

INSPECTION REPORT

Skills Training UK Ltd

10 June 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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

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

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

Skills Training UK Ltd

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for Skills Training UK Ltd	2
Grades	2
About the inspection	2
Key Findings	3
What learners like about Skills Training UK Ltd	7
What learners think Skills Training UK Ltd could improve	7

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	8
Equality of opportunity	9
Quality improvement	10
Foundation programmes	12

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Skills Training UK Ltd (Skills Training) is a well-established national training and resource organisation. It was formed in 1992 as a partnership and now operates in west London, Merseyside and Cambridgeshire. The company now has seven learning centres, each with its own staffing structure. Some staff have responsibilities for all seven sites. The company's office at Harrow is an annexe of a larger centre in Hayes. In addition, there are three centres in Ealing, Ilford and London Bridge which are responsible for providing Jobcentre Plus programmes. The role of operations director is a national function and is not based in any one centre, while the finance director and quality assurance manager are based in Hayes. The post of southern area manager to oversee the larger Hayes and Cambridge centres, together with the newer centres across London, was created in 2003. Direct contracts are held with Jobcentre Plus districts in northwest London (Brent, Harrow and Hillingdon District), northeast London, southwest London (Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth District), and west London. Skills Training's main focus is on programme centres and programmes for New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults. There are 109 participants on English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programmes, 564 in programme centres, and 65 on other programmes such as longer occupational training (LOT) and intensive activity period for New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** Skills Training's leadership and management are good. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory. In foundation programmes the provision is good.

3. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is established and is completed annually. Skills Training's staff contribute to an evaluation of the company's strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report does not identify all of the key strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors and provides insufficient supporting evidence. The self-assessment report's grades matched those of the inspection.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** Skills Training has previously been effective in carrying out actions to promote improvements in its Learning and Skills Council (LSC)-funded work. Measures taken in the past 18 months have increased the number of learning centres to five in the London area. In spite of this rapid expansion, retention rates remain very good and job-entry rates have improved annually to a satisfactory position.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR SKILLS TRAINING UK LTD:

- ensure that the self-assessment process is more inclusive and evaluative
- further develop the quality improvement processes
- implement a staff development programme and provide accredited training for staff
- introduce and implement the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language (skills for life)
- improve links and partnerships with external organisations including employers
- actively promote equality and diversity

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

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

Foundation programmes			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
ESOL			
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	109	2	
Employability/employment training			
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	65	2	
Programme centres	564	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. Foundation programmes were reported on and graded. The provision inspected included five programme centres and programmes for New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults. Skills Training's basic employability training (BET) focused on ESOL. A small number of participants were involved with LOT and intensive activity period programmes. These programmes were offered at the Hayes and Harrow centres. A few participants were on a literacy, numeracy and language skills programme, which is a discrete programme offered at the Hayes Centre. Inspectors made one visit to the company.

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	29
Number of learners interviewed	201
Number of staff interviewed	48
Number of employers interviewed	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	5
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

6. **Participants develop good computing skills on the LOT** programmes and in a short time use e-mail and internet facilities effectively. Participants on the intensive activity period work confidently in work placements which are well matched to their needs and aspirations. **ESOL participants improve language skills quickly** and use visits to local places of interest to develop their writing skills through the production and editing of an ESOL newsletter.

7. In programme centres, job-entry rates are satisfactory and have improved from around 28 per cent to between 42 and 50 per cent in the past year. The rates are consistent across most of the five centres.

8. **Retention rates are very high in most programmes** ranging from 76 per cent for ESOL programmes to 91 per cent for programme centres. Retention on LOT and intensive activity period have improved from 58 per cent in 2003-04 to 62 per cent in 2004-05.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Foundation programmes	0	5	8	1	14
Total	0	5	8	1	14

9. **Standards of teaching and learning on ESOL programmes are good.** Staff provide a good range of activities and materials to develop participants' language skills, pronunciation and vocabulary. Good support is provided by learning assistants for less able participants.

10. **Skills Training provides particularly good individual coaching for programme centre participants** referred by jobsearch consultants. Most staff have very good levels of computer skills and use them well to support participants in the preparation of curriculum vitae, and internet jobsearch.

11. Employers provide good support in the workplace for those participants on the intensive activity period. Participants are helped to develop their employability skills and

interpersonal skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. Jobsearch consultants work particularly hard to ensure that participants are matched appropriately to work placements.

12. Most of the qualifications are examination-based and pass rates are good. External verification and moderation are satisfactory. Assessment is also satisfactory for the additional nationally recognised qualifications such as those in health and safety.

13. **The arrangements for literacy and numeracy support are weak.** Formal support is offered in the Hayes centre, but participants have to be referred by Jobcentre Plus staff. Skills Training staff are not always aware of the literacy and numeracy needs of participants and there is insufficient recording or monitoring of the support provided.

14. **Participants' progress reviews are ineffective in the Hayes, Harrow and Ilford learning centres.** The London Bridge centre provides good progress reviews with clear target-setting and constructive discussions between staff and participants. The process is not as good in the other centres, with poor target-setting and insufficient attention given to the necessary steps for improvement.

15. Support from external support agencies is satisfactory but referrals are dependent on the review process or intervention from staff. Insufficient confidential information is made available to participants.

16. **Resources are poorly organised for some programme centre participants.** There are often queues for computers and there is insufficient access to confidential telephone facilities. Some learning centres do not have sufficient journals and newspapers to support jobsearch activities.

Leadership and management

17. **Skills Training has managed the development of New Deal programmes and the expansion of the company well.** Retention rates are very good and have remained consistently so during the past 18 months during which the company has expanded from three learning centres to seven and from 30 staff to 80. Job-entry rates have improved across all centres and programmes and staff turnover has been reduced to approximately 10 per cent, with an average length of stay of approximately two and a half years.

18. **Skills Training has developed a customised management information system.** This is used very effectively to monitor contractual requirements and provide up-to-date information for centre managers to measure targets such as participant reviews.

19. **Internal communications are very good.** Staff in learning centres have frequent and regular meetings and the operations director and southern area manager visit all the centres weekly. The company's intranet is used to good effect to share management information and good practice.

20. The company's approach to equality and diversity is satisfactory. **Most participants and staff have a good understanding of equality and diversity.** Participants' success is acknowledged by award ceremonies and posters displayed on walls in the learning centres. There is a high level of mutual respect in the learning centres and timetables are flexible enough to allow participants to attend religious festivals and to worship at appropriate times. Most centres are accessible to participants with mobility difficulties. Where learning

centres are not accessible, alternative arrangements are made.

21. **The company's use of participants' feedback is good.** Participants' questionnaires are used to monitor areas for improvement such as induction and training sessions. Other methods of feedback include suggestion boxes in all learning centres, which are checked regularly by staff. Any improvements made are communicated to participants.

22. **Insufficient attention is given to staff appraisals and development.** The company is currently developing a staff training programme in conjunction with Harrow College to promote the introduction of the skills for life strategy and to provide staff with appropriate opportunities for accredited qualifications. Appraisals focus primarily on performance targets rather than the quality of training.

23. **Participants' achievement rates are not monitored sufficiently.** Some analyses have been made, but no comparisons have taken place for programme types, gender or participants who require additional learning support.

24. **Some quality improvement processes have not been fully implemented.** Skills Training has introduced session observations, but this is a relatively new innovation and has had no effect on the quality of training as yet. Internal audits are carried out, but these are directed primarily towards contract compliance. Some training for staff in carrying out reviews has taken place, but not all staff have been involved.

25. The self-assessment and action-planning process is incomplete. The self-assessment report did not clearly identify some of the key weaknesses, such as the delayed introduction of the skills for life strategy, and was not evaluative enough.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- well-managed development of programmes and learning centres
- very good innovative development and use of management information systems.
- particularly good internal communications
- very inclusive practices to support participants
- good understanding of equality and diversity by most participants and staff
- good use of participants' feedback to support continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to staff appraisals and development
- delayed implementation of a skills for life strategy
- insufficient routine use of diversity data
- quality improvement processes not fully implemented for some activities

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- consistently high retention rates

SKILLS TRAINING UK LTD

- good skills development
- good standards of teaching and learning on ESOL programmes
- particularly effective individual coaching for programme centre participants
- good celebration of participants' achievements

Weaknesses

- ineffective progress reviews in Hayes, Harrow and Ilford learning centres
- insufficient awareness by staff of participants' literacy, numeracy and language needs
- poorly organised resources for some programme centre participants

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SKILLS TRAINING UK LTD:

- 'the staff are helpful'
- 'being able to work at my own pace'
- 'flexible arrangements and days for my attendance'
- 'the way the staff built up my confidence. I've just got a job'
- 'the staff keep an eye on you and volunteer help'
- 'I like the centres, they are clean, warm and welcoming'
- 'the attitude of the staff is always positive'
- 'I'm feeling that I'm going in the right direction'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK SKILLS TRAINING UK LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- better and easier access to computers for internet jobsearch
- 'more printers, the queue is often very long'
- 'I would like more time on the internet to complete jobsearch activities'
- a microwave oven in the refreshment area
- 'more telephones so I don't have to queue'
- 'somewhere more private to make phone calls. Can be difficult to hear what is being said'
- the number of newspapers
- 'induction is too slow. You get bored waiting for others to catch up'
- 'rooms are too cramped'
- the amount of direct links with employers

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- well-managed development of programmes and learning centres
- very good innovative development and use of management information systems.
- particularly good internal communications
- very inclusive practices to support participants
- good understanding of equality and diversity by most participants and staff
- good use of participants' feedback to support continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient attention to staff appraisals and development
- delayed implementation of a skills for life strategy
- insufficient routine use of diversity data
- quality improvement processes not fully implemented for some activities

26. Skills Training has successfully managed recent changes to Jobcentre Plus contracts and the resulting effects on the company in terms of the development of programmes and the acquisition of resources. The company has grown significantly in the past 18 months, from three learning centres to seven and from 30 staff to 80. The senior staff at Skills Training have a clear understanding of the objectives for the company and take seriously the ethos of quality improvement. Since 2003 they have made significant investments in accommodation and resources to provide learning centres which are welcoming, well decorated and generally well resourced. This process has been managed well, with several staff from within the company being promoted to centre manager roles from previous jobs as jobsearch consultants. Good continuity of purpose and a seamless transition for participants have been achieved. These staff also have a good appreciation of their job roles and the importance of working to targets. All staff are well motivated and enthusiastic and have contributed to the success of maintaining very good retention rates and improving job-entry rates. A significant improvement has been the monitoring of job-entry rates after completion of programmes.

27. In the Hayes centre there is a discrete area for ESOL and literacy and numeracy programmes. The Harrow centre has a dedicated area for ESOL programmes. All of these areas are used for teaching and jobsearch and are well presented and equipped. In most learning centres there are enough staff to meet the needs of participants. Each centre is managed effectively by a centre manager who has responsibilities for staffing and resourcing and budgetary management. Some inconsistencies exist in staff workloads, as in the Ealing centre where staff have responsibility for over 60 participants while those in other learning centres have approximately 25 to 30 participants to support. Occasionally, participants wait for long periods for attention.

28. Skills Training has developed a comprehensive and innovative intranet and information

system to manage the performance of the company. All staff have access to the information they require to perform their jobs effectively. Participants' records are entered promptly and frequently, and from these records, activity lists can be generated for all of the key processes in the participants' jobsearch cycle. On a weekly basis, managers and staff can easily identify critical and overdue events, as well as being able to schedule the coming week's activities. The login screen clearly highlights current job-entry rate performance by learning centre and provides managers with up-to-the-minute quantitative performance information about centres and staff. Depending on the level of access required by members of staff, very detailed information about individual participants can be viewed and reported on. The system also monitors participants in the 13-week post-programme job-entry phase, provides prompts, and automatically generates query letters during this period.

29. Internal communications are particularly good. The operations director and southern area manager maintain regular contact with learning centre managers through visits to the centres. Another director also visits all centres on a regular basis and staff value this personal contact and support. The management information system also provides the infrastructure for communications, giving easy access to the e-mail addresses of all staff and allowing team leaders and managers to communicate with individuals and groups. Staff can be deployed quickly to help with induction and to support jobsearch activities where necessary. Senior managers make particularly effective use of newsletters and the acknowledgement of individual and learning centre performances. Strong support is maintained for participants and their ability to gain jobs.

30. The company does not give sufficient attention to the process of staff appraisal and development. In the past year, the staff turnover rate has improved and now stands at less than 10 per cent, with an average length of stay of over two years. Skills Training has introduced a framework of financial incentives for staff linked to performance targets. All staff receive an annual appraisal but the process is based on performance targets such as job entry and does not focus sufficiently on the quality of performance and staff development.

31. Most staff are working towards or have achieved various accredited training awards and some are working towards other relevant qualifications for key skills and an examination-based qualification in information technology. The company has been slow in introducing the skills for life strategy. New external accreditation has only recently been introduced for ESOL participants and staff have not been fully trained yet. Skills Training has recognised these problems in its self-assessment report and is working with Harrow College to produce a staff development plan and support the introduction of basic teaching qualifications for staff.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

32. Skills Training has a positive attitude towards diversity, and provides a welcoming environment for its participants. The profile of participants from minority ethnic groups using Skills Training closely reflects their representation in the local communities where the centres are based. Information is translated into community languages and interpreters are used to enable effective communications. Important notices, in a wide variety of languages, are displayed prominently in each of the learning centres. Positive images are provided by the staff who are also representative of the local communities. Many of these staff were previously participants. Staff pay particular attention to the wishes of participants

in jobsearch activities and provide them with an extensive variety of occupational opportunities. Good support is provided for participants attending interviews, including transport and clothing where necessary. Participants' attendance at the learning centres is made flexible to suit personal, religious and childcare needs. A good supply of adaptive technologies is available for those participants who need them.

33. Participants and staff have a good understanding of equality and diversity matters, including their rights and responsibilities. During induction, participants are introduced effectively to Skills Training's policies and procedures, including complaints and anti-bullying and harassment procedures. Participants are encouraged to have an awareness of discriminatory attitudes and prejudice. Staff demonstrate very good levels of commitment to ensuring that participants receive equality of opportunity and respect. However, in progress reviews staff do not challenge participants' views and perceptions of equality of opportunity sufficiently. Staff have not received any training to update their own understanding of diversity-related issues.

34. Comprehensive data about participants is collected throughout their stay with Skills Training, and diversity profiles in general are discussed at the monthly management meetings. This data is not used routinely to monitor and analyse performances such as those of different minority ethnic groups, gender groups or age groups. Individual learning centres' job-entry rates are compared regularly, but this does not include any analysis of the participant profile within these centres and any possible impact that this may have on performance. Leaders and managers do not actively promote equality and diversity.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

35. Skills Training has a quality assurance policy and also a quality assurance manual which is comprehensive and contains procedures and processes for all of its training activities. Senior staff have concentrated on the business of gaining and maintaining Jobcentre Plus contracts and have only recently begun to remedy the duplication of processes. Skills Training has contracts with four Jobcentre Plus districts. Practices vary within these contractual arrangements. The management information system has proved invaluable in being able to monitor activities and contribute to the close monitoring of performance. The organisation has been able to maintain the improving trends in retention and job-entry rates while managing the change process.

36. The company's participants' feedback is good. All participants are given questionnaires and surveys during their programmes and these are collated and analysed by the southern area manager. Matters raised are discussed with the senior managers and actions are taken to resolve concerns. For example, the structure of the induction process was raised by participants as an area for improvement. The structure was changed to make induction more interesting and more participative and this situation continues to be monitored. Suggestion boxes are placed in all of the learning centres. The southern area manager checks the boxes regularly, matters are resolved and information is fed back to participants. The feedback includes details of improvements made and explanations when improvements are not possible. Improvements include the purchase of additional practical exercise books, workshops on personal hygiene and the purchase of pictorial dictionaries.

37. The arrangements for internal verification and moderation of qualifications, where appropriate, are satisfactory and are supported by an adequate range of documents.

38. The process to observe training sessions is relatively new. Observations have been carried out by the quality assurance officer throughout all learning centres. The process concentrated in the first instance on induction and progress reviews and identified the variation in performance. Staff are not given action plans to resolve the weaknesses. The quality assurance manager has carried out staff training on the review process, but only approximately 60 per cent of staff have attended so far and it is too soon to measure the impact of the training in terms of the quality of the reviews carried out.

39. Some quality improvements have not been fully implemented. Regular and very effective communications take place among learning centres and between centre managers and visiting senior staff. However, the operations director and the southern area manager are relied upon to identify good practice and share the practice with other learning centres. There are no formal structures to share good practice among staff in the learning centres. The quality assurance manager carries out regular audits of documents, but these are concerned primarily with contract compliance and place little emphasis on quality assurance or improvements. The wide variations in progress reviews are examples of the shortcomings in this audit process. Progress reviews in the London Bridge centre are carried out effectively, with good target-setting and monitoring of participants' progress. The review process in other learning centres is less effective and relies on general comments such as 'doing well'.

40. Self-assessment and action-planning processes are weak. Skills Training has produced a number of self-assessment reports over the past few years, but these have been concerned primarily with LSC-funded provision. The most recent report was sparse and contained insufficient evidence to support the judgements. All staff were consulted about the strengths and weaknesses of their provision and the information was then drawn together by senior staff. The grades proposed by the company closely matched those given by the inspectors, with the exception of the grade for equality of opportunity. Some of the key strengths and weaknesses were not identified by the company, and although actions for improvement were identified and communicated to staff, they were not articulated in a structured development plan.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Foundation programmes

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
ESOL		
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	109	2
Employability/employment training		
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	65	2
Programme centres	564	2

41. Skills Training provides a range of programmes for unemployed adults in five learning centres across four Jobcentre Plus districts throughout the London area. The company's office at Harrow is an annexe of a larger centre in Hayes. In addition, there are three other centres in Ealing, Ilford and London Bridge, each located in a separate Jobcentre Plus district.

42. Participants come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, and many of them speak English as an additional language. A total of 58 staff support participants on a range of programmes in the learning centres. These staff are supported by nine additional managers and other staff at the company's head office in Hayes.

43. During 2003-04, there were 1,268 participants. This number has increased to 2,427 in the current year. At the time of inspection, 564 participants were attending programme centres. None of the participants has a declared disability and 400 are men. Participants attend full time during the first two weeks and then 15 hours each week for the remainder of the eight-week programme.

44. Skills Training provides ESOL courses at its learning centres in Harrow and Hayes for participants on BET programmes. At the time of inspection there were 109 participants on these programmes, 80 per cent of whom were attending the Hayes centre. Participants attend up to 21 hours each week over a period of 26 weeks, and 40 per cent of their time is spent on jobsearch and computer activities. In Hayes, 65 per cent of ESOL participants work at pre-entry level and entry level 1, whereas all participants at Harrow are working towards entry level 2.

45. Sixty-five participants are on LOT and intensive activity period programme at the Hayes and Harrow learning centres. Those on LOT are working towards qualifications in information and communications technology as well as completing jobsearch activities. Participants attend for between 21 and 24 hours each week for 20 weeks. Participants on the intensive activity period attend the 13-week programme for 30 hours each week. After the first two weeks, participants usually spend four days in a work placement and one day doing jobsearch activities. Four participants are attending a discrete Jobcentre Plus-funded Basic Skills programme.

Strengths

- consistently high retention rates

- good skills development
- good standards of teaching and learning on ESOL programmes
- particularly effective individual coaching for programme centre participants
- good celebration of participants' achievements

Weaknesses

- ineffective progress reviews in Hayes, Harrow and Ilford learning centres
- insufficient awareness by staff of participants' literacy, numeracy and language needs
- poorly organised resources for some programme centre participants

Achievement and standards

46. Job-entry rates show a year-on-year improvement and currently stand at between 40 and 50 per cent at most programme centres, the exception being Ilford where the achievement rate is 38 per cent. However, at the time of inspection this rose to 42 per cent. Job-entry rates for ESOL, LOT and the intensive activity period are improving. From approximately 25 per cent in 2004 they currently stand at between 30 per cent and 43 per cent. In May of this year the job-entry rate for the LOT programme in Harrow was over 60 per cent.

47. Retention rates show an improving trend over the past two years in all the learning centres. For ESOL programmes the rates have increased from 64 per cent in 2003-04 to 76 per cent in 2004-05. In programme centres the rates have increased substantially from 66 per cent in 2003-04 to 91 per cent in 2004-05. On other programmes, such as LOT and the intensive activity period, the rates have improved from 58 per cent in 2003-04 to 62 per cent in 2004-05.

48. Attendance is particularly good on most programmes. For ESOL programmes the average attendance is above 90 per cent and often reaches 100 per cent. On other programmes, attendance rates are above 75 per cent. Participants attend regularly for their scheduled sessions and are punctual and well motivated to learn and gain jobsearch skills. When participants arrive late they are often challenged by staff who ensure that appropriate support is offered to improve punctuality. At the London Bridge centre where attendance at progress reviews was poor, staff introduced a booking system for participants attending reviews. Those who arrive late without informing the centre in advance are given an alternative time. A vast improvement in attendance and punctuality has been achieved with participants telephoning to advise of their late arrival.

49. Participants develop a good range of skills. They are very well motivated and take pride in their achievements. Participants develop good computing skills and use e-mails and internet facilities effectively to complete their jobsearch tasks. They produce good-quality curriculum vitae and application letters. Participants on the intensive activity period view their work placements as very positive opportunities to consolidate and expand their skills. ESOL participants improve their language skills and value the opportunities to practise and develop these new skills. For example, in Hayes, participants share their skills with peers in their work placements, acting as ESOL assistants, or develop a better understanding of life and work in the UK through interviews with learning centre staff. Others are keen to take part in visits to places of local interest or develop their writing skills effectively through the production and editing of the ESOL newsletter.

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	728		493	100													
Retained*	317		291	59													
Planned learning completed	0		0	0													
Gained job	156		87	18													
Still in training	174		0	0													

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																	
Programme Centres	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	2,427	100	1,268	100													
Retained*	1,642	68	813	64													
Planned learning completed	10	0	0	0													
Gained job	581	24	354	28													
Still in training	564	23	0	0													

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

The quality of provision

50. Participants receive good coaching from the jobsearch consultants. This begins during induction, when producing an up-to-date curriculum vitae and completing application forms are given priority. Staff skilfully help participants to identify their skills and experience which they do not always recognise themselves. For example, staff helped one participant who worked for a direct sales company, to identify employability skills such as marketing, money management and communication.

51. Programme centre staff have very good levels of computing skills and put these to good use when instructing participants in the use of the internet for jobsearch. Filling in application forms online and e-mailing them are other aspects covered. Participants learn how to produce good-quality application letters which staff check for accuracy and layout. Help is always available and users are encouraged to practise their new skills. Some participants have never used a computer before, but by the end of their programmes they use them with confidence. A great deal of attention is paid to developing participants' confidence, helping them to reflect on and identify their strengths and ambitions. Staff are particularly good at guiding participants in identifying realistic job goals and income requirements. Many participants receive particularly good coaching in interview techniques. In most learning centres this is covered during induction. Where a participant or a consultant recognises that there is still a development need, this is remedied promptly. This can be by arranging another structured session, individual help, mock interviews or

general hints and tips about posture or appearance.

52. Standards of teaching and learning on ESOL programmes are good. All the sessions observed were judged to be either good or satisfactory. In the best sessions, tutors provide a good range of activities and meaningful materials to develop all four language skills, pronunciation and a wider vocabulary. In these sessions, assistants provide valuable support for less able participants and work effectively with staff in planning and evaluating training. Participants work hard to complete all their tasks and take pride in their work. However, staff do not sufficiently include the language and context of job-seeking sufficiently when planning training. In one session, language learning was not focused sufficiently on meeting participants' employment needs.

53. Participants' achievements are acknowledged well. Very bright and attractive individual posters are displayed on the walls in all learning centres which celebrate participants' successes. New participants find the posters motivating, and many of them comment that they want to have their names displayed when they eventually get jobs. In the training rooms at Harrow and Hayes, there are well-presented photographic displays, comments and work by ESOL participants. Well-attended presentation events celebrate ESOL participants' achievements of national qualifications.

54. Induction is satisfactory. Four of the five learning centres cover all the prescribed modules during the first five days. Participants are given various handouts and the most important of these are discussed, those mainly involving aspects of equality of opportunity, appropriate behaviour and health and safety. In one learning centre, participants attend a session on day one where they are required to identify their job goals and their sustainable incomes. Realistic targets are then agreed. Participants are expected to work in groups and share useful information, contacts and experiences. However, in one centre the induction programme is provided over successive weeks, with Jobcentre Plus identifying the specific modules that participants need to cover.

55. Staff are generally suitably qualified. However, some staff do not have specialist teaching, training or guidance qualifications. Accommodation is also satisfactory overall with appropriately sized and well-presented rooms. The Hayes and Harrow centres have dedicated and adequately equipped training rooms for ESOL participants. In the Hayes centre there is also a dedicated Basic Skills room.

56. Progress reviews are ineffective for some participants. Although reviews take place regularly, the specific skills to be developed by participants are poorly identified and recorded. In most learning centres, comments recorded on review documents are frequently vague and not easily measurable. Statements such as 'make more effort in class' and 'he has made progress in applying for vacancies' are very common. Progress reviews focus mainly on the development of personal skills and not specifically on the development of vocational or jobsearch skills. Staff rarely check previous learning goals during reviews to establish whether they have been achieved. Jobsearch targets are not always recorded and where they are identified, the emphasis is on the number of applications or speculative letters to be sent, rather than on the development of skills that participants may need to achieve them. However, in the London Bridge centre participants are set detailed targets for the following week, such as attending an individual interview skills session or a coaching session on how to use the internet more effectively for jobsearch purposes.

57. Staff are not sufficiently aware of the literacy, numeracy and language needs of participants. Staff do not give sufficient attention to the outcomes of the initial assessments completed by jobcentre staff. Those participants who have been identified as having difficulties in reading or spelling are not supported effectively and many become frustrated. For example, one participant who was working towards a basic computer literacy qualification was having difficulties in fully understanding the workbook instructions. The participant raised this as a concern, but was offered no further support to help with reading and comprehending the text. The Hayes centre has specialist staff to support participants in need of extra support, but this facility is not available in the other four learning centres.

Leadership and management

58. In many learning centres the standard of accommodation is particularly good with high standards of decoration and well-considered room layouts. Learning centre managers are enthusiastic and manage their responsibilities well. All centres have sufficient staff to support the programmes and many have been promoted from within the company. All learning centres are equipped with computers connected to the internet to allow participants to search for jobs. However, in some centres, at busy times, participants frequently have to wait for long periods of time before being able to use the computers. Sometimes participants are discouraged from attending. Participants can reserve time slots, but often this allocation is too short to allow them to complete a search or an application form online.

59. The Ealing centre does not provide participants with sufficient access to telephones. There is only one telephone and this is located in a public area. At the Harrow centre, the number of telephones is appropriate, but calls must be made in a noisy public area. Skills Training does not provide sufficient information about local services to which participants could be referred, such as citizens advice bureaux or housing agencies. There are not enough links with local employers or other relevant organisations in order to support work placements and increase staff's and participants' knowledge of employment opportunities. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

