

INSPECTION REPORT

McArthur Dean Training Limited

29 April 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

McArthur Dean Training Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. McArthur Dean Training Limited (McArthur Dean) is a private limited company based in the centre of Hull, which was founded in 1995. The company contracts with the Yorkshire and Humberside Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide apprenticeships for young people. It also provides other training and marketing services to employers and training organisations. A team of 17 staff, including two working directors and a general manager, provide training, assessment and administration.

2. McArthur Dean provides training for apprentices and advanced apprentices in business administration, accounts and customer service. Training is based at the company's training centre in Hull, which learners attend for off-the-job training. Most learners are employed with local businesses and public sector organisations.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** McArthur Dean's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Provision is good in business administration, management and professional.

4. **The inspection team were broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is well managed and effective. McArthur Dean's current self-assessment report is accurately written and presents a reliable account of the company's strengths and weaknesses, although a small number of the strengths noted in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. The company collects feedback effectively and analyses data very well to enable it to assess itself.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** McArthur Dean has effectively implemented improvement strategies and the quality of its provision has improved. Thorough and well-managed development planning and post-inspection action-planning have contributed to the successful quality improvement. Retention rates have improved and are now good. Although the effect on learners completing full frameworks has not yet been realised, the level of achievement of qualifications has increased and learners achieve good vocational skills.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR MCARTHUR DEAN TRAINING LIMITED:

- continue to improve the framework completion rates
- sustain and improve on the good retention rates
- further develop its strategy for literacy, numeracy and language skills support
- continue to work well with employers and develop the quality of on-the-job training
- establish a more structured approach internally for staff development and training in equality of opportunity and diversity

GRADES

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

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

| Business administration, management & professional | | 2 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|
| Contributory areas: | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
| <i>Business administration</i> Apprenticeships for young people | 130 | 2 |

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Business administration, including accounting, was reported on and graded. At the time of the inspection there were too few customer service learners for this area to be reported on separately. Evidence was examined before and during the inspection, and a team of three inspectors visited McArthur Dean for four days.

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of inspectors | 3 |
| Number of inspection days | 12 |
| Number of learners interviewed | 29 |
| Number of staff interviewed | 15 |
| Number of employers interviewed | 10 |
| Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited | 13 |
| Number of partners/external agencies interviewed | 1 |

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **Retention rates are improving and are good overall.** McArthur Dean has made significant improvements, from retaining around one-third of learners who started in 2000-01 to retaining over two-thirds of those starting in 2003-04. Of the 2004-05 starts, 86 per cent of learners are still in learning.

8. **Learners develop good vocational skills** in the workplace and in off-the-job training. Workplaces offer highly appropriate opportunities for skills development and progression. Many employers support learners to carry out a wide range of

tasks and projects outside of their normal duties.

9. The framework completion rates for learners who started in 2001-02 are low.

While framework completion rates improved for those who started in 2002-03, they remained unsatisfactory. Most learners who started in 2003-04 are progressing well and are on schedule to complete frameworks, and the completion rates are already approaching the levels of previous years.

10. Since 2003 McArthur Dean has made significant changes to its provision and there are clear indications of the effect of these strategies. For example, the most recent test results for the technical certificate in administration showed a 91 per cent pass rate and key skills certificates are also being achieved at a higher rate now.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

| | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Total |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Business administration, management & professional | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Total | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |

11. **Off-the-job training is good.** During the inspection, all of the six training sessions observed were judged to be good. Training sessions are planned well and make good use of question and answer techniques to check learners' knowledge and understanding. Handouts and exercises are designed and prepared well. Some learners benefit from well-organised training on the job and take part in additional training for externally certificated qualifications supported by their employer.

12. Assessment is satisfactory and frequent, and is effectively planned. Evidence of learners' work and assessment records are appropriate. McArthur Dean has recently invested in internet-based software for portfolio completion and an increasing number of learners are choosing this as a preferred method. The company is developing this approach effectively and learners appreciate the flexibility.

13. Learners receive satisfactory initial assessment and support. Those with additional literacy and numeracy needs receive satisfactory training with good externally published workbooks, individual coaching and support in classes.

14. Training staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Learners benefit from the provision of individual textbooks, and the centre holds a good library of books and other learning resources. Computing facilities are appropriate for learners' activities.

15. Learners participate in effective progress reviews. Individual learning plans are used appropriately. Reviews effectively involve employers, identify progress made and identify any problems experienced by learners, and result in clear targets.

16. McArthur Dean uses its well-established good contacts with local business to

identify employment or work-placement opportunities for prospective learners. It gives applicants appropriate guidance and support during the interview period and during training.

Leadership and management

17. **McArthur Dean has a good business planning processes to improve provision and performance.** It focuses clearly on teaching, training and learning. Very comprehensive business plans, a clear marketing strategy and good development planning processes are in place, with a number of initiatives to improve the learners' experience.

18. **The company uses management information well to support continuous improvement.** Meaningful information and reports are easily and frequently generated and used to review critically all aspects of performance. Targets are set and reviewed for all members of staff.

19. **McArthur Dean collaborates particularly effectively with a wide range of external organisations** and shares good practices to benefit learners. The company's good links with employers ensure that learners gain appropriate work placements and develop good vocational skills.

20. Leadership and management of training programmes are effective and staff are clear about their responsibilities. Members of staff receive regular monthly briefings on business developments at well-attended monthly staff meetings, which have a clear focus on learners' progression and achievement.

21. McArthur Dean provides appropriate staff development and training opportunities, which it manages effectively. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the areas of learning in which they train and assess. Resources are managed well to support teaching, training and learning. Learners benefit from using a range of appropriate equipment and accommodation.

22. The management of literacy, numeracy and language training is satisfactory. The company is committed to promoting skills for life, the government's strategy for training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language, although it does not yet have a defined strategy or action plan for this. Some staff are following relevant qualifications to enable them to support literacy and numeracy training.

23. McArthur Dean's provision for equality of opportunity is good. **It has effective strategies in place to widen participation and promote equality of opportunity.** Programmes are effectively marketed and good links have been developed with most schools in the area. The company has constructive links with community groups and uses these effectively to attract under-represented groups into learning.

24. Learners develop a good understanding of equality of opportunity. McArthur Dean effectively communicates to learners its equality policy and how to put it into practice. Learners value the way they are treated. The company takes suitable care to promote and safeguard learners' welfare and safety in the workplace. It has recently employed a qualified counsellor as a full-time member of staff to act as learner liaison tutor.

25. Staff have an appropriate understanding of their responsibilities for equality of opportunity and for the need to widen participation. All staff receive appropriate induction and are familiar with the company's policies and practices. Specialist equipment and arrangements are put in place when needed for learners with additional learning needs. Premises are adequate to meet learners' needs and provide satisfactory access.

26. McArthur Dean is strongly committed to quality improvement and **has introduced good initiatives effectively to evaluate and improve the standard of its provision and performance** over the past two years. It makes good use of data to measure progress, focus on targets for improvement, identify trends and confirm priorities, notably for improving achievement and retention rates. The company's sharing of good practices through its external links contributes to improvements in its learning resources and teaching methods. It monitors and observes training and other key processes to support continuous improvement. Staff are involved in implementing quality improvements. Internal verification is satisfactory.

27. Self-assessment is a regular feature of the way the company works and has been well established for a number of years. The process is managed well by one of the directors. The company's development and action plan is thorough, used very effectively to identify areas for development systematically, and supports constructive actions for improvement.

28. The self-assessment report accurately reflects the findings made through the inspection process, although some aspects of the provision regarded by the company as strengths were judged by inspectors to be normal practice contributing to strengths. McArthur Dean uses data and performance trends very effectively in the report to highlight strengths and weaknesses and to focus on achievement and standards.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good business planning to improve provision
- good use of management information
- particularly effective collaboration with external partners
- effective strategies to widen participation and promote equality of opportunity
- good initiatives to evaluate and improve training

Weaknesses

- no significant weakness identified

Business administration, management & professional

Business administration

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good development of vocational skills
- good off-the-job training

Weaknesses

- low framework completion rates

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT MCARTHUR DEAN TRAINING LIMITED:

- the good working environment
- the friendly staff willing to give their time and 'who treat you like adults'
- the friendly provider, with small group sizes in classes
- good teaching and explanations, for those who don't understand
- the well-planned training - 'my work supervisor is very helpful'
- that it's a good place to learn - 'the staff give me confidence'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK MCARTHUR DEAN TRAINING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the contents in sessions - some topics are covered at work before joining training
- the amount of time for training
- the parking
- the drinks machine - it's often empty

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good business planning to improve provision
- good use of management information
- particularly effective collaboration with external partners
- effective strategies to widen participation and promote equality of opportunity
- good initiatives to evaluate and improve training

Weaknesses

- no significant weakness identified

29. McArthur Dean's business planning processes to improve provision and performance are good. There is a clear focus on training, learning and achievement. Very comprehensive business plans, a clear marketing strategy and good development plans are in place together with a number of initiatives to improve the learners' experience. Learners benefit from well-planned training, challenging and realistic targets, a thorough initial assessment process, flexible training arrangements, employment with relevant learning opportunities, a taster programme designed to ensure learners are on the right programme, and the recent appointment of a learner liaison officer to monitor and support learners. These actions have had a positive effect on the significant improvements made in achievement and retention rates, but further time is required for the actions to be reflected in framework completion rates.

30. The way the company is structured is clear and effective. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of the company's aims, objectives and values. Staff are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities within McArthur Dean and how they relate to others. A strong team spirit positively affects the learners. A wide range of networking activity takes place to ensure the company is well informed about the needs of the sector, and how best to actively respond to those needs.

31. McArthur Dean makes good use of management information to support continuous improvement. Meaningful information and reports are easily and frequently generated and used to review critically all aspects of performance. A wide range of information is collected, analysed and used purposefully by all staff to monitor performance and plan future actions. Staff are very aware of the business objectives and their own performance targets. Personal and business targets are set for all individual members of staff and these are reviewed and monitored at weekly and monthly meetings.

32. McArthur Dean's particularly effective collaboration with a wide range of external organisations enables it to develop good practice which benefits learners. Its good links with employers and other training providers ensure learners gain appropriate work placements and develop good vocational skills. The company's staff engage with a local strategic forum for collaboration and the sharing of good practice. Staff are involved in several working groups which contribute to the company's strategies and initiatives. Groups cover areas such as improving retention and achievement rates, raising standards, developing staff and addressing the skills for life agenda.

33. Communication within the company is satisfactory. The directors have an open management style and are extremely approachable, and staff are kept well informed about all aspects of the business and its training programmes. Regularly scheduled meetings have standard agenda items, are minuted, and contain actions that are relevant to improving the learners' experience and progress. These meetings are used to collect feedback, highlight support needs and review individual progress against performance targets. McArthur Dean emphasises the sharing of information and teamwork, and staff, managers and directors work well together.

34. Staff appraisal, training and development are satisfactory. The company's informative induction process is supported by access to a detailed procedures manual. Staff are appraised annually to agree personal and business targets which are reviewed regularly. McArthur Dean's arrangements for staff training and development are linked to the needs of the company and each member of staff. Staff are encouraged to participate in continuing professional development activities that will have a positive effect on training and the quality of provision for the learner. Staff are observed and given feedback about their performance in delivering training and carrying out assessments.

35. McArthur Dean manages its resources well to support teaching, training and learning. Learners are provided with a good range of equipment and accommodation which is fit for purpose. The company manages staff effectively to support learners. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for the areas of learning in which they teach and assess.

36. The company satisfactorily manages training for learners with literacy, numeracy and language support needs. All learners undergo an initial assessment and further diagnostic tests to establish their literacy, numeracy and language support needs. Those learners identified as needing additional help are provided with appropriate support. The company is committed to promoting skills for life, although it does not yet have a defined strategy or action plan. Some staff are currently working towards relevant qualifications to enable them to better support learners with literacy and numeracy needs.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

37. McArthur Dean's approach to equality of opportunity is good. It follows effective strategies to widen participation and promote equality of opportunity, which are key features of the company's marketing strategy. The company has effectively marketed its programmes and developed good links with most schools in the area.

38. The company has constructive links with community groups and uses these links effectively to attract under-represented groups into learning. It met its targets for

recruitment of minority ethnic learners in 2003-04 and has set higher levels for 2004-05. It collects and monitors relevant equal opportunities data relating to marketing, recruitment, progress and achievement.

39. Learners develop a good understanding of equality of opportunity. McArthur Dean effectively communicates to learners its policy and how to put it into practice. Learners value the way they are treated. Relevant policy statements are displayed in the centre along with various imaginative displays that further reinforce learning points on topics such as racism, ageism and sexism. Staff introduce learners to the policies, and how to apply to them, during induction and reinforce their understanding on other occasions such as in training sessions and at progress reviews. The company has developed some good learning materials, and it uses them very effectively to enable learners to better understand matters relating to equality and participation, such as the needs of people with disabilities at work.

40. McArthur Dean takes suitable care to promote and safeguard learners' welfare and safety in the workplace. It monitors employers' policies and practices and has taken action to protect learners in the past when its policy was not being met by employers. The company has an effective equal opportunities reporting process and supporting procedures. Complaints are dealt with satisfactorily and concerns resolved constructively. Good partnership work with Connexions takes place which benefits learners. Learners can meet a personal adviser at the company's training centre and discuss in confidence any concerns they have. McArthur Dean has recently employed a qualified counsellor as a full time member of staff to act as learner liaison tutor. However, it is too early to judge the effect of this role on learners.

41. Staff have an appropriate understanding of their responsibilities for equality of opportunity and of the need to widen participation. All staff receive an appropriate induction and are familiar with the company's policies and practices. Training and awareness-raising for staff in aspects of equality of opportunity is provided, and regular consideration of the topics is made at staff and team meetings. However, McArthur Dean's internal programme for the continuing development and training of staff in equality of opportunity is not formal enough, and not enough individual planning and reviewing takes place. Some staff have been involved in appropriate external training courses to further develop their awareness of equality and the company's capacity to meet specific learners' additional needs. McArthur Dean puts in place specialist equipment and arrangements for learners with additional learning needs when required. Premises are adequate to meet learners' needs and provide satisfactory access.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

42. Quality improvement is good overall. McArthur Dean is strongly committed to quality improvement and has effectively improved the standard of provision and performance over the past two years.

43. The company makes good use of data to measure progress, focus on targets for improvement, identify trends and confirm priorities, notably for improving achievement and retention rates. Evaluating the learning process forms an integral part of the way the company is managed. For example, it systematically examines and evaluates the effect of changes in key training processes such as initial assessment or the recent innovation of the pre-entry 'taster' course.

44. McArthur Dean carries out a particularly thorough analysis of learners' and employers' feedback to measure progress and trends and support strategies for continuous improvement. It uses its good external links to share good practices which contribute to improvements to learning resources and teaching methods. It uses benchmarking to compare external performance standards.

45. The company's monitoring and observation of training and other key processes contributes to continuous improvement. Good practices are highlighted and shared among the staff team. Actions for improvement are identified from learning session observations and linked to staff development activities. Ideas and suggestions for further improvement are a regular feature of team meetings. McArthur Dean has comprehensive procedures in place to support the implementation of key learning processes, and it uses these effectively as a basis for checking standards and implementing improvements.

46. Staff have clearly defined personal targets linked to the company's business plan objectives and performance indicators. Staff are involved in implementing quality improvements. Actions for improvements are identified from learners' feedback. For example, improvements have been made to the training programme for the technical certificate following feedback from learners. Internal verification is satisfactory. The company has an appropriate number of internal verifiers and suitable systems in place which are implemented satisfactorily.

47. Self-assessment is a regular feature of the way the company works and has been well established for a number of years. The process is managed well by one of the directors. The company's development and action plan is thorough, used very effectively to systematically identify areas for development and supports constructive actions for improvement. McArthur Dean has comprehensive and flexible systems for collecting views from learners, employers and other stakeholders which contributes to its self-assessment.

48. The self-assessment report is an accurate and broadly reliable document which reflects well the findings made through the inspection process. The main weakness was clearly identified and analysed, although the company identified more strengths than the inspectors. Some of these were incorporated in the key strengths identified by inspectors and a few others were regarded as normal practice. The company uses data and performance trends very effectively in the report to highlight strengths and weaknesses, and to focus on achievement and standards.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

| Contributory areas: | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Business administration</i> Apprenticeships for young people | 130 | 2 |

49. Business administration and accounting were reported on and graded together. Eighty-seven learners are on work-based learning programmes in administration, 18 of whom are on advanced apprenticeships and 69 of whom are on apprenticeships. Forty-three learners are on work-based learning programmes in accountancy, 29 as advanced apprentices and 14 as apprentices. All learners are employed. Learners are recruited directly by McArthur Dean, through Connexions, or through employers. All learners attend off-the-job training at McArthur Dean's training centre. They receive progress reviews every eight weeks and monthly visits in the workplace for assessment and target-setting. All learners are offered additional legal and information technology (IT) qualifications as part of their apprenticeship package. Some learners take other additional qualifications and some are also involved in employer training programmes.

Business administration

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good development of vocational skills
- good off-the-job training

Weaknesses

- low framework completion rates

Achievement and standards

50. Retention rates are showing year-on-year improvement and are good overall. Significant improvements have been made, with over two-thirds of the 2003-04 starters retained, compared with one-third of 2000-01 starters. Of the 2004-05 starters, 96 per cent of accounting and 82 per cent of administration learners are still in learning. Analysis of data on early leavers from previous years shows that most learners who were going to leave each year had left within the first six months of the programme, which is not now the case. An effective four-week taster training course in the centre has been introduced for prospective learners. This has helped learners confirm their career decision before commencing the apprenticeship programme.

51. Learners achieve good vocational skills. Workplaces are highly appropriate, offering good opportunities for skills development and progression. Most employers support learners to carry out a wide range of tasks and projects outside of their normal jobs. For example, one apprentice effectively learnt about the accounting procedures relating to the

sale of a company car to develop her understanding of depreciation and asset disposal. Learners exhibit good skills development in off-the-job training. In training sessions, learners provide good answers to questions and use professional language fluently. They complete practical activities and show a good understanding, and use, of appropriate techniques and skills. Learners in a key skills session showed good skills in using business software packages.

52. The framework completion rates are low. Of the 124 learners who started apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeships in 2001-02, only 17 successfully completed their frameworks. While framework achievement improved in 2002-03 it remained low, with only 25 learners completing frameworks out of the 116 who started, although 12 learners remain in learning and are very near to completion. Over the past two years McArthur Dean has made significant changes to the structure and content of the apprenticeship programmes, the training and assessment of key skills, and initial assessment and support. There are clear indications of the effect of these strategies. The most recent test results in 2005 for the technical certificate in administration showed a 91 per cent pass rate. The key skills achievement rate for 2004-05 has already shown a significant increase on that of the previous year. Records show that most learners are now making good or better progress towards completing their apprenticeships. Achievement rates for national vocational qualifications have increased.

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 | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 18 | 100 | 35 | 100 | 27 | 100 | 61 | 100 | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | 0 | 4 | 11 | 10 | 37 | 22 | 36 | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | 0 | 4 | 11 | 6 | 22 | 4 | 7 | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 17 | 94 | 22 | 63 | 7 | 26 | 1 | 2 | | | | | | | | |

*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 | | | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Number of starts | 55 | 100 | 85 | 100 | 89 | 100 | 63 | 100 | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | 0 | 19 | 22 | 36 | 40 | 26 | 41 | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | 0 | 15 | 18 | 19 | 21 | 13 | 21 | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 46 | 84 | 32 | 38 | 5 | 6 | 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

53. Off-the-job training is good. During the inspection, all of the six training sessions observed were judged to be good. Training sessions are well planned with good recap of previous learning. Trainers make good use of question and answer techniques to check

learners' knowledge and understanding. Handouts and exercises are designed and prepared well. Good use is made of increasingly complex activities and exercises to develop and extend the knowledge of learners. Attendance at most training sessions is good. Trainers and learners have very good working relationships.

54. Administration learners can arrange off-the-job training, including attending evening sessions at college, to meet their needs and their employer's requirements. Accounting learners are offered weekend revision workshops before examinations. Learners can also attend at other times of the week to use the resources or seek additional help and support. Some learners benefit from well-organised training on the job and take part in additional training for externally certificated qualifications supported by their employer.

55. Assessment is satisfactory. Administration learners receive monthly assessment visits. Portfolios contain a good range of work-based evidence including regular observations. However, direct observation is not enough to collect evidence on accounting programmes. McArthur Dean has recently invested in internet-based software for completion of portfolios for the administration apprenticeships, and an increasing number of learners are choosing to use this method. The company is developing this approach effectively and learners appreciate the flexibility it allows them.

56. Initial assessment and support for learners are satisfactory. All learners receive an initial assessment covering the key skills of communication, application of number and IT. They also undergo further occupational assessment to determine which level of programme they are best suited for and if they need additional support. The additional support provided is satisfactory, with good externally published workbooks, individual coaching and support in classes.

57. Trainers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Learners benefit from the provision of individual textbooks and a good library of textbooks and other learning resources within the centre. Computing facilities are appropriate for learners' activities. Training rooms are clean and well maintained and McArthur Dean provides good social areas for learners, including free drinks-making facilities. Access and facilities for learners with restricted mobility are satisfactory.

58. Learners participate in effective progress reviews. Individual learning plans are used appropriately. Reviews identify progress made and deal with any problems being experienced by learners. Most workplace supervisors or employers are fully involved in the progress review process. All parties agree what needs to be done for learners to progress successfully and complete the programme. Targets are set during all progress reviews, although in some cases these are insufficiently specific. However, regular assessment planning provides sufficient detail. Individual training plans are regularly updated to reflect changes to target dates agreed during reviews.

59. McArthur Dean uses its established and good contacts with local business to identify employment or work-placement opportunities for prospective learners, and gives good guidance and support to applicants during the interview period. Learners receive appropriate advice from trainers during their programmes. A new learner liaison post has been recently introduced to provide a single point of contact for support but it is too early yet to judge the effect of this post.

Leadership and management

60. The area of learning is managed and led effectively. Members of staff receive regular monthly briefings on business developments at well-attended monthly staff meetings. The meetings have a clear focus on learners' progression and achievement. Staff members have good understanding of the company's business objectives and business plan. Much of the communication within the team is informal, but is effective, given the small team size.

61. The management of training programmes, including arrangements to support learners' literacy and numeracy needs, is satisfactory. All learners undergo an initial assessment to identify their needs, and satisfactory support is provided, together with good externally published workbooks.

62. Equality and diversity are promoted well through the use of well-designed induction booklets and the checking of learners' understanding during progress reviews. Internal verification is satisfactory and staff regularly meet to discuss assessment. Staff contribute well to the self-assessment process and the self-assessment report is largely accurate in its identification of strengths and weaknesses.

