strengths of the provision identified by inspectors but did not identify the weaknesses of the provision.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing - Apprenticeships for young people	22	3
Customer service - Apprenticeships for young people	48	3
Call centre operations - Apprenticeships for young people	13	3

Retailing

Strengths

- good work placements
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- slow application of new initial assessment process to existing learners

Customer service

Strengths

- good work placements
- good target-setting
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework completion
- slow application of new initial assessment process to existing learners

Call centre operations

Strengths

- good work placements
- good retention rates

Weaknesses

- poor framework completion
- slow application of new initial assessment process to existing learners

Achievement and standards

64. Retention rates have improved and are now satisfactory in retailing and customer service. In call centre operations, retention rates were particularly good in 2004-05. Training for technical certificates is now introduced into programmes at the start of the programme. Individual learning plans record the requirements of the technical certificates. Progress made by learners is carefully monitored and recorded on the management information system. Learners' work is satisfactory.

65. There is slow progress towards framework completion for retailing and customer service learners. In retailing, 14 learners have exceeded the duration of their planned programme of study and have still not completed the framework. In the past three years, from 2001-02 to 2003-04, only 23 per cent of learners completed the framework. Twenty-nine per cent of these learners are still in learning. In customer service, achievement has improved since the previous inspection, but there are too many learners who are making slow progress. Forty-three per cent of learners who began their training in the period 2001-02 to 2003-04 have completed the framework. Eighteen per cent of learners are still in learning. Prostart has introduced challenging targets for framework completion and some learners are now close to completion.

66. Framework achievement rates for learners in call centre operations are poor. Only 14 per cent of the learners who started in the period 2001-02 to 2003-04 have completed the framework. Twenty-seven per cent are still in learning.

Quality of education and training

67. Prostart selects and contracts with local employers, which are committed to training and to the achievement of NVQs. Assessors build effective partnerships with these employers and ensure that a good standard of work experience is provided. This enables learners to meet the framework requirements. Employers provide opportunities for learners to do tasks at work which help them to widen their experience and contribute to evidence for their NVQ. Employers give learners sufficient time to complete their portfolios. Employers have well-qualified and experienced supervisors who provide effective coaching and oversee learners' work. Learners are well motivated and respond well to the facilities provided. Health and safety matters are regularly discussed and monitored. Risk assessments are effectively carried out by Prostart's staff. However, at one retail placement, a young learner was required to work in the shop for lengthy periods on her own. Prostart identified this risk to the learner's safety but did not act upon it.

68. Prostart's assessors provide good support for learners. They provide good on-the-job coaching in vocational and key skills subjects. The regular visits from the assessors and reviewers allow learners to discuss their problems and aims. Additional advice and support is available from staff, and learners know they can use Prostart to help them look for other employment. If a learner changes employment, assessors work hard to retain the learner on a programme. Prostart's staff are committed to getting unemployed

learners a job. Effective pastoral support is given when needed and there is a qualified counsellor available. In retailing and customer service, good support is provided by employers. In call centre operations, support is satisfactory. There are good links with external agencies that give additional specialist support. Arrangements for learners' progress reviews have been revised since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory.

69. All learners receive a satisfactory induction irrespective of their employment status. Individual learning plans are adequate and have significantly improved with the introduction of detailed target-setting. Customer service learners are set clear and challenging targets, which are appropriate to their needs and ability. These have clear deadlines significantly ahead of the normal planned completion dates.

70. Resources are satisfactory. Staff are qualified and experienced to assess in their occupational area.

71. Assessment is satisfactory. Internal verification arrangements have been completely revised since the previous inspection. These arrangements are now satisfactory and meet the requirements of the awarding body. Prostart has introduced a new initial assessment process as part of the learners' induction. This has clearly identified learners' additional needs in literacy and numeracy. Some assessors and some employers have provided learners with additional support. Plans are in place to apply the new assessment to existing learners. However, implementation of this has been slow and many learners on the programme have not yet received an initial assessment.

Leadership and management

72. There is good communication between the lead internal verifier and the assessors. Staff understand their work roles well. There are frequent formal and informal staff meetings between assessors and the work-based learning co-ordinator to review personal targets and the learners' progress. Staff share good practice.

73. Staff have good opportunities for personal and career development. Annual appraisals identify staff training and development needs and all staff now have an individual learning plan.

74. Equal opportunities is included in the induction for learners and staff. Learners are aware of the complaints and appeals process. Material to introduce new legislation has been used to help learners to understand equality of opportunity.

75. Quality assurance arrangements are thorough and effective. Quality assurance is reviewed four times a year. Data is used effectively in self-assessment to make judgements about retention and achievement rates. The self-assessment report identified many strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors, but inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

Foundation programmes

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Employability/employment training - Apprenticeships for young people	11	3

Employability/employment training

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good learning sessions at the training centre
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient work-related learning
- poor recording and monitoring of learners’ progress

Achievement and standards

76. Retention rates are good and have improved in the past three years. In 2001-02, the retention rate was 41 per cent and in 2002-03, it rose to 50 per cent. In 2003-04, the retention rate was 68 per cent. In 2004-05, 12 learners started the programme. Two learners have successfully completed the framework and 10 are still in learning. Achievement rates have improved and are now satisfactory. In 2001-02 and 2002-03, achievement rates were poor at 8 per cent and 7 per cent respectively. In 2003-04, the achievement rate was 49 per cent.

77. Learners develop personal skills and gain confidence. They are proud of achieving certificates for in-house courses in equality of opportunity and health and safety. The work produced by learners is satisfactory. Learners improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Some learners are producing a key skills portfolio. However, they are not given the opportunity to work towards the full key skills qualification.

78. Learners develop good time-keeping skills and attend sessions regularly.

Quality of education and training

79. Learning sessions are good. This strength was identified at the previous inspection and has been maintained. Lessons are well planned and include a range of activities, such as group work, individual written work and practical tasks. Learners’ interest is maintained and learning is placed in a real-life context. In one session, the learners calculated the distance of a marathon race using various units of measurement. They

made confident use of calculators, rulers and tapes. Learners concentrate very well and learn to take turns, to listen to instructions and to communicate verbally. They are well motivated and keen to participate in the tasks set. Tutors give good verbal feedback and encouragement. Classroom management is good. Learners work well with each other. Tutor assistants provide effective support to individual learners. However, the introduction of new activities and the monitoring of learning are sometimes rushed.

80. Support for learners is good. Prostart reduces barriers to learning and encourages learners to attend regularly. Learners value the help and support they receive. They are encouraged to discuss personal difficulties with staff. Learners who have specific needs, receive individual support to overcome their difficulties. For example, staff have obtained baby equipment for a pregnant learner. They have also provided learners with computer equipment, clothing and personal hygiene products and obtained funding for a vulnerable learner's taxi fares to Prostart's premises. Staff are very supportive of learners and ensure that they are not experiencing any problems. Learners are referred to specialist agencies when appropriate. All learners know who to go to if they feel that they are being bullied or harassed. Staff deal promptly with disagreements between learners and create a caring learning environment.

81. Resources are satisfactory. Prostart provides learners with a training room and recreational facilities. Computers with internet access are available for project work. The ratio of staff to learners is good. Two staff are working towards skills for life teaching qualifications. Learning materials are well produced and all learners are provided with the equipment required to complete work. The accommodation provides a satisfactory environment for teaching, training and learning.

82. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to gain work experience. In the past six months, only four learners have attended a work placement or completed a work taster. One learner attended for one day only. Most learners' experience of a real working environment is limited to that provided by the company at its own premises. Work tasters are not used to help learners identify vocational pathways. Prostart does not provide vocational training for learners. Learners are based in the training centre and contact with employers is limited. They do not acquire vocational knowledge by attending taster courses with other training providers or by visiting workplaces. Prostart has not developed links with local industry to introduce learners to the range of vocational opportunities available to them. Employers are not involved in jobsearch programmes. Learners receive guidance on personal presentation and interview techniques from tutors. They also search for suitable vacancies in local newspapers. This weakness is partly recognised in the self-assessment report.

83. There is poor recording and monitoring of learners' progress. The recording of progress reviews in individual learning plans was judged to be weak at the previous inspection. It remains poor. A range of review paperwork has been introduced but records take various forms and are not used in individual learning plans. The review process does not give learners a clear idea of their progress. Individual learning plans do not set clear and specific targets for learners to help them measure progress towards milestones. There is no central record containing all the details of the learners' progress.

PROSTART REINSPECTION

Learners have no agreed starting points from which to develop their skills. Action plans do not include clear targets to support learners' development needs. Targets are too vague. Planning for progression is not planned as a targeted outcome within a timeframe in the learning plans. Personal files contain incomplete documents and key information is committed to memory rather than to paper.

84. Tutors do not mark all learners' work and records of completed work are inadequate. Work produced as evidence for the key skills portfolio has not been marked and does not contain feedback on assessment.

Leadership and management

85. Two new members of staff have recently been appointed as tutor assistants. The team works well with the training manager to deliver training sessions in the training centre and provides individual support to learners. Equality of opportunity and health and safety are effectively promoted. Learners are encouraged to respect themselves and others. All staff attend the weekly business meetings, but they do not meet formally to discuss the development of the programme. Informal communication between staff is effective. Staff produce a seven-week timetable of learning sessions, which is shared with learners.

86. Monthly meetings are held between staff and line managers to discuss individual performance. The E2E manager was closely involved in the production of the self-assessment report.

87. The self-assessment report identified some of the strengths identified by inspectors. Inspectors found different weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report, but gave the same overall grade for the area of learning.