

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry**

**27 May 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
- **learnndirect** 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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## North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry (NECC) is a limited company and is owned by its members. It is one of the largest chamber of commerce in the country, and the only regional one. It has headquarters in Durham and nine training centres located in the main cities and towns throughout the Northeast. At the time of the inspection, NECC was in its 10th year of operation and was opening its 10th learning centre in Durham. NECC holds contracts with the regional Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) of Tees Valley, North Yorkshire, Durham, Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, and with Jobcentre Plus.

2. Training is provided in land-based, construction, engineering, business administration, information and communications technology (ICT), retailing and customer service, hospitality, visual and performing arts, health, and foundation programmes. NECC subcontracts provision including construction, motor vehicle and land-based training, assessment and internal verification to 17 subcontractors including local colleges. For some learners the whole learning programme, including on- and off-the-job training, delivery of key skills qualifications and progress reviews, is subcontracted. For other learners, only the off-the-job training is subcontracted.

3. At the time of the inspection, NECC had 1,962 learners. Of these, 563 were advanced apprentices, 893 were apprentices, 244 were on apprenticeships for young people, 73 were on the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme and 131 were on Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes for adults. Additionally, 46 learners were funded through the employer training pilot (ETP) and 12 were on provision funded through the European Social Fund (ESF).

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 3**

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** NECC's leadership and management are satisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Provision is good in health, social care and public services, and satisfactory in business administration, management and professional, engineering, technology and manufacturing, ICT, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, and foundation programmes. Provision is inadequate in retailing, customer service and transportation.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process is inclusive and uses evidence from a wide range of sources including quality monitoring, learners' and employers' feedback, observations of teaching and learning, verifiers' reports, previous self-assessment reports, retention and achievement outcomes and inspection reports. The report is referenced against the Common Inspection Framework. The grades awarded to occupational areas are broadly in line with inspection grades.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.**

Retention and achievement rates for learners at all levels are improving but the rate of increase is slow. Development plans are detailed and well structured, but some weaknesses identified at the previous inspection remain. Actions are planned and implemented but the effectiveness of these actions is not always monitored.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTH EAST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY:

- continue to improve retention and achievement rate
- improve the quality of learning
- improve the monitoring of new initiatives and development plans
- improve the quality of learners' reviews and target-setting
- increase the rigour of quality improvement mechanisms
- increase the effectiveness of the sharing of good practice
- improve activities to widen participation of under-represented groups

## GRADES

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

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<b>Mechanical engineering</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	123	3	
<b>Electrical engineering</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	42	3	
<b>Manufacturing</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	30	3	
Other government-funded provision	5	3	
Employer training pilot	3	3	
<b>Other contributory areas</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	126	3	

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Business administration</i></b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	318	3	
NVQ training for young people	4	3	
<b><i>Accounting and economics</i></b>		<b>2</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	175	2	
NVQ training for young people	58	2	

<b>Information &amp; communications technology</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Developing IT systems</i></b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	73	3	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	91	3	
Employer training pilot	1	3	

<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>			<b>4</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Retailing</i></b>		<b>4</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	34	4	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	10	4	
<b><i>Customer service</i></b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	145	3	
Employer training pilot	12	3	
NVQ training for young people	2	3	
<b><i>Warehousing and distribution</i></b>		<b>4</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	43	4	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	14	3	
Employer training pilot	8	None	

<b>Hospitality, sport, leisure &amp; travel</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Hospitality and catering</i></b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	90	3	

<b>Health, social care &amp; public services</b>			<b>2</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Dental</i></b>		<b>2</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	149	2	

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Literacy</i> Entry to Employment	66	3

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. All areas of learning except land-based provision, construction, visual and performing arts and motor vehicle engineering were reported on and graded. Evidence was collected from these areas to support judgements in the key findings section of the report. Within health, social care and public services, NECC provides training in oral health care and for laboratory technicians. Due to illness, the inspection team was unable to inspect or grade the laboratory technician training. The overall grade for health, social care and public services reflects only the training of oral health care learners, who make up about 40 per cent of the numbers in the area as a whole. Inspectors visited NECC once in the four weeks leading up to the final inspection visit.

Number of inspectors	15
Number of inspection days	65
Number of learners interviewed	168
Number of staff interviewed	141
Number of employers interviewed	62
Number of subcontractors interviewed	4
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	27
Number of visits	2

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

8. **Learners are able to take a wide range of additional qualifications.** Many engineering learners successfully achieve qualifications at a higher level than required for their apprenticeship. Over a quarter of hospitality learners gain one additional qualification or more, and learners on accounting programmes have the opportunity to achieve health and safety certificates and book-keeping qualifications. Agricultural learners successfully gain additional qualifications in areas such as shearing, driving and the use of chemicals. All learners who complete the E2E programme achieve one or more qualifications. Their confidence is improved by the development of personal and teamwork skills generated by their participation in a wide range of enrichment activities such as outdoor activities and study visits. Learners' pass rates on external accounting examinations are high, with all level 2 national vocational qualification (NVQ) learners passing the most recent accounting examination. In oral health care, learners' pass rates at the independent assessment,



administered by the national examination board for dental nursing, usually exceed the national average.

9. **Engineering learners confidently produce high-quality work** including welding, machine setting and operating, fitting and electrical skills. Many achieve this standard early in their programme. Learners on technician programmes use computer-aided design software confidently and capably, and produce work to a high standard. They are involved in complex and demanding projects and make a valuable contribution to their employers' business. **Accounting learners develop high-level workplace skills** enabling them to move confidently from basic book-keeping duties to preparing taxation computations and attending clients' premises as part of an audit team. **Adult retailing learners develop good employability skills** which prepare them for placement in the industry.

10. The overall framework achievement rate at NECC is low, but the upward trend identified at the reinspection of November 2003 continues. The achievement rate for learners starting apprenticeships between 2001 and 2003 has improved by 9 per cent. In accounting, the framework completion rate is good, and recent improvements in some areas such as ICT are having a positive effect. The rate of framework completion is satisfactory in oral health care and learners on foundation programmes are making satisfactory progress. In business administration, the framework completion rate is satisfactory, but learners at one centre are making slow progress. **In hospitality and customer service, retailing and warehousing, framework completion rates are unsatisfactory.**

### The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	3	1	4
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	1	2	0	3
Foundation programmes	0	2	0	0	2
Health, social care & public services	0	1	1	0	2
Information & communications technology	0	1	1	0	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>

11. NECC is very effective in finding good work placements and employment for learners. Employers are supportive and workplaces provide good opportunities for learners to develop their occupational skills. **Placements and employers are particularly good in business administration, engineering, ICT, retailing, customer service and foundation programmes.** Engineering learners have the opportunity to try a placement before committing to employment. Many learners can experience different job roles to develop their skills further and gain the appropriate evidence to complete their qualification. Many employers provide additional training and good job opportunities, and learners often progress into jobs or are promoted at their placement. Learners have time during working hours to develop their portfolios and study for examinations. Employers of customer service learners provide an effective induction into the workplace. Some business administration learners carry out responsible tasks without direct supervision and employers have recognised this by rewarding them. Dental practice managers and dentists help oral health care learners to gain a better understanding of the background knowledge required by the qualification.

12. NECC provides good support for its learners. **Support is particularly good in business administration and accounting, engineering, ICT, hospitality and oral health care.**

Learners have effective working relationships with trainers. All learners have good access to their tutors and assessors at NECC's premises, through regular and frequent visits in the workplace or by mobile phone and e-mail. Learners receive sensitive and confidential help with matters that represent a barrier to their learning and employment. ICT staff are attentive and sensitive to the needs of adult learners and provide individual guidance and advice. The intervention and support of NECC's staff has enabled many learners to stay in learning.

13. **Learning is planned well in oral health care**, where integration of on- and off-the-job learning is good. In ICT, jobsearch sessions are planned and delivered particularly effectively. Detailed schemes of work support meaningful session plans. **Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills for foundation learners is effective** and is used to plan their learning programme.

14. Jobsearch sessions for adult participants on Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes are delivered well through a wide range of teaching and learning methods. All sessions but one observed by inspectors were satisfactory or better. Resources are good, but staff use too limited a range of training methods. In engineering, some staff spend too much time talking to learners, and learners spend too much time taking notes. **Training is inadequate in warehousing**, where good training resources for adult learners have not been adapted for use with apprentices.

15. Although most learners on most programmes receive good support from staff, the recording of this support is insufficient. Target-setting to ensure learners make good progress is often unsatisfactory, as in the reinforcement of equality and diversity and health and safety at reviews. **Reviews remain poor in engineering. Reviews and action-planning at reviews is weak for adult participants in ICT.**

16. Assessment practice and the quality of learners' portfolios is generally satisfactory. Assessors use a variety of assessment methods and learners contribute workplace evidence. In a few cases assessment methods are too narrow. **Assessment practice is good in oral health care and ICT.** ICT assessors make creative use of new technology within the assessment process. Oral health care assessors provide detailed and constructive feedback. Their learners have good ownership of their portfolios and take responsibility for their own learning. **Some assessment practice in hospitality is poor**, with photographs of the training of learners being inappropriately used as assessment evidence. In retailing, portfolios are assessor-led with little contribution from learners. Assessment does not always take place when possible in other areas of learning. **On- and off-the-job training are not sufficiently co-ordinated in customer services. On-the-job learning in engineering is poorly planned**, with workplace learning not structured to meet the needs of the framework. **On E2E programmes, too much reliance is placed on the use of workbooks at one centre.**

### **Leadership and management**

17. **Formal and informal internal communication is good.** Regular meetings keep staff informed of developments and enable them to discuss specific matters as they arise. Staff work closely together to improve the service they offer to learners. Meeting agendas include standing items, actions are recorded and minutes are distributed. All centres are

connected to the company's intranet and use it well, accessing company policies, procedures, minutes and a broad range of information focused upon the training programmes. The staff conference provides all staff with the opportunity to review performance, identify priorities, set targets for the coming year and contribute to the self-assessment.

**18. NECC has made, and continues to make, significant investments in resources to benefit learners.** Training resources for oral health are good and the ICT resources are of a high quality. Training centres are well equipped and create a professional environment for learners. Staff are well qualified and NECC offers an extensive staff development programme, including a thorough staff induction.

**19. NECC has comprehensive and well-understood quality improvement policies and procedures** that cover each stage of the learning process, including recruitment, induction, initial assessment, individual learning plans, employer approval, on- and off-the-job training, assessment and verification, and progress reviews. These processes are planned, understood and generally used well. However, in 2003-04 only 34 per cent of the planned teaching and learning observations were completed.

20. NECC's directors and senior managers give clear strategic direction. The training company's strategic plan has clearly identified priorities which reflect the company's vision and mission. Priorities are clearly based upon local needs analysis, employers' input and the local LSCs' strategic priorities. Staff are involved in the strategic planning process.

21. Data at NECC is maintained centrally at the head office and is accurate and readily available. Managers monitor learners' retention and achievement rates regularly. Targets are used to measure success, but these are not always sufficiently challenging. Retention and achievement information is published regularly. Managers set targets for individual members of staff and monitor performance regularly.

22. NECC manages the provision of additional learning support satisfactorily, but insufficient staff have literacy and numeracy skills support qualifications. All learners receive an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language skills support needs at induction. Where support needs are identified, learners receive mostly good support. For apprentices on land-based qualifications, this specialist support has only recently been made available. NECC has satisfactory arrangements to share good practice and monitor new initiatives. The effect of the company's best practice group can be seen in some areas. However, inconsistencies still remain in the management of programmes.

23. The internal verification procedures are thorough. The internal verifier team meets regularly to review assessment practice and to standardise assessment decisions. Assessors in each occupational area meet to share in training and assessment in the area of learning. NECC has developed guidance for staff to improve assessment practice and all new staff take the new assessor awards as part of their induction. These initiatives are yet to have a significant effect upon the quality of assessment practice in some occupational areas.

24. NECC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and clear procedures to cover bullying and harassment. Staff have received equality and diversity training which focuses on raising awareness. Learners and staff are supported well. Recruitment and selection procedures for staff are good. NECC's dignity at work policy has been well received. An

extensive accessibility audit has been carried out, and alternative arrangements are made where training centres are inaccessible to wheelchair users.

25. Learners receive thorough equality and diversity training in their induction. They enjoy this training and have satisfactory understanding of equality. However, equality and diversity are not sufficiently reinforced during the programme or at progress reviews. The management of learners' health and safety is satisfactory. **However, in retailing and warehousing, the reinforcement of health and safety for learners is weak** and learners have poor awareness of the subject. Some warehousing learners do not always wear appropriate personal protective equipment.

26. **NECC's central co-ordination and management of its subcontractor arrangements is weak.** A manager is soon to take up specific responsibility for the management of subcontracted training. The contract document that NECC uses for its subcontractors is inadequate. It does not set quality standards or targets, and does not clearly indicate how the contract will be monitored or managed. Centre managers negotiate and monitor the subcontractor arrangements. Some centre managers are demanding of subcontractors, but other monitoring is less thorough. Regular meetings are held with subcontractors' staff and learners are monitored closely in most cases.

27. **NECC has not sufficiently promoted equality of opportunity.** Managers collect and monitor application and recruitment data by learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. They are aware that some groups are under-represented on NECC's training programmes, but actions to deal with this are unsatisfactory. The arrangements NECC has made to raise employers' awareness of equality and diversity are ineffective. An employers' meeting has been planned and responses have been positive. All new members of staff are required to get a Criminal Records Bureau check before their appointment.

28. **NECC's monitoring of quality improvement initiatives is ineffective.** A number of weaknesses identified at previous inspections, including weak progress reviews, remain despite action being planned to deal with them. NECC implements plans but does not rigorously monitor the effect and success of these. Some audit reports do not include the detail needed by managers to bring about improvements.

29. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It takes into account a broad range of evidence from quality monitoring and includes learners' and employers' feedback. Staff are fully involved in the consultation process. Each occupational area considers its own strengths and weaknesses which contribute to the final report. The report is referenced against the Common Inspection Framework. The self-assessment grades given to occupational areas are broadly in line with inspection grades. Development plans are detailed and well structured, but some weaknesses identified at the previous inspection remain.

## Leadership and management

### Strengths

- good internal communication
- good investment in resources to benefit learners
- comprehensive and well-understood quality improvement arrangements

## **Weaknesses**

- weak management of some subcontracted training
- insufficient use of targets to widen participation and promote equality and diversity
- ineffective monitoring of quality improvement initiatives

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### *Strengths*

- good personal support for learners
- good development and assessment of key skills
- good placement of learners with employers
- high standard of learners' work
- good achievement of additional qualifications

### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity
- weak progress reviews
- inadequate planning of on-the-job training
- low retention and achievement rates for apprentices

## **Business administration, management & professional**

### ***Business administration***

***Grade 3***

### *Strengths*

- good standard of work placements
- good personal support for learners

### *Weaknesses*

- slow progress by learners at one centre
- insufficient involvement of workplace supervisors in learners' programmes

### ***Accounting and economics***

***Grade 2***

### *Strengths*

- particularly good support for learners
- good skills development
- high pass rates in accounting exams

### *Weaknesses*

- weak use of initial assessment

## **Information & communications technology**

### *Strengths*

- particularly effective planning and delivery of jobsearch
- good range of employer placements
- very good support for learners
- good use of resources

### *Weaknesses*

- poor retention and achievement rates on apprenticeship programmes
- insufficient action-planning in adult participants' progress reviews

## **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

### ***Retailing***

***Grade 4***

### *Strengths*

- good, supportive workplaces
- good development of employability skills on adult programmes

### *Weaknesses*

- poor framework completion rates
- slow progress for many learners
- some poor health and safety awareness

### ***Customer service***

***Grade 3***

### *Strengths*

- good-quality workplaces
- good support for learners
- thorough induction for non-employed learners

### *Weaknesses*

- low framework completion rates
- insufficient planning and co-ordination of learning
- insufficient reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity

### ***Warehousing and distribution***

***Grade 4***

### *Strengths*

- good opportunities to progress in the workplace
- good training resources for adult participants

*Weaknesses*

- poor retention and achievement rates for apprentices
- some slow progress towards framework completion
- inadequate training for apprentices
- some poor health and safety awareness

**Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**

*Strengths*

- good range and achievement of additional qualifications
- good individual support for learners

*Weaknesses*

- poor apprenticeship achievement rate
- some inappropriate assessment practice

**Health, social care & public services**

***Dental***

***Grade 2***

*Strengths*

- good support for learners
- good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- good assessment practice

*Weaknesses*

- insufficient promotion of equality and diversity

**Foundation programmes**

*Strengths*

- particularly supportive work placements
- good provision of additional qualifications and enrichment activities
- effective initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills

*Weaknesses*

- slow progress for some learners
- over-reliance on workbook learning in one centre

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTH EAST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY:**

- the help given with personal issues and to build confidence - 'gave me confidence to apply for a job'
- the good support by managers and advisers - 'got me a suitable job straight away'
- the good training in the workplace
- the regular visits for assessments and reviews
- the good learning experience
- the really nice atmosphere and friendly staff
- the good preparation for work and to study
- getting to know new people
- getting a qualification

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK NORTH EAST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY COULD IMPROVE:**

- induction - it could be arranged away from work
- the pace of sessions - the tutor could slow down a little when explaining things
- the variety of teaching
- the initial advice and guidance
- the paperwork, such as timesheets - there is too much



## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 3**

#### Strengths

- good internal communication
- good investment in resources to benefit learners
- comprehensive and well-understood quality improvement arrangements

#### Weaknesses

- weak management of some subcontracted training
- insufficient use of targets to widen participation and promote equality and diversity
- ineffective monitoring of quality improvement initiatives

30. Internal communication is good. Staff work closely together to improve the service they offer to learners. Regular meetings at all management levels include best practice groups, cross-centre groups, internal verifiers, centre managers, assessors and senior managers. Staff hold frequent and productive informal meetings to deal with very specific matters. The company's intranet is well used. All learning centres are connected, providing access to company policies, procedures, minutes and a broad range of information focused on the training programmes. Staff can post information online through the intranet noticeboard. The staff conference provides all staff with the opportunity to review performance, identify priorities, set targets for the coming year and contribute to self-assessment.

31. NECC makes a significant investment in the development of its resources to benefit learners. Over one million pounds is shortly to be invested in a complete upgrade of the engineering training centre and a training centre is to be opened in Durham. There are good resources for oral health, training centres are generally of a high specification and the ICT resources are high quality. NECC makes a significant investment in its workforce. All staff have an annual appraisal and complete a training needs analysis which includes core job skills, information technology (IT) skills and job-specific skills. Staff development arrangements are good. New staff have a thorough and well-structured 12-week induction and are effectively supported by experienced mentors. Staff have access to an excellent range of training linked to their job role and individual development priorities. NECC has recently implemented a development programme to improve assessment practice and support for learners. Improvements in these areas can be seen in engineering, business administration, ICT and oral healthcare.

32. NECC's directors and senior managers give clear strategic direction. The training company's strategic plan has clearly identified priorities which reflect NECC's vision and mission. Priorities are based on local needs analysis, employers' input and the local LSCs' strategic priorities. Staff are involved in the strategic planning process. Centre managers have a significant input in developing key objectives and have specific responsibility for their achievement. Strategic objectives and priorities in the development and implementation plans are mostly descriptive, highlighting priority areas and actions, but

with insufficient performance measures, targets and success indicators. Interim review dates and monitoring procedures are unclear and some actions have not been updated for 12 months.

33. The overall framework completion rate remains low, but has improved by 9 per cent between 2001 and 2003. The current data indicates that the improvement in retention and achievement rates identified at the reinspection has continued in most occupational areas. The achievement rate for apprentices starting between 2001 and 2003 has improved to 31 per cent. The achievement rate for advanced apprentices starting in 2001-02 is 47 per cent. Inspectors have judged that most learners are making satisfactory progress against the targets in their learning plans. Approximately 70 per cent of learners progress into employment. This supports the NECC's judgement in the self-assessment report of continued improvement and 2001-02 was the most successful year to date for meeting targets.

34. Data at NECC is maintained at the head office and is regularly and thoroughly audited to ensure accuracy. Learners' retention and achievement is regularly monitored by managers. Much of the monitoring is based on contract management and the retention and achievement of learners at learning centres and not by area of learning. This provides an unrealistic indication of retention and achievement. In 2000, NECC set very challenging targets for retention and achievement rates by area of learning, which are reviewed annually. Retention and achievement rates in some areas of learning have exceeded these targets but the targets have not been revised. Retention and achievement rates are published by NECC quarterly. The data is displayed as graphs of maximum possible retention and achievement set against targets and not actual retention and achievement rates. Some staff misunderstand these measures, and the way they contribute to these targets is unclear. The overall retention and achievement targets set in some paperwork are not sufficiently clear. Inspectors are unable to correlate these targets with the published targets by area of learning, published in April 2005.

35. Financial management is sound and the NECC's external financial audit was good. The training company slightly exceeded its contract target in 2003-04, and is currently above profile for this year. Managers closely monitor starts and unplaced learners on a weekly basis. There is close monitoring of devolved budgets by the training director who receives monthly financial reports.

36. NECC's management of additional learning support is satisfactory, but insufficient staff have literacy and numeracy skills support qualifications. All learners receive an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language skills support needs at induction. Where support needs are identified, learners receive mostly good individual support. This support has only recently become available for apprentices on land-based qualifications. ICT learners with identified additional support needs are referred to specialist support.

37. The management of learners' health and safety is satisfactory. The staff identified by NECC as responsible for learners' health and safety either have appropriate qualifications or have been trained. The engineering area of learning has an effective system for vetting employers and for ensuring liability insurance is up to date. In oral healthcare, health and safety is satisfactory and all learners follow good cross-infection control. Hospitality learners have developed a health and safety handbook as part of a key skills project. In retailing, customer service and warehousing, learners' awareness of health and safety is poor. Some

warehousing learners do not always wear appropriate personal protective equipment.

38. Central co-ordination and management of the subcontractor arrangements is weak. A manager with specific responsibility for the management of subcontracted training is soon to take up his post. At the time of the inspection, 302 of NECC's learners were on programmes subcontracted to 17 organisations throughout the region. The whole learning programme of some learners, including on- and off-the-job training, delivery of key skills and progress reviews, is subcontracted. For other learners, only the off-the-job training is subcontracted. The contract document is inadequate. It lists what the subcontractor will deliver in terms of qualifications but it does not set quality standards or targets, and does not clearly indicate how the contract will be monitored or managed. Centre managers negotiate and monitor the subcontractor arrangements, but the thoroughness of this monitoring is not consistent. Some centre managers are demanding of subcontractors, but monitoring by others is less thorough. Meetings are held with subcontractors' staff every three months. These meetings are recorded and, in most cases, close monitoring of learners takes place. The contract arrangements are audited each year, but the action plans do not include clear targets for improvement. In some cases, NECC's managers are slow to implement actions to rectify the concerns identified by the audit. This weakness is recognised in the current self-assessment report. The development plan resulting from the 2004 self-assessment report lists the actions which are to be taken, but these will not be completed until February 2006.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

39. Learners and staff are well supported at NECC. Recruitment and selection procedures for staff are good. The company's dignity at work policy has been well received. Staff induction is thorough and all staff are allocated a mentor. NECC offers an extensive programme for staff development which includes equality and diversity. Staff work effectively to ensure that all learners have access to learning. Special travel arrangements are made for learners who live in rural or outlying areas. In partnership with Connexions, NECC makes mopeds available to learners where public transport is unavailable or inconvenient. NECC allows learners who are no longer eligible for funding to remain in training to complete their qualifications. Tutors hold evening training and coaching sessions for learners who cannot attend daytime off-the-job training sessions. They arrange visits at home for learners who cannot come to the training centre. Learners are supported well in the workplace, and NECC's staff have intervened successfully to maintain many learners in good learning environments. Additional support is readily available for learners who need it. An extensive accessibility audit has been carried out, making managers aware that some of NECC's training centres are inaccessible to wheelchair users. The alternative attendance arrangements that NECC makes where necessary, are satisfactory but are not always convenient for potential learners.

40. Learners enjoy the thorough and well-planned equality and diversity training included in their induction, and have a satisfactory understanding of equality. However, equality and diversity are not sufficiently reinforced during the programme or at progress reviews unless equality of opportunity is a unit within the learner's NVQ. During progress reviews, staff ask learners a question about equality and diversity from a list of pre-prepared questions. These questions are intended to promote discussion about topics such as harassment and prompt to learners to share experiences. However, the range of questions has been reduced since the reinspection and the implementation of this process, in many cases, is superficial.

41. NECC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and clear procedures to cover bullying and harassment. The equality statement is included in the learners' handbook and a version is produced for learners. The complaints procedure is appropriate and well publicised. Staff have received equality and diversity training which focuses on raising awareness, rather than the implementation of policies and reinforcing learners' and employers' understanding.

42. NECC has not sufficiently promoted equality of opportunity. It has taken little positive action to encourage under-represented groups to join programmes. NECC's managers collect and monitor application and recruitment data by learners' gender, ethnicity and disability. They are aware that some groups are under-represented on NECC's training programmes, but actions to deal with this are unsatisfactory. The company makes some use of positive role models in its marketing and publicity materials, but has no strategy or targets for attracting under-represented groups. It has taken some action and has links with some community groups. In 2003, the Middlesbrough centre arranged taster sessions in engineering for young women, and applications by women increased by 6 per cent in the following year. This activity has not been repeated and there are now few applications from women. NECC takes no positive action to attract women on construction or land-based programmes and little action to encourage men to apply for oral health care programmes. Two women are on construction courses and one man is following oral health care programmes. As identified in the self-assessment report, the arrangements NECC has made to raise employers' awareness of equality and diversity are ineffective. An employers' meeting has been planned and responses have been positive. All new members of staff are required to get a Criminal Records Bureau check before their appointment, but NECC does not yet have a strategy to ensure existing staff are checked.

### **Quality improvement**

### **Contributory grade 3**

43. NECC has comprehensive and well-understood quality improvement policies and procedures that cover each stage of the learning process, including recruitment, induction, initial assessment, individual learning plans, employer approval, on- and off-the-job training, assessment and verification, and progress reviews. Training in the use of the quality assurance system is included in staff members' induction and the process is generally planned and used well. Electronic copies of the manual are available on NECC's intranet, and staff are regularly notified of any updates. All procedures indicate clear lines of accountability. Learners' and employers' feedback is collected annually and satisfaction rates are high. Observation of key training processes includes interviews, induction in the workplace, developing individual learning plans, teaching and learning, progress reviews and employer sign-ups. However, in 2003-04, only 34 per cent of the planned teaching and learning observations were completed.

44. Systems for sharing good practice are contributing to improvements. A best practice, group including representatives from all training centres, meets quarterly to review training procedures and the success of new initiatives. Occupational area teams meet quarterly to share best practice across their occupational sector and to review external verifier reports, course materials and performance. However, inconsistencies still remain in the management of programmes.

45. The internal verification procedures are thorough. The internal verifier team meets regularly to review assessment practice and standardise assessment decisions. Monthly

assessors' meetings provide a further forum for sharing good practice and standardising assessment practice. All verifiers have updated their qualifications to the latest verifier standards and mentors provide good support for new assessors. NECC has developed some good practice materials including a 'back to basics in assessment' guide to improve assessment practice. This is still to have a significant effect on the quality of assessment practice in some areas of learning.

46. Monitoring of quality improvement initiatives is ineffective. Despite action to rectify them, a number of weaknesses identified at previous inspections remain, including weak progress reviews and slow progress of learners. Annual reports are produced for each key activity such as observation of teaching and learning, but these are insufficiently thorough and do not clearly identify the actions which need to be taken to bring about improvement. In some instances, feedback focuses on operational compliance and not quality improvement. Reports are sent to centre managers detailing the corrective action required. The effectiveness and timeliness of actions taken by centre managers are not sufficiently monitored. Some centres are slow to respond and, in some cases, actions are still outstanding eight months after reports have been issued.

47. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. It takes into account a broad range of evidence from quality monitoring, learners' and employers' feedback, teaching and learning observations, internal and external verifier reports, previous self-assessment reports, retention and achievement outcomes and inspection reports. Staff are fully involved in the consultation process. Each occupational area considers their own strengths and weaknesses. Programme area reports are moderated and then contribute to the final report, which is referenced against the Common Inspection Framework. The grades given to occupational areas in the self-assessment report are broadly in line with inspection grades. Development plans are detailed and structured well but do not include sufficient challenging targets and success measures.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Mechanical engineering</b> Apprenticeships for young people	123	3
<b>Electrical engineering</b> Apprenticeships for young people	42	3
<b>Manufacturing</b> Apprenticeships for young people	30	3
Other government-funded provision	5	3
Employer training pilot	3	3
<b>Other contributory areas</b> Apprenticeships for young people	126	3

48. There are 338 learners on apprenticeships for young people in engineering, manufacturing and technology. This total is made up of 110 advanced apprentices, 186 apprentices and 42 learners on NVQ-only programmes. Of these learners, 126 are following general engineering programmes including engineering maintenance, engineering production, technical services and performing engineering operations. Forty-two learners are following programmes in electrical engineering, 123 in mechanical engineering, 30 in manufacturing and 17 in motor vehicle engineering. The motor vehicle programme is subcontracted to another training provider and was not inspected. In addition to the apprenticeships, five learners are on an ESF-funded project called ACE and three learners are on the ETP programme known locally as EQ8. Fourteen learners are women and five are from minority ethnic groups.

49. Most learners are employed and attend either the NECC training centre or a local college of further education one day a week for off-the-job training. Other learners complete all of their training in their company.

#### Strengths

- good personal support for learners
- good development and assessment of key skills
- good placement of learners with employers
- high standard of learners' work
- good achievement of additional qualifications

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and promotion of equality and diversity
- weak progress reviews
- inadequate planning of on-the-job training
- low retention and achievement rates for apprentices



## Achievement and standards

50. Learners are able to take a wide range of additional qualifications and are successful with these. These include qualifications in first aid, health and safety, site safety, computer-aided design, lift truck driving and specialised welding processes. Many learners achieve qualifications, including key skills qualifications, at a higher level than required for their apprenticeship. Some learners study for higher national certificates and a few take degrees.

51. Learners develop particularly good practical skills at work. Employers provide good training in practical tasks to meet company requirements. Learners confidently produce high-quality work including welding, machine setting and operating, fitting and electrical skills. Many achieve this standard early in their programme. Learners on technician programmes are confident and capable in their use of computer-aided design software and produce work to a high standard. They are involved in complex and demanding projects and make a valuable contribution to their employers' business. Employers are pleased with the quality of the learners and are keen to develop their skills as quickly as possible. Learners are well motivated and respond well to challenges.

52. The retention rate for apprentices is low, but improving. Nearly 70 per cent of those who started in 2001-02 left without completing. This rate has improved consistently in subsequent years. Of those who started in 2002-03, 53 per cent left without completing and of those who started in 2003-04, 48 per cent left without completing. Of the 113 learners who started in the current year, 21 per cent have already left without completing. The achievement rate on apprenticeships is also low. Just 31 per cent of those who started in 2001-02 completed all the components of their apprenticeship. However, this has improved to 40 per cent of those who started in 2002-03. Inspectors judged that those still on the programme are making at least satisfactory progress. Of the advanced apprentices who started in 2001-02, just 6 per cent completed their framework. This rate has improved for those who started in 2002-03, but as 58 per cent of this intake are still working towards their qualification it is too early to judge the extent of this improvement.

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

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	30		49		55	100	32	100								
Retained*	0		1		9	16	8	25								
Successfully completed	0		0		6	11	2	6								
Still in learning	27		42		32	58	9	28								

\*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	113		202		147	100	52	100								
Retained*	0		26		84	57	19	37								
Successfully completed	0		18		59	40	16	31								
Still in learning	89		87		10	7	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																
Employer training pilot	2004-05		2003-04													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		4	100												
Retained*	0		4	100												
Successfully completed	0		4	100												
Still in learning	3		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																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	13		18	100	25	100	138	100								
Retained*	0		1	6	8	32	59	43								
Successfully completed	0		0	0	6	24	52	38								
Still in learning	12		16	89	6	24	8	6								

\*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. NECC is very effective in finding good work placements and employment for learners. Most learners are found a work placement within five weeks of starting their training programme. Just eight of the current learners do not have a work placement and most learners are employed. Learners have the opportunity to try a placement before committing to employment. If the learner or employer is not satisfied with the placement then NECC's staff will work with the learner to find a more suitable placement. Once a suitable placement is found, NECC's staff work with the employer to set a target date for the learner to be fully employed. Some learners are found good employment opportunities within days of starting their programme. The employment and placement rate of learners is a key performance indicator for all centres and is monitored monthly.

54. The development, planning and assessment of learners' key skills good. The assessment of key skills is integrated well into the assessment of learners' NVQs and technical certificates. Plans clearly show how the key skills will be assessed in conjunction with other aspects of the programme. Where aspects of the key skills cannot be assessed



directly using evidence from learners' normal work activities, learners are set relevant assignments. For example, one learner gave a presentation to his managers on his training programme and how his NVQ is assessed, reinforcing the employer's understanding and developing the learner's communications skills. Pass rates for key skills examination are good. Where learners hold exemptions they are encouraged to attempt key skills qualifications at a higher level, and many do.

55. Learners receive particularly good support although it is not always sufficiently recorded. All learners are allocated to a training adviser. NECC has taken effective actions to allow training advisers to spend more time with learners and employers. One training officer has received training to support learners with dyslexia and is supporting other staff to identify dyslexic learners. Learners and employers have good access to training advisers, who maintain regular and frequent contact with learners. Learners and employers value the high level of contact and support. Learners receive good personal support including help to find accommodation. For example, one learner who was made homeless was found accommodation by NECC's staff and has been able to continue with his training programme. Where learners are at risk of losing their job for whatever reason, NECC effectively intervenes. Where possible, learners and employers are helped to enable the learners to continue with their employment, but where this is not possible NECC will find an alternative placement. One learner recently received training to help him to pass his driving test, enabling him to keep his job.

56. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. All of the training sessions observed by inspectors were satisfactory or better. The better sessions were well structured and included a good mix of practical and background knowledge teaching. Practical tasks were well chosen to reinforce the theory. Learners were attentive, well motivated and learnt well. Attendance was good. In the less effective sessions, tutors made ineffective use of projectors and visual information. They talked too much and too much time was wasted while learners copied information or made notes. Tutors did not adequately check learners' understanding before moving on to new information.

57. All learners have their literacy and numeracy skills tested before they start their learning programme. Very few learners have been identified as needing support, and those who need it are receiving it. Assessors have received no formal training in delivering literacy and numeracy skills support, but key skills training is ongoing and some advisers are qualified practitioners.

58. The planning of on-the-job training is inadequate. Few learners have a written training plan. Employers give training to meet the immediate demands of the workplace, and training is not structured to meet the demands of the programme that the learner is following. Employers normally plan the execution of work to a high degree and well in advance but do not plan the training for their learners. Insufficient attention is given to planning how the demands of learners' qualifications will be met and how learners' skills and knowledge will be developed over time.

59. Reviews of learners' progress are weak. They do not give learners or employers a clear view of the progress learners are making or what they need to do next. Short- and medium-term targets are often vague and unhelpful. For example, one learner's target was to 'make a start on key skills'. Targets are not referenced to the achievement of the apprenticeship, are rarely about learning and development, and are too often simply about

the collection of evidence. Reviews often do not consider the progress of learners in relation to all aspects of their programme including the technical certificate, key skills qualifications and NVQ. In some reviews, learners are not given the opportunity for a confidential discussion with their reviewer. Checks on how the learner has been treated are superficial. There is little attempt to explore learners' understanding of the matters raised and learners' responses are not recorded. Opportunities to reinforce learners' understanding are not taken.

### **Leadership and management**

60. The management of engineering programmes is satisfactory overall. Clear targets for retention and achievement rates have been set and are monitored. Actions to improve the retention and achievement rates have been taken, and rates are improving. Centre managers set individual targets for training advisers, but the relationship between these and the centre's targets is weak. Data is used to monitor some aspects of the provision well, but it is not adequately used in all areas. NECC conducted a detailed analysis of the results of learners taking their technical certificate in the Middlesbrough centre, and has made improvements in the structure and teaching of this programme. However, the success rates of learners who take their technical certificate at a local college have not been analysed.

61. A few learners are on inappropriate qualifications. One learner who has moved employers and now works in a garage is not taking a suitable motor vehicle qualification. Four learners are following a qualification in manufacturing at one employer, but this is not suitable for the work they are doing and is unlikely to allow them to progress to a higher-level qualification.

62. Internal verification is satisfactory. The process is systematic and recorded well. Sampling plans are thorough. Feedback to assessors is recorded but does not contribute to the assessor's performance appraisal. Standardisation meetings are held, but do not give sufficient time to the standardisation of assessment practice and standards.

63. Self-assessment is satisfactory. The updated self-assessment report provided in May 2004 correctly identifies many of the strengths and significant weaknesses of the provision. However, it does not identify weaknesses in progress reviews and the promotion and monitoring of equality and diversity.

64. NECC does not monitor or promote equality and diversity sufficiently. It has not taken sufficient action to target under-represented groups and has not built on the success of previous activities. All learners are given a copy of NECC's equal opportunities policy and this is explained at their induction. However, the monitoring of learners' treatment in employment, and the reinforcement of learners' knowledge after this, is weak.

**Business administration, management & professional****Grade 3**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b><i>Business administration</i></b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	318	3
NVQ training for young people	4	3
<b><i>Accounting and economics</i></b>		<b>2</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	175	2
NVQ training for young people	58	2

65. NECC offers apprenticeships and NVQ training in business administration, accountancy and management. There are 252 apprentices, 66 advanced apprentices and four NVQ learners in business administration. In addition, there are 86 apprentices and 89 advanced apprentices in accounting, as well as 58 learners working towards the accounting technician NVQ at level 4. Advanced apprentices and NVQ learners have employed status but apprentices generally do not.

66. Learners can join the apprenticeship programme at any time of the year. Recruitment is through referral from Connexions and schools, contacts from employers and personal application as a result of advertising campaigns. All learners attend a one-week induction programme at one of eight training centres. Business administration learners have the opportunity to attend off-the-job training through day-release at a training centre. All accounting learners attend day-release training at one of four centres.

67. A team of 25 training advisers visit the business administration learners in the workplace every two to three weeks to carry out work-based assessment and to provide portfolio-building and key skills support. Three members of staff carry out internal verification. Learners' progress reviews are completed every 12 weeks with the learner and the workplace supervisor. There are six accounting tutors/assessors, three of whom also do internal verification. There are also six training advisers who complete the learners' progress reviews in the workplace with the learners and the supervisors.

***Business administration******Grade 3******Strengths***

- good standard of work placements
- good personal support for learners

***Weaknesses***

- slow progress by learners at one centre
- insufficient involvement of workplace supervisors in learners' programmes

**Achievement and standards**

68. Retention and achievement rates for apprenticeships were poor before the reinspection in 2003 but now are improving. A satisfactory 175 of the 241 apprentices who started training in 2004-05 are still in learning. There has been a significant decline in

the number of learners who have left the programme without achieving the apprenticeship framework. The rate of progress has improved in the past two years and most learners are now making satisfactory progress.

69. Learners have access to an appropriate range of additional qualifications that enhance their career and employment prospects. Take-up and pass rates for additional qualifications are satisfactory. Learners develop a satisfactory range of skills and knowledge through their training. The standard of work that learners produce is appropriate for the stage they are at in their training.

70. Learners at one centre are making slow progress towards completing their apprenticeship frameworks. While learners have received training, most have not achieved units towards their NVQ despite being on programme for a considerable period of time. Most learners making slow progress have experienced changes in staff. New staffing arrangements have been introduced very recently and the progress of some learners has started to improve. NECC has identified this weakness in slow progress but the plan devised and implemented by the business administration team has not yet brought about sufficient improvement.

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	31		48		65	100	95	100								
Retained*	0		3		20	31	51	54								
Successfully completed	0		2		10	15	16	17								
Still in learning	24		29		9	14	4	4								

\*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	210		317		411	100	352	100								
Retained*	2		71		175	43	155	44								
Successfully completed	2		40		100	24	87	25								
Still in learning	151		93		8	2	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																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1		8	100	9	100	73	100								
Retained*	0		2	25	5	56	22	30								
Successfully completed	0		1	12	5	56	17	23								
Still in learning	1		3	38	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

71. Learners benefit from good-quality work placements. They work in a variety of organisations including accounting practices and offices in industry, solicitors, estate agents, local council and the health service. Working conditions are good and learners have access to good physical resources. Work placements are well matched to learners' interests and career aims. Many learners are able to move between roles at their employer to develop a range of skills. Placements offer a wide range of learning opportunities that allow learners to develop a good range of career and personal skills beyond those needed for their programme. In some cases, learners carry out responsible tasks without direct supervision. Some employers have recognised this by rewarding learners with financial incentives and paying for additional externally accredited courses. Many employers give learners time during working hours to develop their portfolios.

72. Learners receive good personal support. They have an effective working relationship with trainers and have good access to them through visits, telephone or e-mail. Learners receive sensitive and confidential help with matters that represent a barrier to their learning and employment. Those needing specialist support are referred to appropriate external agencies. However, these actions are not systematically recorded. Most employers are adequately involved in progress reviews. A number of learners have remained in learning and employment following intervention from training advisers.

73. Learning sessions are appropriately planned, and teaching and learning in off-the-job training sessions are satisfactory. However, in sessions graded during inspection as satisfactory, the teaching styles were insufficiently stimulating. Trainers usually evaluate their own teaching and make alterations to session plans if necessary. Paper-based learning resources are of a good standard. Learners have access to appropriate computer facilities and the internet. Accommodation and physical resources are satisfactory or better. Training rooms have wall displays of information, but these do not focus sufficiently on business administration. Trainers are suitably qualified and experienced. Attendance at off-the-job training sessions is satisfactory, and poor punctuality is dealt with effectively.

74. All learners receive an appropriate initial assessment and induction. Training advisers use the results of the assessment to develop the learners' individual learning plans and to plan additional support. Most learning plans are regularly and systematically updated. Appropriate use is made of accreditation of prior learning including exemptions from key skills qualifications. Progress reviews are satisfactory, but they do not always allow for confidential discussion with the learner. Comments and short-term targets recorded during the process satisfactorily encourage learners to achieve.

75. Support to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills is adequate. Learners receive support in group sessions or individually, at the workplace, or during off-the-job training sessions. The quality of learning materials used is good. At the time of inspection, three learners were receiving support.

76. Staff make regular and frequent visits to learners in the workplace to carry out assessment. Learners know in advance how and when they will be assessed. Written feedback to learners following assessment is usually detailed enough to ensure that learners know how well they are performing and how to develop in the future. Portfolios are structured well and contain a variety of evidence. Most evidence collected by learners is sourced from the workplace. Satisfactory use is made of assessment by observation. Some learners are not adequately guided to take effective responsibility for matching evidence to programme requirements. Evidence collected by learners for their NVQ programme is not effectively used to claim competence for key skills. NECC has recently introduced processes to improve the use of evidence, but it is too early to make a judgement on the effect of these initiatives.

77. Workplace supervisors are not sufficiently involved in the learners' programmes. Workplace supervisors receive some verbal feedback on the outcome of learners' assessment, but receive insufficient guidance on the activities and on-the-job training they should provide to allow learners to demonstrate the competence required of their programme. Employers often have an inadequate understanding of the standard learners must achieve for their programme. On-the-job training is not always effectively planned and linked to off-the-job training. This weakness was identified at the previous inspection and has not been adequately dealt with.

### **Leadership and management**

78. Actions taken by managers to improve the progress of learners have been ineffective, and practice between training centres has not yet been standardised. However, retention rates have improved. Formal and informal communications are effective in keeping staff informed of organisational developments. Regular meetings include a range of relevant standing agenda items. Actions are recorded and distributed. Data is effectively used for planning and decision-making to bring about improvement. However, centre meetings do not adequately focus on the monitoring of achievement and retention rates at the area of learning level, or specific details relating to each learner's progress. Staff receive annual appraisals that are effectively used to identify training needs. There are good opportunities for staff development. Resources are appropriately managed.

79. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They are confident that any concerns they raise will be dealt with in an effective and confidential manner. Oppressive behaviour is dealt with promptly. However, progress reviews are not effectively used to promote and check learners' understanding of equality of opportunity. The monitoring and use of targets to promote equality of opportunity is inadequate and the recruitment of learners tends to conform to gender stereotypes. Some staff have not yet received the equality and diversity training.

80. Internal verification is satisfactory. Verification is planned and detailed records are kept. Assessors receive detailed written feedback which enables them to bring about improvement. Arrangements for sharing good practice are satisfactory. Learners



understand how to appeal if they do not agree with an assessment decision. Quality assurance of the programme is appropriate. Arrangements are in place for collecting feedback from learners and employers and their satisfaction ratings are high. Staff were effectively involved in the production of the self-assessment report. Strengths and weaknesses in the report matched those found at inspection, but some weaknesses were overstated.

### **Accounting and economics**

### **Grade 2**

#### *Strengths*

- particularly good support for learners
- good skills development
- high pass rates in accounting exams

#### *Weaknesses*

- weak use of initial assessment

### **Achievement and standards**

81. Pass rates in external exams are high. The pass rate for level 2 NVQ learners at the most recent external accounting exam was 100 per cent, rising from 86 per cent at the previous exam. The framework completion rate for advanced apprentices has also consistently been high, although there is sometimes a time gap between the achievement of exams and the completion of the full framework. From the most recent three intakes, only one of which has reached the scheduled end date for their programmes, the framework completion rate has averaged 77 per cent. The achievement rate for apprentices and learners on NVQ programmes is satisfactory, but a significant number of learners are still in learning. Retention rates are satisfactory across all programmes.

82. Learners develop high-level workplace skills giving them the ability, skills and confidence to move from basic book-keeping duties to preparing taxation computations and attending clients' premises as part of an audit team. Learners make good progress throughout the three levels of the qualification. In one workplace, four ex-learners are studying professional accounting qualifications after completing apprenticeships with NECC. Learners also have the opportunity to achieve other qualifications including health and safety certificates and other basic book-keeping qualifications

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

<b>LSC funded work-based learning</b>																
<b>Advanced apprenticeships</b>	<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	72		74		56	100	44	100								
Retained*	0		44		39	70	34	77								
Successfully completed	0		41		34	61	30	68								
Still in learning	68		17		4	7	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									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	88		110		83	100	66	100								
Retained*	0		68		55	66	47	71								
Successfully completed	0		64		54	65	45	68								
Still in learning	70		15		1	1	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																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	48		45	100	47	100	113	100								
Retained*	1		28	62	33	70	73	65								
Successfully completed	1		25	56	30	64	68	60								
Still in learning	44		14	31	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

83. Good support is provided for learners. Extra tuition and assessment are available to support any learner needing more help. Learners often use the e-mail and telephone support available from tutors. Monitoring officers change learners' placements where necessary to meet their career aspirations and the requirements of their qualification. Learners are often placed very quickly after applying to NECC, with some securing a suitable work placement within a day. Workplaces are particularly supportive. In many placements, learners can experience different job roles to develop their skills further and gain the appropriate evidence to complete their qualification. Many companies offer further training opportunities for specific accounting requirements. Many learners are given study leave for exam revision. One work placement provides alternative arrangements for a learner with travel problems who cannot start work at the company's appointed time. One learner who is extremely shy, is being supported by NECC, his family and his work placement to overcome this problem. Satisfactory progress reviews occur, always involving the workplace supervisor.

84. Teaching is satisfactory. Teaching methods used are appropriate to the level and development of the learner, but the range of methods used is limited. A range of handouts and workbooks matches the requirements of the programme and meets learners' needs. Assessment is planned but this is not evident in some portfolios. The standard of learners' work in portfolios is satisfactory.

85. Reviewing officers visit learners in the workplace at least once every 12 weeks and often more frequently. These officers are qualified to assess the administration-based units of the level 2 programme but no assessment is planned or occurs during visits. Accounting units are only assessed in the training centres and naturally occurring evidence from the



workplace is not always assessed. For example, one learner is carrying out advanced spreadsheet modelling work, but this has not yet been recognised in her assessments.

86. No vocational initial assessment occurs and little use is made of the results of the initial assessment tools used. One learner has unnecessarily taken the same literacy and numeracy skills assessment twice in just over a year because their career aim changed. Results of initial assessment do not drive the learning programmes forward or raise more challenging targets for learners of high ability. Exemption from key skills qualifications is claimed, but few learners, if any, have been encouraged to take key skills qualifications at a higher level. No learners are currently identified as having any additional learning support needs.

### **Leadership and management**

87. Accounting programmes are managed satisfactorily. The off-the-job training is clearly planned. It is supported by a small range of satisfactory resources, but little use is made of ICT or electronic resources in teaching. The training rooms are adequate, although learners with restricted mobility have problems with access at one centre. The reinforcement of the learners' understanding of equality of opportunity varies across the centres. Internal verification is satisfactory overall, but the planning of assessment and verification is not synchronised. There are instances when planned verification activities cannot be completed because the assessment is planned to take place after the verification, and the standard of assessment for some NVQ units varies across centres. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the strengths but not the weakness found by inspectors.

**Information & communications technology****Grade 3**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b><i>Developing IT systems</i></b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	73	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	91	3
Employer training pilot	1	3

88. NECC has 165 learners on ICT programmes. Seventy-four of these are following qualifications in installing and supporting ICT, and using ICT, 52 are apprentices, 21 are advanced apprentices and one learners is on a work-based learning for adults programme. The remaining 91 are participants on Jobcentre Plus-funded longer occupational training (LOT) and intensive activity period programmes. These participants are working towards nationally recognised ICT qualifications. ICT programmes are offered at eight of NECC's centres. Learners have their suitability assessed by interview, a test of their literacy, numeracy and language skills, and a key skills diagnostic assessment. Jobcentre Plus participants are initially assessed before being submitted to NECC. Induction takes place at NECC or in the workplace. A subcontractor provides off-the-job training for some learners, but most is delivered at one of NECC's centres. Assessors visit the learners in the workplace every four weeks to provide training and assessment and every 12 weeks to review their progress.

*Strengths*

- particularly effective planning and delivery of jobsearch
- good range of employer placements
- very good support for learners
- good use of resources

*Weaknesses*

- poor retention and achievement rates on apprenticeship programmes
- insufficient action-planning in adult participants' progress reviews

**Achievement and standards**

89. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices are low. Recently introduced measures are starting to affect current learners, with assessors concentrating on improving the rate of learners' progress and supporting learners to complete their qualification within the agreed timeframe. Of the 45 learners recruited to apprenticeships in 2003-04, 33 per cent are still in training, and of the 53 learners recruited in 2004-05, 70 per cent are still in training. The retention rate for adult learners is currently 93 per cent. At the time of inspection, no learners were identified as making slow progress and all were on target to achieve within the target achievement dates in their learning plans.

90. Forty per cent of the participants who have completed Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes this year have successfully gained employment. Most participants are reluctant to join programmes. Many have significant personal problems and come from

third-generation unemployed families, and some have little desire to gain employment. A key objective for staff is to motivate these participants and restore their confidence and self-esteem. Most participants gain self-esteem and confidence during the programme and some feel able to present themselves in a much more positive and meaningful way to prospective employers. Interview and telephone technique sessions are regularly delivered. However, for many participants, their inability to communicate clearly with prospective employers during interviews is a barrier to employment.

91. Participants who are in training have a good understanding of IT skills and demonstrate them confidently. They produce work of a good standard and most do well at their mock assessments. They show a good grasp of jobsearch skills and are able to search the internet with confidence.

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	13		7		10	100	11	100								
Retained*	0		0		5	50	8	73								
Successfully completed	0		0		2	20	3	27								
Still in learning	12		4		4	40	1	9								

\*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	53		45		50	100	70	100								
Retained*	0		4		20	40	31	44								
Successfully completed	0		2		13	26	27	39								
Still in learning	37		15		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																
Employer training pilot	2004-05															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1															
Retained*	0															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in learning	1															

\*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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	279		416	100	408	100	234	100								
Retained*	110		272	65	291	71	157	67								
Planned learning completed	85		238	57	262	64	141	60								
Gained job	74		109	26	59	14	37	16								
Still in training	90		1	0	0	0	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

92. Jobsearch sessions for adult participants are planned and delivered well. Staff work diligently at presenting a positive picture of how employment can change participants' lives and the benefits that can accrue through work. Success is celebrated and good use is made of the successes of previous participants in getting jobs. Posters and case studies showing how previous participants have achieved a job are displayed prominently. A comprehensive and detailed scheme of work supports the production of meaningful session plans that clearly identify topics for delivery and the methods and styles to be used. The tutor uses a variety of teaching styles to engage participants and to keep them interested. A range of relevant videos is used to support and enhance learning. Good use is made of interview and telephone techniques sessions to prepare participants before they attend interviews with employers. The tutor delivers individual sessions to reassure participants when needed.

93. Much good use is made of resources to stimulate and engage learners in the learning process. Classrooms are of a high standard and provide a good and welcoming learning environment. They are well equipped with up-to-date IT equipment that includes computers, none of which are over two years of age, networked printers, scanners, overhead digital projectors and interactive whiteboards. Tutors make good use of interactive whiteboards to demonstrate how to manipulate data in spreadsheets and in databases. Good-quality workbooks are used to support learners and well-presented handouts provide confirmation of information presented by the tutor.

94. Assessors make creative use of new technology within the assessment process. They use modern recording equipment well to record employers' witness testimonies, which workplace supervisors welcome as they do not have to get statements typed. Learners welcome being able to record professional discussions with their assessors, and many workplace observations are now being recorded. All recordings are transferred to CD-ROMs and form part of a learner's evidence portfolio. Good use is also made of digital cameras to photograph learners carrying out specific tasks in their workplace. These photographs provide good visual images and enhance the learners' portfolios of evidence. ICT staff are well qualified and experienced and use their own experience of work to enrich their teaching.

95. Learners receive very good support. Staff are attentive and sensitive to the needs and demands of adult participants and provide individual guidance and advice. All learners feel

confident to approach staff and discuss anything that is troubling them. Staff have attended dyslexia awareness courses. They provide positive support and guidance for learners and direct them to more appropriate agencies as necessary. NECC has built up good relationships with a range of external agencies that can provide specialist support and guidance for people with alcohol or substance misuse problems. Good use is made of specialist guest speakers who come and provide specific help and advice on a variety of subjects that are causing learners' or participants' problems. Minority ethnic community organisations provide specific help and guidance to improve staff members' awareness of cultures and the traditions of their learners.

96. A good range and variety of work placements is available to learners. These placements enable learners to put into practice what they learn during their off-the-job training and to broaden their skills through involvement with other aspects of their employers' business. Employers also provide good on-the-job training to extend learners' knowledge and understanding of their systems and procedures. Many employers ask for additional learners as their businesses grow. NECC's staff have recently secured a bank of work placements for the next intake of learners who will require opportunities to install and support IT systems.

97. The induction programme is satisfactory. Learners receive a week-long induction that includes an introduction to their NVQ, the rules and regulations, initial assessment, health and safety, and equality of opportunity. Tutors use quizzes and questionnaires well to check the level of knowledge and understanding of learners. The induction programme for adult participants is delivered over two days.

98. Initial assessment is satisfactory, with learners being assessed for their literacy, numeracy and key skills during their induction programme. Adult participants are assessed for their literacy and numeracy skills before enrolling at NECC. The provision for literacy and numeracy skills support is satisfactory. When a learner is identified as requiring additional support they are referred to a qualified literacy or numeracy tutor.

99. The range of courses and qualifications available is satisfactory and meets local employers' needs and requirements. Learners are also able to take additional courses in topics including basic computing, health and safety, manual handling and first aid.

100. Recording of action points during progress reviews is insufficient, particularly for adult participants. Statements like 'continue to attend jobsearch sessions' and 'ensure jobsearch logs are updated' do not provide participants with sufficient detailed information to enable them to improve their performance. Action-planning in learners' progress reviews is improving. Recent reviews include actions which are specific and measurable.

## **Leadership and management**

101. Regular meetings ensure all staff are kept well informed of new developments. The internal verification system is satisfactory and currently provides for 100 per cent coverage of units and elements of the various NVQs. A spreadsheet provides a forward plan that includes all assessors. The internal verifier uses e-mail to inform assessors of slow progress and of the observation timetable. There is evidence that quality improvement measures are now successful. The programmes are managed satisfactorily, with centre managers using management information to update staff on progress, achievement and retention rates. Adult provision was self-assessed as part of the business provision and not ICT. However,

the judgements made in the self-assessment report broadly matched those made by the inspectors.

**Retailing, customer service & transportation****Grade 4**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b><i>Retailing</i></b>		<b>4</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	34	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	10	4
<b><i>Customer service</i></b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	145	3
Employer training pilot	12	3
NVQ training for young people	2	3
<b><i>Warehousing and distribution</i></b>		<b>4</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	43	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	14	3
Employer training pilot	8	0

102. There are 268 learners in retailing, customer service, and warehousing. Of these, 154 are apprentices, 68 are advanced apprentices, two are NVQ learners and 24 are adult learners on Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes which include LOT and intensive activity period. Twenty learners are following EQ8.

103. In retailing, seven learners are advanced apprentices and 27 are apprentices. Ten adult participants are following Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes. In customer service, 58 learners are advanced apprentices and 87 are apprentices. A further two are young people and 12 are adult ETP learners working towards a customer service NVQ.

104. Sixty-five learners are following warehousing qualifications with NECC. Forty-three of these are on apprenticeships for young people programmes, three are advanced apprentices and 40 are apprentices. The remaining 22 are adult learners participating in ETP programmes or Jobcentre Plus-funded provision, and on EQ8. These learners are employed or placed with employers in the Sunderland, Hexham, South Tyneside, Northallerton and Darlington areas.

105. Most customer service learners are employed or on placements in office or retail environments. Non-employed learners attend off-the-job training at NECC's centres, while employed learners generally receive their training in the workplace. Retailing and warehousing training takes place on the job with some additional courses in manual handling and basic health and safety made available off the job in NECC's training centres. Training advisers visit the learners to carry out assessment and progress reviews in the workplace. Progress reviews are completed every 12 weeks. Training for Jobcentre Plus-funded participants takes place mainly in the Sunderland training centre where the participants improve their skills before entering employment.

***Retailing******Grade 4******Strengths***

- good, supportive workplaces
- good development of employability skills on adult programmes

*Weaknesses*

- poor framework completion rates
- slow progress for many learners
- some poor health and safety awareness

**Achievement and standards**

106. Achievement rates are poor. Sixteen learners have started advanced apprenticeships in retailing over the past four years. Seven of these learners are still in learning, and no learners have achieved their qualification. Only 14 per cent of apprentices starting in 2002-03 have successfully completed their framework and only 6 per cent of the 2003-04 intake have achieved their qualification, with 22 per cent still in learning. Retention rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are improving, and 60 per cent of learners starting in the current year are still in learning.

107. Advanced apprentices and apprentices make slow progress. Thirty-seven apprentices have achieved 46 units out of a potential 296, and 17 apprentices have been on programme for more than a year. Seven advanced apprentices have achieved eight units out of a possible 56, with three of these learners having been on programme for two years. Target-setting in reviews does not challenge learners to achieve within the agreed timeframes. Learners are not clear on the requirements of the framework or how to organise their work to meet timescales for achievement. Action identified by the team of assessors has not yet brought about improvements.

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

<b>LSC funded work-based learning</b>																
<b>Advanced apprenticeships</b>	<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		3		4	100	6	100								
Retained*	0		0		2	50	2	33								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	3		3		1	25	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

<b>LSC funded work-based learning</b>																
<b>Apprenticeships</b>	<b>2004-05</b>		<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	30		32		50	100	27	100								
Retained*	0		8		18	36	7	26								
Successfully completed	0		2		7	14	1	4								
Still in learning	20		7		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



Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	51		35		85	100	64	100								
Retained*	24		23		60	71	51	80								
Planned learning completed	21		22		59	69	50	78								
Gained job	0		0		0	0	0	100								
Still in training	10		0		0	0	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

108. Learners have good, supportive placements at companies which include good high-street stores, sports chains and department stores. Workplaces are equipped well with the latest technology, and learners are trained in a variety of tasks which meet the NVQ standards. Employers are open and supportive to learning, giving the learners time to complete the NVQ. Workplace supervisors help learners with tasks in the application of number. Learners are given responsibility for various areas at work, and those who stay in their placements often gain promotion to trainee supervisor and manager positions.

109. The adult participants on retailing provision attend a six-week induction programme with learners on other adult programmes. They can start at any time. A scheme of work and learning session plans are in place. The tutor is occupationally competent in retailing and the programme prepares the participants for placements in the industry. Participants complete practical activities such as cash handling using a till, health and safety, and manual handling. Jobsearch is thorough and participants produce curriculum vitae and application letters for jobs. Participants are supported well by staff, who are sensitive to their needs. Resources are good, with internet access for jobsearch and videos to aid learning. Visiting speakers give the participants the opportunity to talk to people from industry.

110. All learners undergo NECC's initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills, the results of which are used to plan learning. Learners' key skills are developed through projects which meet their needs and interests. Additional support to improve learners' communication and application of number skills is available and learners use the key skills builder workbooks. Visits to the workplace are regular and assessors are occupationally competent. Portable dictation machines are in use, and all learners have the opportunity to use a computer at the centre.

111. Progress reviews take place regularly and the employer is usually involved, but target-setting during reviews is poor. Some progress reviews have weak targets which give only one action for the period up to the next review, with little overview of the framework. Some linking and monitoring of training in the workplace is poorly recorded in the individual learning plan, allowing assessment of aspects such as health and safety to take place with limited knowledge. Some assessment practices are too assessor-driven with learners contributing little to their portfolio.

112. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners have good access to supportive

training advisers. Learners are given relevant information regarding their progression to the next stage of their learning, and appropriate job roles are considered when moving the learner on. This consideration takes place when the learner asks, rather than being freely available to the learner for planning the future. Learners are not always aware of the requirements for the apprenticeship frameworks. Learners have access to specialist advice and support where necessary. Adults participants who have gained employment are signed off the programme, but NECC still trains and assesses them through units of a level 2 NVQ in retail operations.

### **Leadership and management**

113. Communications are good. Regular team meetings are held and staff value the support they receive from managers and employers. Resources are satisfactory. Systems for managing the programme are appropriate but have been ineffective in improving achievement rates. NECC has invested in a retail computer software programme to support the technical certificate. Resources used on the induction programme for adult participants are good, and participants have good access to ICT. Learners' progress is recorded on a chart for each assessor and is discussed at a weekly meeting with the centre manager. However, learners' progress remains slow and senior managers carry out insufficient monitoring of learners' performance.

114. Cross-centre meetings take place to standardise practice at each centre, and all documents and resources are available on NECC's intranet. Internal verification systems are satisfactory, with all the necessary paperwork and sampling plans in place. However, the internal verifiers' reports to the assessors tend to be too positive and do not identify weak assessment practices such as assessor-led portfolios. Internal verifiers do not visit the assessors enough and records of the internal verifiers' comments in the portfolios are not clear enough.

115. The approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The questions on equality of opportunity asked at reviews are superficial and learners' simple answers are accepted but not actually recorded, being marked instead by a signature and a date. Several learners have to resit the module in the technical certificate that asks questions regarding equality of opportunity and diversity. However, learners are well supported and they know who to report to if a problem arises.

116. Some learners have a poor awareness of health and safety. The health and safety induction is not memorable for many learners. It is included on the induction checklist but only actually features as a tour of the building when the learner is inducted at NECC's centre. Health and safety induction is considered to be the employer's responsibility. Learners have often been employed for a number of weeks before starting their NVQ and health and safety is not re-addressed at the beginning of training. NECC does not adequately record its monitoring of the training provided by employers. Housekeeping was poor in some observed placements. In some back-of-store areas, empty boxes, used packaging and polythene, obstructed passageways were a hazard. Some health and safety questions asked at progress reviews did not probe deeply enough to find out if the learner really understood what was required. All the staff had some involvement in the production of the self-assessment report, but the report does not identify all of the strengths and weaknesses found by the inspectors.

**Customer service****Grade 3***Strengths*

- good-quality workplaces
- good support for learners
- thorough induction for non-employed learners

*Weaknesses*

- low framework completion rates
- insufficient planning and co-ordination of learning
- insufficient reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality and diversity

**Achievement and standards**

117. Framework completion rates are low. Only 21 per cent of the learners who started an advanced apprenticeship in 2002-03 successfully completed their framework, with 10 per cent of the intake still in learning. In the same year, 30 per cent of apprentices were successful. There are indications that retention rates are improving. Sixty-seven per cent of advanced apprentices starting in 2003-04 are still in learning, with 2 per cent having already completed their framework. Of the apprentices starting in the same year, 13 per cent have successfully completed their framework and 43 per cent are still in learning.

118. Learners currently on programme are making good progress towards completing their framework. Key skills training and assessment are now introduced into the programme earlier and the NVQ is being completed in good time. However, NVQ units are in some cases all signed off at the end of the qualification rather than in stages throughout the programme. Technical certificates have sometimes been introduced towards the end of the programme, but NECC has recently taken action to introduce this part of the framework earlier in the overall programme.

119. The number of adult learners is small, but retention and achievement rates are satisfactory. All adult learners' portfolios are of a satisfactory standard, although in a few cases, learners have contributed insufficient evidence.

120. Learners obtain a satisfactory level of customer service skills and knowledge while on their programme. Some are in their first jobs from school, while others have substantial workplace experience. Learners and employers confirm that working towards the qualification improves learners' understanding of customer service and work performance. Learners show good commitment to their programme and have an appropriate professional attitude in the workplace.

## NORTH EAST CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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	33		42		29	100	24	100								
Retained*	0		1		9	31	8	33								
Successfully completed	0		1		6	21	6	25								
Still in learning	27		28		3	10	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									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	80		63		70	100	32	100								
Retained*	2		19		38	54	15	47								
Successfully completed	2		8		21	30	9	28								
Still in learning	59		27		1	1	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																
Employer training pilot	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	15		1		6	100										
Retained*	0		1		4	67										
Successfully completed	0		1		4	67										
Still in learning	12		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																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0		3	100	3	100	35	100								
Retained*	0		3	100	2	67	25	71								
Successfully completed	0		0	0	2	67	21	60								
Still in learning	0		2	67	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

121. Learners are employed or on placements in good-quality workplaces. The workplace

environment provides good opportunities for learners to develop their occupational skills. Employers provide an effective induction into the workplace with continual supervision and on-the-job training. Some employers provide learners with additional off-the-job training to develop further the quality of their customer service skills and update their product knowledge. One employer provided training in equality of opportunity for all staff. Learners are satisfactorily developing their customer service skills. They enjoy their jobs and present a professional attitude in the workplace. Employers provide good job opportunities, and several current learners have progressed into jobs at their placement. Line managers are supportive of the learners' qualifications and help with evidence collection, including arranging additional work responsibilities to help learners meet NVQ requirements.

122. NECC's staff provide good support for learners. Training advisers and learners have frequent contact, usually meeting every two weeks. This contact develops good working relationships between staff and learners, and encourages and motivates the learners to achieve their qualifications. There are examples of where learners have remained on programme because of support from their assessors. Learners and employers confirm that being on programmes increases learners' confidence. Effective short-term action-planning takes place to help learners progress in their qualifications. The staff have good occupational experience and provide effective coaching to support learning. Between visits, learners are easily able to contact staff to discuss any concerns. Any additional support needs are effectively identified at initial assessment. Staff use diagnostic tests to identify learners' specific literacy and numeracy skills support needs. Training advisers then provide effective individual support using appropriate learning materials, either in the workplace or at the training centre. Learners value this extra support to help them prepare for their key skills tests.

123. Non-employed learners have a thorough induction to their programme. They spend a week at their local centre, following a structured induction programme. This provides them with good preparation for the workplace and includes activities to develop their interview skills and build their curriculum vitae. Learners are provided with information on the different apprenticeship programmes which are available. They work towards a national certificate in health and safety in the workplace, and are also updated on matters around equality and diversity. NECC has developed good links with employers and is aware of their needs, and takes care to match the learner to the placement which will meet their career aspirations. Interviews are then arranged for the learners with employers. Subsequently, learners receive a thorough induction from their employers to help them settle effectively into their jobs. Induction for employed learners is satisfactory. It is significantly less detailed than the induction provided for non-employed learners, taking place in the workplace and lasting for one to two hours. However, employed learners do have a reasonable understanding of their learning programme.

124. Assessment practice and the quality of learners' portfolios are satisfactory. Assessors use a reasonable variety of assessment methods and learners generally contribute some of their own workplace evidence. In a few cases assessment methods are narrow, although they do meet the requirements of the qualification standards.

125. Learning is not sufficiently planned or co-ordinated. Non-employed learners attend NECC's centres for well-structured off-the-job training. However, this off-the-job training is not sufficiently co-ordinated with on-the-job training. Employers are not aware of what

takes place at off-the-job training. Insufficient teaching and learning take place at some centres, with the time spent primarily on building portfolios. The on-the-job training record is rarely completed and includes insufficient information on what training is planned or delivered. The initial assessment process does not include a formal matching of the learner's job against the NVQ standards to ensure that learners will be able to achieve their qualification, or to identify any specific training and development needs that an individual learner might have. In one case, a learner changed their employer and went into a different job role which does not meet the level 3 standards. NECC has taken insufficient action to produce a development plan to ensure this learner can achieve the qualification. Employed learners rarely attend off-the-job training, in some cases because the employer is reluctant to release them. Where training advisers provide on-the-job training, this is insufficiently planned and recorded. The use made of learning materials is inconsistent. Some learners are provided with some good-quality resources, while others receive very little. Reviews of learners' progress tend to focus on assessment and do not sufficiently review learning and record actions or targets. Some learners have an insufficient understanding of the technical certificate.

### **Leadership and management**

126. Internal communication is good, with a variety of regular meetings held to keep staff informed. Staff have appropriate occupational experience and qualifications for their job roles. All staff hold continual professional development records to show when they have received training.

127. Resources are satisfactory. The training rooms at the centres are sufficient to meet tutors' and learners' needs. Rooms are lit well and have equipment such as computer presentation software, flip charts and furnishings which are in good condition. However, the training rooms at one centre are reached by staircases which would make it difficult for learners with restricted mobility to attend. Alternative arrangements for attendance will be made if required.

128. The quality assurance arrangements are sound. Internal verification is effective in ensuring satisfactory assessment practice. The process sufficiently monitors the assessors and interviews learners. However, one example of poor assessment practice had not been identified at the time of the inspection even though the learner affected had been on programme for eight months. Internal verifiers and assessors hold regular meetings. Representatives from each of NECC's centres meet to share and standardise good practice and to discuss specific topics. Information is then shared with other staff involved in customer service programmes.

129. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is not sufficiently monitored. Although their understanding is effectively covered at induction, it is not sufficiently discussed at progress reviews. Some staff do ask questions and record learners' answers adequately, but other staff do not. Some learners have no recollection of discussing equality and diversity since their induction. Evidence provided by some learners in their portfolios indicates that they do not sufficiently understand the topics. Staff members' training records indicate that some staff have not received recent training in equality and diversity. However, learners are treated fairly in the workplace and at the training centre. They have not reported any problems and do understand the procedures to follow should that be necessary. The good-quality workplaces and the support from staff help to ensure that learners are well treated.

130. The self-assessment report for customer service is reasonably accurate in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. Staff are sufficiently involved in the process. The grade given in the self-assessment report matched that given by inspectors.

### ***Warehousing and distribution***

***Grade 4***

#### *Strengths*

- good opportunities to progress in the workplace
- good training resources for adult participants

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor retention and achievement rates for apprentices
- some slow progress towards framework completion
- inadequate training for apprentices
- some poor health and safety awareness

### **Achievement and standards**

131. Retention and achievement rates are particularly poor for apprentices. Eighteen out of 47 learners starting in the current year have left the programme without completing their qualification. Forty-three of the 57 learners starting programmes in 2003-04 left early, as did 56 of the 64 starters in 2002-03. Of the six advanced apprentices recruited since 2001, only three remain on programme. Learners make slow progress on all apprenticeship programmes.

132. Achievement rates have been poor, with only 13 per cent of the apprentices who started in 2002-03 successfully completing the framework. Five per cent of the 2003-04 intake of apprentices have completed their framework, with 19 per cent still in learning. Sixty-two per cent of the 2004-05 intake of apprentices are still in learning.

133. Retention rates for adult learners are better, with over 60 per cent of learners completing their programme in each year since 2001.

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	0		5		0	0	1	100								
Retained*	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	0		3		0	0	1	100								

\*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	47		57		64	100	21	100								
Retained*	1		8		39	61	6	29								
Successfully completed	0		3		8	12	5	24								
Still in learning	29		11		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																
Employer training pilot	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		5	100	3	100	0	100								
Retained*	0		4	80	3	100	0	100								
Successfully completed	0		2	40	0	0	0	100								
Still in learning	5		3	60	0	0	0	100								

\*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

Jobcentre Plus funded programmes																
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	58		66		75	100	27	100								
Retained*	20		40		49	65	21	78								
Planned learning completed	18		40		46	61	18	67								
Gained job	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Still in training	14		0		0	0	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

134. The opportunity for workplace progression is good. Learners have opportunities for promotion, moving onto supervisor roles and operating lift trucks or specialist equipment such as wood-cutting machines. Supervisors contribute to the review process and get involved in key skills development, especially in the application of number. Many learners placed by NECC gain jobs at their host company. Where difficulties are encountered, NECC's staff work hard with young people to deal with concerns, to improve their employability skills and keep them in work. If learners leave their placements, NECC's staff support them to return to work, and in some cases the learners return to their previous workplace.

135. Training resources for the adult programme are good. The tutor has occupational expertise and the training is well structured. A scheme of work exists for the six-week



intensive programmes where adults receive health and safety, security, materials handling and warehouse systems training. The good range of materials includes videos, computers and well-equipped, pleasant training rooms. Personal protective equipment is provided to learners when they begin work placements. Adult learners are also given jobsearch training.

136. Initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is carried out at induction and learners receive support from training advisers and supervisors to meet any additional needs. Not all training advisers are qualified to provide this support, but additional training is accessible and some advisers have attended courses on dyslexia awareness. Learners who stay on programme do their key skills tests and assignments, and attend training sessions on or off the job. Key skills projects relate to workplace topics where possible, but often learners are asked to use a topic which is of interest to them. This is common practice when trying to engage young learners in key skills assessment.

137. The quality of learners' progress reviews is generally satisfactory but there is a high level of variability. NECC has worked hard at developing the progress review process, ensuring that it involves the supervisors and covers equality of opportunity, health and safety.

138. Training for learners on NVQ and apprenticeship programmes is inadequate. The structured programme which is used for adult learners is not apparent in the training for those learners on NVQ or apprenticeship programmes. Occupational initial assessment is not consistent and does not contribute to the individual's learning plan, and prior experience is not used to guide assessment planning. Units of the warehousing NVQ, which learners consistently perform in the workplace, are often not signed off until near the end of a learner's programme. Learners do not always take an active role in the assessment process and are reliant on the assessor keeping extensive records. Progress reviews do not always set challenging targets for learners to progress at a satisfactory rate. Learning resources are inadequate. Learners do receive key skills training, on and off the job. Little use is made of laptop computers when the training advisers visit learners to deliver occupational training in the workplace. Learners are given training styles assessment during induction but little use is made of the results.

139. There is some poor awareness of health and safety, such as poor housekeeping practices not always being picked up during assessment of learners on the job. There are poor examples of safety by trainers in the workplace and personal protective equipment, although supplied to learners, is sometimes not worn.

### **Leadership and management**

140. Action to improve the retention and achievement rates of warehousing learners has been ineffective. Cross-centre, cross-sector and standardisation meetings are held regularly with centre staff, internal verifiers and managers. The effect of these meeting is beginning to contribute to continual improvements, but the delivery of many training practices is still too variable in quality. Some learners receive training in equality and diversity on the job with the aid of a video but others do not. Good resources used in the training of adults have not been adapted for use with apprentices. Some training advisers have attended one-day awareness courses in equality and diversity, but others have not. Some learners have an insufficient awareness of equality and diversity.

141. Internal verification for warehousing meets the awarding body's guidelines and is generally satisfactory but some poor practices, such as poor health and safety and housekeeping in assessments and an over-reliance on assessor-led practice, have not been identified.

142. Staff were consulted during the self-assessment process, and the self-assessment report partially recognises some of the weaknesses and strengths in the delivery of programmes.

**Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel****Grade 3**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b><i>Hospitality and catering</i></b> Apprenticeships for young people	90	3

143. NECC offers apprenticeships in hospitality and NVQs in food and bar service, food preparation and cooking, and hospitality supervision at levels 2 and 3 across four sites in the Northeast. Ninety learners are enrolled on hospitality programmes. Of these, 55 are apprentices and 35 are advanced apprentices. Around half of the learners are men. Learners are employed in a range of businesses including private clubs, restaurants, theatres, public houses and hotels. All learners are employed and are visited regularly in the workplace for assessment and progress reviews. They attend NECC's premises for off-the-job training for the technical certificates. Initial assessment, induction and key skills development are delivered at learners' places of work. The area of learning has a full-time manager, three full-time and one part-time training advisers and a part-time internal verifier.

*Strengths*

- good range and achievement of additional qualifications
- good individual support for learners

*Weaknesses*

- poor apprenticeship achievement rate
- some inappropriate assessment practice

**Achievement and standards**

144. Learners' achievement of additional qualifications is good, with approximately 26 per cent of learners gaining or on target to gain one or more qualifications. The qualifications available include additional NVQ units, additional technical certificates or key skills qualifications at a higher level than required by the framework.

145. Retention rates are satisfactory and improving. Sixty-nine per cent of advanced apprentices and 73 per cent of apprentices who started their programme in 2002-03 left without completing their qualification. Of those who started in 2004-05, 85 per cent of advanced apprentices and 71 per cent of apprentices are still on programme. The framework completion rate is poor. However, training advisers now monitor and evaluate learners' progress regularly. These progress records indicate that many learners are on target to achieve their qualification and some will do so well before their planned date.

146. Many learners have good practical skills and background knowledge. Some learners progress in their job roles and are promoted to higher and more demanding jobs. Learners' portfolios of evidence are satisfactory and contain a range of evidence in the form of work products, photographs, witness testimonies, taped professional discussions and observations.

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	20		25		13	100	3	100								
Retained*	0		1		2	15	1	33								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	17		14		4	31	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									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	70		46		71	100	19	100								
Retained*	0		12		41	58	10	53								
Successfully completed	0		7		19	27	6	32								
Still in learning	50		5		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

147. Learners on all programmes receive good support. NECC's staff and employers have often worked well together to support learners with a range of personal, behavioural and learning problems, enabling them to stay on programme and complete their qualification. All learners have easy access to their tutors and assessors at NECC's premises, through regular and frequent visits in the workplace or by mobile phone and e-mail. NECC's training advisers and employers work well together to support individual learners, and all parties who are involved in the assessment and review of learners' progress have excellent working relationships. Most learners are given time at work to develop their portfolios and receive satisfactorily planned on-the-job training of an adequate standard.

148. Workplaces are of a satisfactory standard, offering learners a supportive environment for personal development and assessment opportunities towards their qualifications. Learners are part of workplace teams and are given challenging and demanding roles and responsibilities that promote confidence and develop skills. Some employers have their own in-house training programmes. Training and learning are satisfactory and meet the needs of the learners.

149. Adequate arrangements are in place for the initial assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and key skills at induction. The tests identify the correct level of qualification for learners. Individual learning needs are identified and adequate levels of support are given individually or through referring learners to specialist subcontracted support. Key skills assessments are used to identify the learners' current competence levels. Further development is given to those who need it through literacy and numeracy skills support at NECC's premises or individual coaching in the workplace. Induction and initial assessment are satisfactory.

150. Some assessment practice is inappropriate. Photographs of learners being trained are sometimes used as evidence for assessment. These learners, while training, are developing their skills and not demonstrating competence. This practice is also confusing for the learner in that it does not adequately differentiate between learning and assessment.

### **Leadership and management**

151. Hospitality programmes are managed satisfactorily. Since the previous inspection, a training centre manager has been allocated the responsibility to co-ordinate this area of learning. Recruitment of learners has increased, reflecting the rapid growth of this sector across the region. There have been significant improvements to training and support materials, further staff training and development in the key skills provision. Internal verification was previously subcontracted, but an existing member of staff has been trained to carry out these duties. This staff member is now accredited with the new verifier award and will commence full-time duties at the end of May 2005, supported by NECC's lead verifier. Two training advisers are also planned to be recruited in June 2005. The effect of these activities is yet to be measured, but NECC has already rectified some weaknesses in the previous self-assessment report, and the retention of learners on programmes is showing substantial improvement.

152. Formal and informal communications are good, with team members' performance targets and learners' progress being monitored and evaluated at regular team meetings. Staff are well qualified with appropriate vocational qualifications, assessor/verifier awards and, in many cases, teaching qualifications. Staff are appraised annually and NECC plans further continual professional development activities. Feedback from learners and employers is collected and analysed to improve the hospitality programmes further.

153. The self-assessment report accurately reflects most of the strengths and weaknesses identified at inspection. Inspectors identified one additional weakness and judged as satisfactory some of the areas self-assessed as strengths or weaknesses. Internal verification is satisfactory, with an annual sampling plan to verify units achieved, observe assessment practice and interview learners. Internal verification activity can be followed through learners' portfolios. Standardisation meetings take place every two months and assessors receive written feedback and action points on their judgements. However, the verification process has not identified the inconsistencies in assessment practice.

**Health, social care & public services****Grade 2**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b><i>Dental</i></b>		<b>2</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	149	2

154. NECC has 113 learners on the NVQ in oral healthcare at level 3 and 36 learners on the new temporary framework for advanced apprentices in oral health-care. This framework has only been available to learners since January 2005. The level 3 NVQ is the only qualification that enables dental nurses to be registered. All learners attend off-the-job training, during the day or in the evening to suit their needs, at one of NECC's sites at Sunderland, Darlington, Middlesbrough or Northallerton. Most learners are employed locally in NHS or private practices. Assessment is carried out by NECC's staff and takes place mainly in the workplace. Oral healthcare assessment includes an independent assessment by the national examination board for dental nursing, for which learners are normally entered after they have been on programme about one year. All learners attend an interview and receive an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills before they are accepted on to the programme.

***Dental*****Grade 2*****Strengths***

- good support for learners
- good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- good assessment practice

***Weaknesses***

- insufficient promotion of equality and diversity

**Achievement and standards**

155. Retention and achievement rates are satisfactory, learners currently on programme are making good progress and unit achievement is good. NECC's learners normally achieve well in the independent assessment and pass rates have exceeded the national average, although in the most recent examination in November 2004 the achievement rate was slightly below the national average. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is good.

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

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	39		0		0	0	0	100								
Retained*	0		0		0	100	0	100								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	100	0	100								
Still in learning	36		0		0	100	0	100								

\*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																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	55		100	100	113	100	99	100								
Retained*	0		14	14	59	52	58	59								
Successfully completed	0		14	14	58	51	56	57								
Still in learning	44		61	61	8	7	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

156. Assessment practice is good. Assessors visit learners in their workplaces regularly to review progress and set targets. Learners take appropriate responsibility for their assessment. They identify when patients are booked in for relevant treatment and request an observation from their assessor, who will normally agree. The assessor will carry out the observation and provide detailed and constructive feedback, including details of the further evidence required. The learner will then work on obtaining the required evidence with support from their workplace supervisor, or the dentist or practice manager. Where appropriate, assessors make use of professional discussion, and question and answer techniques to provide the necessary evidence. Learners have good ownership of their portfolios and take responsibility for their own learning.

157. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is good. Targets are set for the learners, and shared with practice managers. Practice managers take an active part in learners' reviews, helping learners to identify the patients they need for observation purposes, as well as encouraging and motivating them. Practice managers and dentists help learners to understand the background knowledge and learners have the confidence to ask for help when they require it.

158. Learners receive good support. Assessors make themselves available if possible to carry out observations as requested and make time available to help with portfolio-building. Assessors are welcomed into the practices and have developed a very successful support network. NECC has supported learners when requested to find them new employers, perhaps just because the learner wishes to extend their learning opportunities by moving to an employer involved in a greater variety of dental practices.

159. Off-the-job training is available during the day or in the evening. This training prepares learners for the independent assessment which covers the mandatory units, as well as helping them to gain the background knowledge required. The training rooms used by the learners are well resourced with equipment commonly used in dental practices, as well as books and computers. Some learners are beginning to search for their own information on certain topics using the internet as well as more traditional methods. This adds a new dimension to their learning and offers the opportunity for integration of key skills. Learners can access a range of additional qualifications.

160. All learners complete an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Before January 2005, learners normally received extra individual time with their assessor if a need was identified. Key skills qualifications have been introduced to the framework since January and learners have required more support, particularly with numeracy. Diagnostic assessment identifies exactly what learners' needs are and teaching sessions are organised to meet these needs. These sessions may be for individuals or small groups if more than one learner has the same need.

### **Leadership and management**

161. Management of oral healthcare is co-ordinated by the internal verifier, who meets regularly with internal verifiers from other areas of learning at NECC to agree common practices. The internal verifier then holds meetings with the oral healthcare assessors to share information and standardise practice. Meetings are also held to share good practice across areas of learning, which has supported the integration of key skills training and assessment into the oral healthcare programme. The internal verifier usually works at each centre for at least a day each week to ensure that she has regular contact with all assessors. Assessors then pass information to learners and employers. In this way, communications are effective and there is a consistency of practice across training centres in the delivery of the programme.

162. Internal verification is thorough. Records identify changes that have been initiated following comments made by the external verifier or from discussions in meetings of the oral health care team, or after analysis of learners' or employers' questionnaires. The oral healthcare programme has piloted new assessment paperwork for NECC. Following discussions with assessors, the external verifier highlighted problems with the paperwork, which has now been revised and is used throughout NECC.

163. Learners have a good awareness of equality and diversity. However, there is insufficient promotion of equality and diversity. A small number of men have enrolled but none have completed the programme. On one occasion, men were targeted as potential learners after a request from Connexions, but this did not result in any men being recruited to the programme and is no longer a priority. The programme has not been promoted to minority groups.

164. Inspectors confirmed the self-assessed grade for dental nursing, however, the self-assessment report does not identify the key weakness identified by inspectors. Some of the strengths in the self-assessment report are overstated.



**Foundation programmes****Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Literacy</b> Entry to Employment	66	3

165. E2E programmes are provided in Newcastle and Hexham. In Newcastle, the training is subcontracted from Oakfield Solutions and in Hexham, the subcontract is from Northumberland County Council. Outreach provision is based in a community centre at Cramlington. Sixty-six learners are registered on E2E programmes. Of these learners, 21 are on either full-time or part-time placements with employers and 46 attend in-house training for 16 hours a week, spread over three days. Learners on placements with employers in Newcastle attend their workplaces for four days a week and return to the training centre on a day-release basis. In Hexham and Cramlington, learners remain on placement for five days a week. Eight staff are directly employed to deliver E2E programmes. Most learners are referred by Connexions, although some apply independently. All learners complete an induction programme in the centre and an initial assessment process that includes testing of their literacy and numeracy skills and identifies their preferred learning styles. Learners on placements complete a separate induction relating to the workplace which is guided by the employer. Training advisers or assessors visit learners in the workplace on average once a week to provide support, conduct assessments and review progress.

*Strengths*

- particularly supportive work placements
- good provision of additional qualifications and enrichment activities
- effective initial assessment of literacy and numeracy skills

*Weaknesses*

- slow progress for some learners
- over-reliance on workbook learning in one centre

**Achievement and standards**

166. Achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. NECC began providing E2E programmes in 2003-04. The criteria applied to learners leaving to enter employment have changed in the current year, recognising progression to any job where training is provided whether certificated or not.

167. Some learners make slow progress. Learners sometimes attend for over a year before achieving any certificates or identified progression. A number of learners are in training for approximately 12 months before progressing to work placements or further qualifications. Although targets on learning plans often agree actions to be completed within a month, these actions are not enforced and learners are not always challenged to progress within timescales. Some learners have taken approximately a year to achieve a basic computing certificate, although the usual time taken to achieve this qualification is less than this.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Entry to Employment	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	96		148	100	56	100	53	100								
Progression <sup>1</sup>	12		54	36	41	73	44	83								
Achieved objectives <sup>2</sup>	12		54	36	17	30	6	11								
Still in learning	52		14	9	0	0	0	0								

1. Measured in terms of learners' movement to further training, education or employment, during or after their training

2. These being the key objectives identified for each learner while on E2E

## The quality of provision

168. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills development needs are clearly and accurately identified at induction and then reassessed at appropriate points during the programme. Initial assessment is thorough and results are clear. Staff use the information from initial assessment effectively to direct learning, review progress and reinforce skills gained. Learners' motivation is increased by their good understanding of the assessment process. Results from initial and diagnostic assessments help learners to plan their learning, prioritise targets and agree next steps. Their attainment of new skills is positively reinforced by further diagnostic assessment which proves their competence and allows for further targets to be agreed. Learners clearly understand the outcomes of initial assessment and are able to describe what specific literacy and numeracy skills development needs they have, what they will do to improve and how they will recognise their own achievement.

169. The E2E programme is greatly enhanced by the opportunities learners have to achieve nationally recognised qualifications. This is not a requirement of E2E programmes but NECC makes a range of certificated awards available to learners including computing skills, health and safety awareness, first aid and literacy and numeracy skills awards. All learners who complete the programme achieve at least one qualification. Learners also benefit from participation in new experiences such as canoeing, sailing, climbing, pot-holing and valuable visits to local employers and sites of local interest. Their confidence is increased by the development of personal and teamwork skills generated by these activities. Tutors are very good at using local and national events to add interest to social skills development. An example of this is the tall ships race, which tutors are using to generate very interesting training sessions dealing with teamwork, trust, attitudes to disability and respect for others.

170. NECC's careful matching of learners to placement opportunities creates satisfaction, promotes achievement and maintains learners in the workplace for longer. Staff are good at considering factors such as bus routes, travel-to-work areas, preferences for working in small or large organisations and employment aims. Placement providers and workplace supervisors are aware of the nature of E2E. They understand the difficulties often faced by E2E learners and are willing to provide the additional support required to keep learners on their programmes. Placement providers often accept a learner back into the workplace after a problem has arisen, try to help find a resolution and influence actions taken for the future. Placement providers are given a copy of the individual's learning plan and are encouraged to suggest off-the-job training activities to enhance the learner's workplace abilities. They understand the outcomes of literacy and numeracy initial assessments and encourage learners' development of these skills as good preparation for a future

progression to an NVQ or an apprenticeship. Workplace supervisors are effectively involved in the progress review process. Their views are valued and used to plan future action points. Placement providers plan for learners' progression from very early in the programme. For example, one learner in a business administration workplace is learning the very diverse duties of the reception desk in her place of work. She is currently working towards a national test for level 1 mathematics and will then progress on to an NVQ in business administration. The placement provider is already preparing the way for the learner to move to a general office so that she will be guaranteed the full range of activities required for the NVQ.

171. In one centre, most learning is achieved through the use of workbooks and there is not enough flexibility to accommodate individual preferences. Some computer-based activities are also downloaded and printed as workbooks. These are then adapted as paper exercises. Other teaching methods are used such as group work, projects and assignments, but the one most often named as a target on individual learning plans is completion of a workbook. These workbooks are designed for specific subjects and issued according to needs identified by initial and diagnostic assessments. Learners are sometimes required to work through a book on their own with little input from tutors. When they need help they have to wait until a staff member is free. Workbook contents are not directly linked to any work-placement or lifestyle activities. Literacy and numeracy learning takes no account of personal and social needs and no use is made of any everyday situations, although these are sometimes integrated with other parts of the programme such as personal development or training in equality of opportunity.

### **Leadership and management**

172. In E2E programmes staff are aware of contract and organisational requirements and know when these requirements are being achieved. Good practice is shared and common challenges discussed at regular staff meetings and networking events. Resources are good, with bright and modern centrally located premises. However, the E2E room in Hexham is small and uncomfortable. All learners benefit from IT equipment and all locations have internet access. The outreach facility has 10 laptops for learners' use. Staff are qualified and experienced in their roles and have an effective staff development programme. Links with other organisations are used to the advantage of the learners. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process, and the self-assessment report identifies the strengths, but not the weaknesses, found at inspection.

