

INSPECTION REPORT

Tendring District Council (Career Track)

22 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*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Work-based learning for young people is provided at Tendring District Council (TDC) through a unit of the council, Career Track, which has been operating since 1983. Career Track is based in the human resources and customer services department of the council. It is located at the town hall in Clacton-on-Sea. In August 2004, Career Track joined the Braintree, Colchester and Tendring consortium. Work-based learning provided by the consortium is funded through Essex Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The LSC contract holder for the consortium is Colchester Institute. There are seven members of the consortium, each has equal representation on a strategic board that meets monthly. Currently, Career Track has 26 learners on business administration programmes and 11 on customer service programmes. Approximately one third of the learners are on work placements within TDC and the rest are employed in the Tendring area or Colchester.

2. The programme manager, who is responsible for the operational management of the programme, reports to the head of human resources and customer services. Career Track has four full-time staff, comprising the programme manager, two assessors and an administrator, supported by an advanced apprentice. The council is accredited with the Investors in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation through its people.

3. The population of Tendring is 138,000. The council is one of the largest employers in the area. Tendring has an unemployment rate of 2.7 per cent, compared with 1.9 per cent for Essex as a whole. Tendring has a minority ethnic population of 1.5 per cent, according to the 2001 census, compared with 9.1 per cent nationally.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provider is good.** TDC's leadership and management are good, and arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory. The provision in business administration is good.

5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** TDC has not produced a new self-assessment report since June 2003 as priority was given to carrying out self-assessment at consortium level. The January 2005 report was an update of this report, but it did not identify new strengths and weaknesses. The first self-assessment report of the consortium was produced in December 2004. Staff have a good understanding of the value of self-assessment to the continuous improvement of provision.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Despite the lack of annual self-assessment, TDC has made good progress in improving the quality of the provision and the learners' experience. Recent improvements in management information have enabled TDC to monitor the progress of learners weekly,

TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL (CAREER TRACK)

and to identify those learners whose progress is a cause for concern. TDC is paying particular attention to implementing a retention intervention strategy which aims to improve retention by taking quick and effective action to support learners who are identified as potential early leavers.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL (CAREER TRACK):

- improve retention rates
- improve the management information system
- improve the range of monitoring taking place
- engage in an evaluative self-assessment process
- continue to develop effective links with the consortium
- provide effective support for learners with identified literacy and numeracy needs
- provide accessible accommodation for those with restricted mobility
- implement strategies to target under-represented groups

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

Business administration, management & professional			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Business administration</i>			2
Apprenticeships for young people	26		2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. Business administration provision at TDC was inspected and graded. Evidence was examined from customer service which was not reported on and graded separately, to support judgements in the key findings section of the report.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	6
Number of learners interviewed	14
Number of staff interviewed	5
Number of employers interviewed	11
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	9
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Learners who started in 2004-05 are making good progress**, and some are likely to finish early. Most of the learners who started in 2003-04 are likely to complete the framework within their agreed timescale. Of the few learners who are past their completion dates, most are waiting for their key skills portfolio to be moderated.

9. **Progression is good.** Many learners progress from apprenticeship to advanced apprenticeship programmes, often in customer service. Most learners are employed at the end of the programme. Learners develop good skills and many are given additional responsibility or promotion during the programme.

10. Customer service provision has been offered since 2003-04. Learners on the programme are making good progress and find the programme relevant to their work roles.

11. **Retention rates over the past three years are low.** Just over half of the learners were retained. However, most of the learners who stayed on programme completed their framework. Of the 14 apprentices who started in business administration in 2004-05, 12 are still in learning.

The quality of provision

12. **Assessment practice is very good.** Assessors visit the workplace approximately every three weeks. Assessment is flexible and meets the needs of learners and employers. Learners are fully aware of their progress and of the work required for the next visit. Targets which are clear, specific and challenging are agreed at each visit. There is good monitoring of progress. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods.

13. Induction is satisfactory and provides appropriate information about the programme. It includes an initial assessment and a half-day session on equality of opportunity.

14. Learners who are identified as having literacy or numeracy support needs are given individual support. However, none of the staff have the relevant qualifications to deliver literacy or numeracy skills.

15. Progress reviews take place every 12 weeks and include the supervisor. They

effectively monitor progress, health and safety, and awareness of equality of opportunity. **The reviews are well recorded** and copies of the paperwork are given to learners and supervisors.

16. Off-the-job training relates to the mandatory national vocational qualification (NVQ) units and takes place for half a day a month. There was no off-the-job training scheduled during the inspection, and no training was observed or graded. **The training is well structured** with suitable learning materials and appropriate workbooks. It is matched to the guided learning hours for the technical certificate. There are no workshops offered for key skills development, or for learners on the customer service programme.

17. **Learners are well supported by assessors and supervisors.** They value the expertise of the assessors and have ready access to them by telephone or e-mail.

Leadership and management

18. **The leadership and management of the programme are good.** Weekly team meetings review the learners' progress. Monthly team meetings cover a broader agenda and include a standing item on equality of opportunity. These meetings are suitably recorded and action points are systematically followed through. A full range of systems and processes are in place to assess, monitor and review progress. Individual learning plans are regularly updated with clear reference to the assessment and progress review processes.

19. **The programme manager for Career Track has effective links with other teams in the council** and represents the council at a local learning partnership and other external groups. Learners who are placed in the council are well supported and often progress to employment within the council. An annual award ceremony is held and certificates are presented to learners by the chair and chief executive of the council.

20. **Benefits of consortium membership include sharing good practice.** For example, Career Track is developing an effective management information system with support from the consortium.

21. **The staff are well motivated to provide good support and training.** The staff function well as a team, are suitably qualified and have a good range of expertise. The team has a strong commitment to the continuous improvement of the provision.

22. **Employers' premises are fully checked to ensure safe and healthy working environments.** Assessors suitably reinforce health and safety throughout the programme.

23. **Equality of opportunity is covered appropriately during induction** and is reinforced well during progress reviews. Learners have a satisfactory awareness of equality and diversity. However, there are no strategies to increase recruitment from under-represented groups.

24. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Internal verification arrangements meet awarding body standards. Effective actions have been taken to improve the quality of provision, in particular the retention intervention strategy and weekly reporting on learners whose progress is causing concern.

25. **The training centre is not accessible to people with restricted mobility.** Career Track has identified alternative accommodation which could be used if the need arises.

26. **Management information systems are not well developed.** Career Track uses a number of separate databases and spreadsheets which are incompatible. This restricts the range of data available for decision-making and makes analysis difficult. Career Track is aware of this and is taking appropriate action. Some progress has been made in extending the use of the main software programme, and further progress is planned.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good leadership and management of the provision
- good quality audit processes

Weaknesses

- weak management information system
- poor access and facilities for those with restricted mobility

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- good progress by current learners
- good progression onto other courses, employment or promotion
- very effective assessment practice

Weaknesses

- low retention rates

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL (CAREER TRACK):

- good support and lots of help
- getting a qualification while working
- 'knowing what you have to achieve and how far you've got'
- good individual support for key skills
- help with finding employment and training opportunities

WHAT LEARNERS THINK TENDRING DISTRICT COUNCIL (CAREER TRACK) COULD IMPROVE:

- more courses, for example in information technology
- the workshops in key skills
- the training sessions for customer service

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good leadership and management of the provision
- good quality audit processes

Weaknesses

- weak management information system
- poor access and facilities for those with restricted mobility

27. The leadership and management of the provision are good. A full range of relevant processes and procedures are in place to help the learners make good progress. These include a regularly updated individual learning plan, clear assessment records with well-defined short-term targets, regular monitoring of individual progress, and a three-way review process. Each learner has an identified assessor who visits them approximately every three weeks. In order to ensure that learners have regular contact with more than one member of staff, the progress reviews are carried out by a different member of the team. A half-day monthly off-the-job training session is scheduled for business administration learners. Customer service provision was introduced in 2003-04. The programmes are more suited to some learners' work placements, especially for advanced apprentices. Customer service learners do not receive off-the-job training, but the support they are offered at assessment visits ensures that they feel confident about what they need to do to complete the framework. They are given good support to build their portfolio of evidence through the use of case studies.

28. The programme manager and team work effectively together to support the learners. Weekly team meetings ensure a strong focus on learners whose progress is causing concern or who are nearing the end of their programme. Learners who are identified as high or medium risk in terms of progress, or other factors which might affect their completion of the programme, are discussed individually and appropriate action is agreed. Through the retention intervention strategy, all learners who are at risk of leaving the programme early are given individual guidance and support. All learners who are near the end of their programme can access an exit programme which involves weekly individual support with jobsearch activities. Learners can access this support even if they have completed the framework.

29. Formal monthly team meetings provide an opportunity to review and discuss other aspects of the provision. All meetings are appropriately recorded and actions are systematically followed through. The team works effectively and communicates well through formal and informal channels. Frequent assessment visits enable the staff to develop good working relationships with the learners and their supervisors. The team is accessible and supportive. Learners' and employers' handbooks, as well as information for supervisors in work-based learning, are distributed at the beginning of training. Newsletters are sent out every six months to learners and employers giving information on the provision.

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30. TDC is supportive of Career Track and the opportunities it gives to young people in the community. The council's first priority is to develop a strong local economy. Career Track is developing effective links with other teams in the council, in particular the regeneration team. The programme manager represents the council on the local learning partnership and other relevant groups in the community. The programme manager liaises with the chief executive of the council every three to four months, or as needed, to ensure that Career Track contributes effectively to the council's strategic aims. The programme manager is line-managed by the head of human resources and customer services and attends weekly team meetings. The programme manager also attends weekly meetings for the heads of service. Through these meetings, Career Track is well integrated in the council structure. The programme manager recently made a presentation about Career Track to the council members, and contributes to the monthly members bulletin. The council values the apprenticeship programme as a mechanism for recruiting suitably skilled staff. Learners who start on a work placement in the council often gain employment in the council, and many are promoted.

31. The programme manager attends monthly consortium meetings and additional working groups. The consortium is still in the process of developing effective networking and partnership arrangements. Career Track has already benefited from networking with the consortium, by developing its management information system. The consortium is developing shared marketing and recruitment procedures with a common point of contact for all enquiries. It is too early to identify the impact of this on Career Track's recruitment patterns.

32. Current marketing and recruitment procedures are satisfactory. There are good working relationships with Connexions. The assessors visit local employers to extend their understanding of apprenticeships, and to recruit employees and potential employees onto the programme. In addition, a wide range of promotional activities takes place, including interviews on local radio and attendance at the local air show in August just after the general certificate of secondary education results are announced. Although Career Track has a marketing and recruitment policy, there is no monitoring of its effectiveness or of the different strategies used to market the provision and recruit learners.

33. Appraisal and staff development are satisfactory. The council's appraisal process applies to Career Track staff and to learners who are placed in the council. The process includes performance indicators and identifies staff development needs. However, for Career Track staff, few performance indicators are used and the appraisal paperwork does not focus on activities which are specific to the success of the provision. The assessors' performance is reviewed every six months by the programme manager, who is in turn reviewed annually by her line manager. All find the process helpful in reviewing their work and in identifying development and training needs. However, the process has not identified the need for training in supporting learners with additional literacy or numeracy needs. The assessors keep a log of development activities, including training, coaching and work-shadowing.

34. Career Track has a basic skills strategy, but it is not well developed and does not ensure that all learners' additional support needs are effectively diagnosed and met. Initial assessment identifies that approximately 40 per cent of learners have literacy or numeracy needs and the assessors provide individual support for these needs. The support is primarily used to prepare learners for the key skills tests. However, the assessors are not

qualified to deliver literacy and numeracy and there is currently no specialist support available for the learners. However, one assessor has key skills qualifications at level 3 in all six key skills. In the past, learners have enrolled onto courses provided by a local adult community college, but have not been offered individual specialist support. Career Track intends to work with the consortium to identify more appropriate support for learners with literacy and numeracy needs.

35. Resources and facilities in the workplace are appropriate. The training resources are generally adequate, although the training centre is not accessible to people with restricted mobility.

36. The use of management information is not well developed. Career Track uses a number of databases and spreadsheets that are not compatible. This restricts the amount of data available and makes analysis difficult. For example, there is no analysis of potential links between learners with additional literacy and numeracy needs and retention or slow progress. Another example is that analysis of early leavers is restricted to individual case studies, as data is not kept in a format that enables effective comparative analysis of the factors associated with non-completion of the programme. Career Track is aware of this weakness, and had requested support from the consortium to resolve the problem. So far, Career Track has received valuable support from two of the consortium members, and from membership of the consortium management information working group. Some progress has been made in extending the use of the main software programme, and further progress is planned.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

37. TDC has comprehensive policies and procedures relating to equal opportunities. These include a separate equality and diversity policy drawn up for Career Track learners, which is reviewed and updated annually. The policy is comprehensive and includes appeals and complaints procedures, as well as clear guidance on harassment and bullying. Although the policy is comprehensive, it is not laid out attractively or phrased in language that is easily understood by learners. Learner and employer handbooks include a summary of the main policies and procedures, and these are written in simpler language. The policies and procedures of the council also apply to the learners placed within the council. However, Career Track does not ensure that all employers have appropriate policies and procedures relating to equal opportunities or that they implement the Career Track policy in relation to their learners.

38. All new learners attend a half-day induction session on equality of opportunity which includes a video giving examples of potential areas of discriminatory practice. The learners gain a good understanding of equal opportunities through watching and discussing the video. Their awareness of equal opportunities is reinforced and developed further at each progress review. Each review includes questions on a specific aspect of equality of opportunity. If a learner does not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the topic covered, the reviewer spends time developing their understanding of the issue. Some learners demonstrate a good awareness of equality, but most learners' understanding and awareness is only satisfactory.

39. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners are valued in the workplace and appreciate the support they receive from their assessor, reviewer and supervisor. They generally make good progress after effective support and guidance. The retention

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intervention strategy focuses on identifying individual barriers to success and providing appropriate support to help overcome these barriers. Learners have access to the full range of support provided by the council, including an occupational health nurse and counselling services. A celebration of success is held annually, where learners are presented with certificates by the chair and chief executive of the council. This event is well publicised and is valued by the learners.

40. Learners with literacy and numeracy needs are identified through initial assessment. Approximately 40 per cent of learners have additional literacy or numeracy needs and they are given individual support to develop their skills. However, this support is not provided by staff with the relevant qualifications to deliver literacy or numeracy. The effectiveness of the support provided is not monitored. In the past, some learners have attended courses in basic skills at a local adult community college. To date, there have been no arrangements made for individualised specialist support. A working group of the consortium is about to be convened to look into initial assessment and the programme manager will be joining this group.

41. There is regular staff development on equality of opportunity. However, this is not always focused on issues of particular relevance to the provision. For example, staff development this year took place with the human resources team as a whole. The training dealt with issues which were not of particular relevance to the team in improving the provision or learners' understanding and awareness of equality of opportunity. In future, Career Track intends to provide more focused and relevant staff development in collaboration with the consortium.

42. Career Track has identified under-represented groups such as men, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups, and, in particular, learners from rural communities. Career Track has been involved in funded projects to increase recruitment from rural communities and these have had some impact. There are plans to develop this targeted activity further. Career Track is developing its contacts with community groups to attract under-represented groups more effectively. However, this has not yet had an impact on recruitment.

43. The weakness identified at the previous inspection on the accessibility of the training accommodation has not been resolved. However, TDC has looked into alternative accommodation for its off-the-job training activity and for examinations, and has identified appropriate accommodation should the need arise. A long-term solution has yet to be identified.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

44. Career Track has a well-established and well-recorded cycle of quality audit activities. Annual observations of training, interviews and reviews ensure that there is consistency of practice. These observations are supported by detailed checklists for each activity, to ensure that all key aspects of the activity being observed are included and reported on. Regular audits of learners' files are carried out by Career Track. In addition, an audit of learner files has also been carried out by the consortium this year. This was seen as a valuable benchmarking activity and an opportunity to share good practice.

45. Internal verification arrangements meet awarding body standards. There are two internal verifiers who use a clear and comprehensive internal verification process which

includes sampling procedures. A cycle of verification activities ensures consistency in all aspects of assessment.

46. There is good commitment among the team to the continuous improvement of provision. An appropriate range of strategies and policies have been developed to improve the provision, such as the retention intervention strategy, the NVQ assessment policy and the exit programme. These are reviewed and updated annually. However, their effectiveness in improving provision is not fully monitored.

47. One of the key intentions of the consortium is to share good practice. To date, Career Track has benefited from this mainly through membership of the management information working group. It has started to produce a wider range of reports to support decision-making and to monitor the effectiveness of provision. A working group is being formed to examine the initial assessment process, and the programme manager will attend these meetings. The programme manager is very positive about the potential benefits of sharing good practice with the consortium.

48. Self-assessment and development-planning processes are well understood by staff. However, this year, the production of an overall self-assessment report for the consortium took priority over annual self-assessment by each provider. The consortium self-assessment report was produced in December 2004. During this period, it was not clear whether the members of the consortium should also produce their own self-assessment reports, and the current report is an update of the report from June 2003. New strengths and weaknesses were not identified, and the development plan was not amended. The team is aware that the self-assessment report does not fully identify current areas of weakness. The development plan is reviewed monthly and the progress made in achieving the targets is recorded. The development plan does not include the full range of actions taken by the team to improve the quality of provision.

49. Despite the limitations of the current self-assessment report and development plan, Career Track has introduced and developed initiatives which have improved the learners' progress and experience. For example, the retention intervention strategy has been introduced and developed over the past two years. It aims to reduce the number of early leavers, although this is not identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. Career Track has also recently introduced the use of weekly data reports in the form of a 'traffic-light' system to highlight the progress being made by learners. The learners identified as being of high or medium concern are discussed at weekly team meetings and appropriate actions are agreed.

50. Regular feedback is gained from learners and it is used to make further improvements in the provision. Regular learner evaluation of off-the-job training through questionnaires is well established, but other forms of feedback are new. For example, a recent survey of learners' views was based on the key questions of the previous Common Inspection Framework. The results have been analysed and improvements to the provision have been identified. For example, the effectiveness of on-the-job training was a concern to learners. Career Track intends to take action by introducing an induction programme for new supervisors and offering updating sessions for supervisors. Career Track has yet to develop firm proposals for implementing these improvements. Career Track plans to carry out a similar survey based on the new Common Inspection Framework, and this is planned for employers as well as learners.

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51. At the time of the reinspection in 2002, TDC held forums for supervisors approximately two or three times a year. These effectively supported and guided supervisors in their role. Since then, the forum meetings have changed their focus and now learners and supervisors are invited. Those who attend these meetings value this opportunity to be involved in developments. Currently, no formal feedback from supervisors is sought on the quality of provision or how to improve it. However, one of the supervisors based at the council is working in collaboration with the programme manager to pilot initiatives to improve the quality of on-the-job training. These include the introduction of schedules of work for each learner, and the allocation of mentors and buddies.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration		2
Apprenticeships for young people	26	2

52. TDC offers work-based learning for young people in business administration. There are two advanced apprentices and 24 apprentices. Learners work predominantly in the Clacton-on-Sea and Weeley areas. Most learners attend monthly half-day off-the-job training sessions at the provider's local training centre. Career Track recruits learners directly from local employers, through Connexions, or from direct enquiries from potential learners. Approximately two-thirds of the learners are employed in local companies, the rest are placed in the council on training contracts. All learners have their suitability assessed and their ability levels tested at the start of the programme. Formal induction takes place at the training centre. Assessors visit the learners in the workplace approximately every three weeks to provide guidance and assessment. Formal reviews are held in the workplace every 12 weeks. Three of Career Track's staff carry out all off-the-job training, assessment and progress reviews.

Business administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- good progress by current learners
- good progression onto other courses, employment or promotion
- very effective assessment practice

Weaknesses

- low retention rates

Achievement and standards

53. The current learners are progressing well. Twelve of the 14 learners who started in 2004-05 are still in learning. All are making at least satisfactory progress, a significant number are making good progress, and some are likely to complete early. For example, one learner has completed all aspects of the programme within nine months. Nine of the learners who started in 2003-04 have already completed the framework. Most of the learners who started in 2003-04 who are still on programme are likely to complete the framework within their agreed time. A few have passed their planned completion date, but most of these have completed the framework and are awaiting moderation of their key skills portfolios.

54. Progression is good. Many learners progress to an advanced apprenticeship after completing their apprenticeship programme. Career Track has introduced advanced apprenticeships in customer service to improve the range of appropriate progression

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opportunities, especially within the council. Learners are making good progress at work. Many receive additional responsibility and some gain promotion or move into full employment while still training. Learners and employers recognise a significant increase in skills and confidence during the programme. Over 80 per cent of all leavers over the past two years have progressed into full-time employment.

55. In the three years to 2003-04, the retention rate was low. Just over half of the learners who started the apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes were retained or are still in learning. Although most of the learners who were retained between 2001 and 2003 completed the full framework, because of low retention rates the achievement rate was just over 50 per cent.

56. Ninety-five per cent of learners achieve their technical certificate at the first attempt. Over the past two years, the overall pass rate in key skills tests has been 73 per cent. However, the pass rate for the application of number unit during the past year has been 50 per cent.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		3		6	100	1	100	7	100						
Retained*	0		0		3	50	0	0	6	86						
Successfully completed	0		0		3	50	0	0	6	86						
Still in learning	1		1		0	0	0	0	0	0						

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	14		38		25	100	24	100	12	100						
Retained*	0		13		14	56	12	50	9	75						
Successfully completed	0		9		13	52	6	25	5	42						
Still in learning	12		12		0	0	0	0	0	0						

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

The quality of provision

57. The assessment process is very effective. Learners are visited approximately every three weeks and are fully aware of their progress and the work they need to do between assessor visits. Assessment planning is good. Short-term targets are agreed at each visit, and they are challenging but achievable. Unit assessment is well planned and evidence is appropriately cross-referenced to all relevant elements of the programme. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods, such as observations, verbal questioning, professional discussion and witness testimony. Assessors integrate the technical certificate into the

NVQ and provide effective guidance to learners in identifying evidence for their key skills portfolio. Learners' progress is discussed at weekly staff meetings and a report highlighting those who are at risk of leaving early or those who are progressing slowly is produced for these meetings.

58. Records of assessment and target-setting are used in the progress reviews, which are held every 12 weeks. The review paperwork is sent to learners and supervisors beforehand so that they can prepare for the review. Reviews are effective and fully involve the learners and their supervisors in discussing all aspects of the learners' progress. Good records are kept of learners' progress and any concerns raised. Copies of the review paperwork are given to the learners and to the supervisors. Individual learning plans are updated regularly after review and assessment.

59. Induction to the programme is satisfactory. Learners receive enough information to be able to choose the right programme and to understand the requirements for the framework. Induction includes appropriate initial assessment to identify the appropriate level of key skills for each learner and any additional support requirements in literacy, numeracy and language skills. This information is recorded on the individual learning plan and is used to tailor the programme to meet individual needs. Initial assessment also identifies preferred learning styles. These are recorded, but they have little influence on the learners' programme. Prior achievement at school is recorded and is used to identify programme requirements. The induction also includes half a day on developing the learners' awareness of equality of opportunity.

60. Arrangements for additional literacy and numeracy support are satisfactory. When additional learning needs are identified during initial assessment, learners have individual training to bring them up to the required key skill level. However, there is no suitable specialist help available, although in the past, some learners have attended basic skills courses at a local adult community college.

61. Off-the-job training takes place for half a day each month at the council's training centre. This training relates to the mandatory units of the NVQ. It is well structured, with suitable learning materials and appropriate workbooks. Evidence of background knowledge is recorded on an attendance certificate. However, there are no workshops for key skills development.

62. Business administration programmes match learners' aims. Learners who are found work placements are well matched to their roles. Employed learners have their job roles matched to the optional units.

63. Career Track's staff support learners well. Working relationships between the assessors and learners are good. The learners have access to their assessors through telephone and e-mail. Learners are also supported effectively in the workplace by their supervisors and other staff. Career Track's staff also have good working relationships with the employers and supervisors. Work-based supervisors or line managers are fully included in the review process and have sufficient knowledge of the programme. They receive copies of the review paperwork and are aware of the learners' targets and of the evidence required to complete the programme.

Leadership and management

64. The Career Track team is clearly motivated to provide good support and training. Meetings are regular, relevant and suitably recorded. Staff are responsive to employers and learners. Business administration staff function well as a team. They are suitably qualified, have a good range of experience and a strong commitment to the learner. A full range of systems and processes are in place. The documents used are well designed and well completed. A beneficial exit programme is in place for all learners who are not employed. Early leavers are followed up well, and Career Track knows why each leaver has left and records the level of support given to them to try to keep them on programme. Employers' premises are fully checked to ensure safe and healthy working environments. Assessors suitably reinforce health and safety throughout the programme.

65. The equipment, learning resources and learning materials are satisfactory. The accommodation is satisfactory overall, although the training centre is not accessible to those with restricted mobility.

66. Equality of opportunity is covered appropriately during induction and is reinforced well at reviews. The learners' awareness of equality and diversity is satisfactory. However, there is no plan to increase recruitment from under-represented groups. Only 19 per cent of learners are men.

67. Career Track has good working relationships with employers and invites them to attend a forum three times a year. They are also invited to attend an annual award ceremony which celebrates the learners' achievements.

68. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Internal verification meets awarding body standards. The self-assessment report did not identify the weakness in retention rates which was identified by inspectors.

