

INSPECTION REPORT

North West Community Services (Training) Ltd

13 October 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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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. North West Community Services (Training) Ltd (NWCS) is a private training provider based in Liverpool. It offers apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in social care and early years, and employability training. NWCS contracts with the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The provider is owned by two shareholders and employs 23 full- and part-time staff to deliver and manage training. From August 2004 two training providers, Aigburth Training Opportunities (ATO) and Netherley Valley Childcare Initiative (NVCI), became partners of NWCS to deliver early years programmes. Previously, these two training organisations were inspected in their own right, but NWCS now holds the contract.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** NWCS's leadership and management are good. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement are satisfactory. The employability provision is good, and in early years programmes the provision is satisfactory. The provision in social care is unsatisfactory.

3. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process involves all stakeholders, except employers, and uses their views to evaluate the programmes' strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report is sufficiently critical. It is accompanied by a detailed action plan which is clearly linked to the business objectives and strategic direction of NWCS. However, not all of the judgements made in the self-assessment report matched those of the inspectors.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** NWCS has good arrangements to promote quality improvement. It has a strong and responsive management team, effective partnership working and strategies which focus clearly on improving the learners' experiences.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTH WEST COMMUNITY SERVICES (TRAINING) LTD:

- improve retention and achievement rates
- develop more on-the-job training and involve employers more
- develop a clear strategy for managing and supporting all learners with literacy and numeracy needs
- further improve target-setting

GRADES

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

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

Health, public services and care			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Social care		4	
Apprenticeships for young people	31	4	
NVQ training for young people	1	4	
Early years		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	155	3	
NVQ training for young people	4	3	

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Employability training		2	
Entry to Employment	47	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. NWCS provides training in the health, public services and care area of learning. This was reported on with contributory grades for early years and for social care. NWCS also provides training in preparation for life and work. This was reported on with a contributory grade for employability training. Five inspectors visited the provider over a four-day period in October 2005.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	78
Number of staff interviewed	58
Number of employers interviewed	14
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	3
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	4
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

6. **Learners on the Entry to Employment (E2E) programme develop good personal and social skills.** They enjoy their learning and are very well motivated to achieve their learning objectives.

7. Retention and achievement rates on early years apprenticeship programmes have been poor but are improving.

8. **Retention and achievement rates for the social care programme are poor.** Many employed learners leave the programme before completing the framework or are making slow progress.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Health, public services and care	0	4	3	0	7
Preparation for life and work	0	3	3	0	6
Total	0	7	6	0	13

9. **Off-the-job training for early years learners is good.** Learners are involved and committed and produce good standards of work.

10. **Resources to support learning on the E2E programme are good.** There are dedicated classrooms, a flat which serves as a simulated living environment, and a range of useful resources.

11. **Induction arrangements for learners in social care are well planned.** The induction provides learners with clear understanding of their programmes and covers health and safety and equality of opportunity very comprehensively.

12. **Additional support for learners in the early years programme is particularly effective.** Action plans are developed, reviewed and updated regularly. Support sessions are provided and arrangements have been made to monitor learners' progress.

13. The provision for early years training has satisfactory standards of teaching and learning. Initial assessments, learners' inductions, and assessments are all satisfactory.

14. The social care programme has a satisfactory level of resources. Assessments, progress reviews, and support are also satisfactory.

15. The E2E training programme is very relevant to the needs and interests of the learners. Standards of teaching and learning are satisfactory.

16. **Progress reviews for early years learners do not include sufficient target-setting.** Short- and medium-term targets are set in relation to the employers' responsibilities in the

training programme.

17. Off-the-job training for employed learners in social care is not delivered effectively. Many learners do not attend and do not complete assigned work.

18. Arrangements to support learners in social care who have literacy and numeracy needs are inadequate. Few learners attend the classes and insufficient support is provided in the workplace.

19. Target-setting in progress reviews for some E2E learners is weak. Some targets are not specific to individual learners, and others are too general to be meaningful.

Leadership and management

20. The provider has a very clear strategic direction for improvements. It prioritises learners' needs and is communicated well to all relevant parties. NWCS's staff are given clear roles, responsibilities and targets to achieve.

21. Partnerships are particularly effective. They are well focused and directed, and have good communications. Staff members collaborate well. NWCS's links with employers and external organisations help to ensure that the learners and their experiences take precedence.

22. Arrangements to promote quality improvement are good. Feedback is analysed by the quality improvement manager. Information from this analysis is used in staff meetings when assessing the provision.

23. The monitoring of learners' progress on the E2E programme is good. There are regular tutorial reports and frequent contacts with employers to discuss the progress of learners.

24. The management of the partnership arrangements for the early years provision is very good. Staff work collaboratively to share good practice and are continually trying to improve the learners' experiences.

25. NWCS's financial management is satisfactory, and thorough financial controls monitor contract compliance. Management information systems are satisfactory. Managers have all relevant information available to them. Trends are analysed and overall targets are set for the retention and achievements of learners. Equality of opportunity and self-assessment arrangements for the provider are also satisfactory.

26. The management of staff, staffing arrangements and internal verification arrangements are all satisfactory for the early years and social care provisions. Staff management is also satisfactory for the E2E provision.

27. There is insufficient planned on-the-job training with employers in the early years programme. Some learners and employers are unable to prepare effectively for training in the workplace. In some cases, learners and employers are not always aware of the purpose of individual learning plans.

28. Some health and safety practices in early years workplaces are inappropriate.

Problems were identified by inspectors regarding supervision. At the time of the inspection, NWCS responded promptly and positively to the concerns expressed.

29. The implementation and monitoring of some quality assurance procedures in social care are poor. Measures to monitor arrangements for internal verification, learners' progress and staff targets more effectively have been introduced recently. It is still too soon to be able to judge their effect, but arrangements for internal verification are now satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very clear strategic direction for improvement
- particularly effective partnerships
- good arrangements to promote quality improvement

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Health, public services and care

Early years

Grade 3

Strengths

- good off-the-job training
- particularly effective additional support for learners
- very good management of partnership arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient target-setting at progress reviews
- insufficient planned on-the-job training with some employers
- inappropriate health and safety practices in the workplace

Social care

Grade 4

Strengths

- well-planned induction

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievements rates on apprenticeship programme
- ineffective delivery of off-the-job training for employed learners
- inadequate arrangements to support learners with literacy and numeracy needs
- poor implementation and monitoring of some quality assurance procedures

Preparation for life and work

Employability training

Grade 2

Strengths

- good development of personal and social skills
- good resources to support learning
- good monitoring of progress

Weaknesses

- some weak target-setting

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTH WEST COMMUNITY SERVICES (TRAINING) LTD:

- 'being treated with respect'
- 'not like school'
- 'friendly staff'
- 'the off-the-job training in early years provision'
- 'staff are helpful'
- 'I like being treated as an adult'
- 'staff are always available'
- 'my rate of progress and achievement in early years training'
- 'working with children'
- 'being able to negotiate placements'
- 'being paid to go to placement'
- 'I like coming into the centre'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NORTH WEST COMMUNITY SERVICES (TRAINING) LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- 'being released early from work so that I can attend evening classes'
- 'the money'
- 'I would like to go on more trips outside the centre'
- 'coming to 'college' every week'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- very clear strategic direction for improvement
- particularly effective partnerships
- good arrangements to promote quality improvement

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

30. NWCS sets a very clear strategic direction for improvement that is well communicated to all staff. The strategy focuses on the learners and emphasises improving the provision and the learners' experiences. The strategic plan is linked very effectively to the business plan. Quarterly reviews are carried out to monitor progress against action plans and to identify strategic and operational issues. Senior staff within the company have clear roles and responsibilities. Regular and updated targets are set for all staff to ensure that their efforts are concentrated on the learners. A particularly effective appraisal system encourages self-analysis and identifies staff's development needs. Staff development at NWCS is very good and a range of opportunities is available to staff to ensure that they have current occupational competences and appropriate teaching qualifications.

31. The provider has an open and consultative management style and staff feel well supported. Internal communications are good and managers meet together monthly, and hold meetings with their staff. These meetings are minuted and actions are clearly identified and followed through. Informal communications with staff are ongoing and effective. The director of learning meets regularly with the board, which provides guidance and leadership. Board members complete a regular appraisal of governance issues. The board responds positively to requests for extra resources where these clearly contribute to business objectives and the learners' experiences. Good resources exist to support learning, including well-appointed training premises, and a well-equipped information technology (IT) suite which offers open access to learners. The employer-related initiatives which were introduced to improve the provision for learners on social care programmes have not been successful to date, although the retention rate is beginning to improve. This situation has been recognised by NWCS through its auditing procedures, and is acknowledged as a weakness, in the self-assessment report.

32. Partnership working by NWCS is particularly effective. NWCS has constructive and helpful links to ATO and NVCI, the partners that deliver the early years provision. The shared strategic and operational objectives focus very clearly on improving the experiences of learners working towards early years qualifications. The partnership arrangements between NWCS, ATO and NVCI ensure that good practice is shared by regular meetings. NWCS has good, well-established links with employers to support its early years and E2E provision, and these employers are very supportive of learners. NWCS also has very effective links with the Connexions service to support its E2E provision to increase the co-ordination and support available to vulnerable young people. The provider's co-operation with local schools, and a developing provision for 14-16 year olds in the

increased flexibilities programme, create useful progression routes to E2E or apprenticeship programmes in early years and social care. Good relationships exist with other learning providers to support learners who may transfer. Effective working partnerships have also been developed with 14 primary care trusts and higher education providers to further progression opportunities for learners.

33. Management information systems are satisfactory. Trends throughout the provision are analysed and overall retention and achievement targets are set. Managers have information readily available to them. The balance of gender and minority ethnic group representation on social care and early years programmes has improved. Nineteen per cent of learners on social care programmes are men. The financial management of NWCS is satisfactory. Effective financial controls have been established which monitor contract compliance thoroughly. The director of learning meets each month with a member of the board to review the budget and to ensure contract compliance. Targets are set throughout NWCS to ensure that all staff share responsibility for contracting arrangements.

34. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are identified satisfactorily. All learners receive initial screening during induction, followed by diagnostic testing, if appropriate. If learners have literacy or numeracy needs, support is provided. Additional support for learners on the early years programme is particularly effective, but learners on social care programmes do not always receive such support. Tutors and assessors provide continual learning support where necessary. Social support for learners is particularly effective and is provided by a suitably qualified member of staff. The advice and guidance given to learners is appropriate and ensures that they are on programmes which are appropriate to their needs and aspirations. All learners have an initial interview at the beginning of the programme to identify their learning goals and to ensure that any accreditation of prior learning is carried out.

35. Health and safety practice is satisfactory. NWCS has a health and safety policy, and employers must agree to comply with health and safety procedures for learners before a work placement is agreed. Employers are regularly monitored for their continued compliance with health and safety procedures. Some inadequate health and safety practices within the early years provision were identified by inspectors. NWCS responded immediately to these issues during the inspection.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

36. NWCS's arrangements for equal opportunities are satisfactory. A number of positive initiatives have been introduced. Some of these, such as the role of the equal opportunities committee, need further development. One member of staff has recently been given responsibility for the continuous improvement of the provider's approach to equal opportunities. NWCS has an equal opportunities committee with representation from staff and learners, but this committee has only met on a few occasions.

37. NWCS has clear policies and procedures for equality of opportunity and for ensuring fair recruitment and selection practices. Equality and diversity issues are well promoted with learners, staff and employers. Raising learners' awareness of equality and diversity issues begins at the induction stage. It forms part of their respective programmes, and is followed through at progress reviews. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and how to deal with issues such as bullying and harassment if they arise within the working environment. All staff have recently been trained in equality

and diversity. Appropriate materials to promote equality of opportunity and to raise awareness of the subject and break down stereotypical views, are well displayed in the training centre. One group of E2E learners has been working on a project to broaden understanding of disabilities. NWCS works with a large number of learners in the community who have previously been excluded, or who have many personal and social issues to deal with. All staff are very supportive in encouraging an environment of social inclusion and fair practices.

38. Employers and work-placement providers are given a comprehensive information pack promoting equal opportunities. Employers' compliance with equality of opportunity is carried out through the progress review process. This process examines learners' experience in the workplace. NWCS also checks that employers have equal opportunities policies and procedures that are adhered to, and that learners and staff with mobility difficulties have access to employers' premises. There is some monitoring and analysis of equal opportunities data. This data is used to inform staff about the progress of different groups of learners. Staff develop appropriate action plans to improve the learning experience.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

39. NWCS has good arrangements to promote quality improvement. Continuous improvement of the provision is emphasised through staff development, various meetings and well-monitored action plans. Feedback from learners is used when considering changes in the delivery of training, or to the curriculum, such as the provision of evening classes and training sessions in the workplace. Feedback from learners is sought in a variety of ways, such as the completion of questionnaires after teaching sessions, and at intervals throughout the programmes. These questionnaires are analysed by the quality improvement manager and actions are initiated in management and staff meetings. However, the provider does not acquire comprehensive feedback from employers in any systematic way and employers' forums are poorly attended.

40. Comprehensive quality assurance policies cover all aspects of the learners' experiences. A comprehensive system of audits is used to monitor the effectiveness of these policies and compliance with procedures. Teaching is observed effectively using a procedure which includes reviews and interviews. Staff development is available where necessary. Good practice is shared throughout the partnership and six-weekly meetings are held to work on the standardisation of procedures and to share good practice. New procedures have now been established, but it is too soon to determine the effects on learners. Partnership agreements set out roles and responsibilities clearly. The agreements have been reviewed and changes made where necessary. Partners are audited regularly.

41. Policies and procedures for internal verification are satisfactory. Internal verifiers have significant experience of verification. Appropriate management action has been taken to resolve the delays in assessment in the social care programme. The director of learning has now taken responsibility for internal verification of these programmes until new staff can be appointed. Regular standardisation meetings are held with assessors and learners' progress is monitored in detail.

42. NWCS has satisfactory self-assessment arrangements. The views of learners, staff, managers and directors contribute to the process. Partners are closely involved in the self-assessment process and take the opportunity to contribute to NWCS's self-assessment

report as well as producing their own. However, the views of employers are not used systematically in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is critical. It is accompanied by a detailed action plan which is clearly linked to NWCS's business objectives and strategic direction. Not all of the judgements in the self-assessment report matched those of the inspectors. Within the areas of learning, inspectors identified some strengths not identified by NWCS, and found some additional weaknesses. There was a closer match between the findings of inspectors and those of the self-assessment report in leadership and management.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Social care</i>		4
Apprenticeships for young people	31	4
NVQ training for young people	1	4
<i>Early years</i>		3
Apprenticeships for young people	155	3
NVQ training for young people	4	3

43. NWCS offers NVQs at level 2 and 3 in early years care and education. In August 2004, NWCS established partnership arrangements with NVCI and ATO. There are 159 learners. One hundred and sixteen are apprentices, 39 are advanced apprentices and four learners are working towards an NVQ at level 2. There are three male and 156 female learners, and four learners are from minority ethnic groups. Eight learners have disabilities and 35 learners have identified additional support needs. All of the advanced apprentices are employed, and 120 apprentices are on work placements. All learners have the opportunity to attend weekly off-the-job training sessions during the day or in the evening.

44. Thirty-two learners are on social care programmes. Twelve are advanced apprentices, 19 are apprentices and one learner is taking an NVQ course at level 3. Most of the learners are employed in care and residential homes, but a small number of learners are on work placements. NWCS works with a large number of employers and organisations throughout the Liverpool area. Training and assessment is delivered in the workplace and at the training centre. Six of the learners on the social care programme are men. Two learners are from minority ethnic groups and four learners have been identified as having additional learning needs.

Early years

Grade 3

Strengths

- good off-the-job training
- particularly effective additional support for learners
- very good management of partnership arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient target-setting at progress reviews
- insufficient planned on-the-job training with some employers
- inappropriate health and safety practices in the workplace

Achievement and standards

45. Retention and achievement rates on apprenticeship programmes in early years have been poor, but are improving. NWCS is now clearly focused on the retention and

achievements of learners. A range of new initiatives is beginning to have a positive effect. Staff are set targets for retention and achievement and management information is used well to keep staff informed of developments. There have been no achievements for advanced apprentices since 2002-03, but 86 per cent of the 2004-05 learners are still in training, and of the 2005-06 intake, all learners are still in training. Twenty-nine per cent of the 2003-04 learners completed their frameworks and 4 per cent are still in training. Of the 2004-05 intake of apprentices, 67 per cent are still in training and all of the 2005-06 intake remain in training. All current learners are making good progress in their technical certificates, key skills training and NVQ units.

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	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		36		27	100	40	100	6	100						
Retained*	0		0		8	30	21	52	4	67						
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	10	25	0	0						
Still in learning	3		31		4	15	1	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																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	46		110		79	100	66	100	11	100	0					
Retained*	0		5		45	57	34	52	9	82	0					
Successfully completed	0		2		23	29	17	26	0	0	0					
Still in learning	46		67		3	4	0	0	0	0	0					

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2003-04		2002-03													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	10	100	16	100												
Retained*	3	30	6	38												
Successfully completed	0	0	6	38												
Still in learning	4	40	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

46. Off-the-job training is good. Training is very well planned, managed and delivered. A variety of resources is used which improves the learning experience. Resources include the effective use of information learning technology. Learners are involved, industrious and

productive. They enjoy their training and recognise its value in their job roles and development within the nurseries where they work. Learners produce a good standard of work.

47. Particularly effective additional support is provided for learners consistently throughout the partnership. Learners' previous experiences and qualifications are taken into consideration. Learners who do not possess general certificates of secondary education above grade C in mathematics and English receive an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and key skills. They complete a questionnaire on which they are invited to identify any particular support needs that they may need. Where support needs are identified, good support is provided. Action plans are drawn up, and are regularly reviewed and updated. Relevant information is shared with tutors, assessors and work-placement officers to ensure that appropriate and consistent support is provided by all staff. Regular diagnostic assessment measures the progress made by learners and is used to amend their action plans. Learners attend regular, additional support sessions either individually or in small groups. There are also informal support sessions for those learners who need it. NWCS's partners are particularly active in this area. Some learners who have completed an apprenticeship programme are receiving literacy, numeracy and language support to prepare them for advanced apprenticeships.

48. Learners' inductions are satisfactory. They all receive an induction to their place of work and to the requirements of their courses. Learners are able to recall important aspects of the information which they have received. They have a satisfactory understanding of equal opportunities, and are able to discuss with confidence what equal opportunities means and how this affects their work.

49. Resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory. A wide range of useful teaching aids is available, and there are very useful resources to support learning. These include toys, reading books, feeding bottles, craft materials and textbooks. Most of the worksheets and handouts given to learners are well produced, contain colourful images and are clearly referenced and dated. Some, however, are poorly photocopied.

50. Arrangements for assessment are satisfactory. Realistic assessment plans are produced after discussions between learners and assessors. Learners are encouraged to consider and suggest appropriate sources of evidence. Assessors use a variety of assessment methods. Learners' written work is of an appropriate standard. Portfolios contain a good range of evidence. Learners receive prompt and comprehensive verbal and written feedback about their performances and the outcomes of assessments.

51. There is insufficient target-setting at progress review meetings. All learners are aware of the dates on which they will be assessed and the deadlines for the completion of units. However, some employers do not receive written notification of these arrangements. Medium- and short-term targets do not take into consideration the employers' responsibilities regarding training, coaching and the mentoring of learners in the workplace. Learners' progress and achievements are not regularly recorded in the individual learning plans nor are they always used in discussions about progress.

Leadership and management

52. The partnership arrangements are managed very well. NWCS's clear strategic direction focuses quite distinctly on improving the learners' experiences. Communications

throughout the partnership are good. All staff are very well informed, work collaboratively and take the opportunity to share examples of good practice. Particularly effective standardisation activities take place regularly to ensure consistency and improvements in the assessment and progression of learners. There is a clear emphasis on the learner, improving retention and achievement rates, and developing and sharing strategies to continuously improve all aspects of the provision.

53. Staff have an annual appraisal where they assess themselves against specific criteria. This assessment is used in discussions with their managers. The outcomes of discussions are used in training and development activities. There are regular opportunities for staff training and updating. Staff have regular supervision meetings with their manager. All staff are appropriately qualified and experienced.

54. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. There is a detailed sampling plan. A comprehensive, computerised wall chart very clearly monitors learners' progress and achievements. Detailed spreadsheets are given to assessors which outline individual learners' targets for completion.

55. There is insufficient planning for on-the-job training by some employers. NWCS does not adequately record the training opportunities available to learners. The provider's records of discussions with employers about the arrangements and opportunities available for training learners at work are not completed thoroughly enough. Some learners and employers are not able to prepare effectively for training in the workplace to support the off-the-job training. Some learners and employers are not always issued with a copy of the individual learning plan and made aware of its purpose, and some plans do not reflect learners' individual learning needs.

56. Some of the health and safety practices in the workplace are inappropriate. For example, one learner was left unsupervised to care for seven children under the age of three. Most of these children were not appropriately dressed for outdoor play in cold weather. The door leading to the play area was not closed. It was left unsecured and swinging in the wind. This posed a potential risk to the children. Some learners are not aware of what the fire alarm sounds like, and others had not experienced a fire drill. A member of staff was seen to be wearing no apron and only one glove when changing nappies. During the inspection the provider acted very promptly in response to the issues raised.

Social care

Grade 4

Strengths

- well-planned induction

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievements rates on apprenticeship programme
- ineffective delivery of off-the-job training for employed learners
- inadequate arrangements to support learners with literacy and numeracy needs
- poor implementation and monitoring of some quality assurance procedures

Achievement and standards

57. The very small number of learners on work placements make good progress with their technical certificate and key skills training, and their portfolios contain a good range of evidence. These learners are also successful in achieving additional qualifications, such as food hygiene and first aid. Some learners who leave the programme before completing their training do so having gained part of the framework, such as the technical certificate, or the NVQ or key skills qualifications. Unit certification is used to show learners' progress. Some learners make slow progress, particularly those employed learners who do not attend off-the-job training. The technical certificate and key skills examination success rates are low.

58. Retention and completion rates for the apprenticeship frameworks are poor. In 2002-03, the retention rate for advanced apprentices was 48 per cent, and 12 per cent completed their frameworks. For 2003-04, retention was 25 per cent and there have been no achievements to date, although 22 per cent of learners are still in training. There are no achievements for 2004-05, but 40 per cent of learners are still in training. In 2002-03, the retention rate for apprentices was 42 per cent and 8 per cent of them completed their frameworks. For 2003-04, the retention rate was 53 per cent and 18 per cent of learners completed their frameworks. A further 6 per cent of learners are still in training. There are no achievements to date for 2004-05, but 57 per cent of learners are still in training. In 2002-03, 45 per cent of NVQ learners achieved their qualification. Twenty per cent of the 2003-04 intake have achieved their NVQs and an additional 20 per cent are still in training. No learners were recruited for the NVQ programme in 2004-05.

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											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	10		36	100	33	100										
Retained*	0		9	25	16	48										
Successfully completed	0		0	0	4	12										
Still in learning	4		8	22	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	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		24		17	100	12	100								
Retained*	0		2		9	53	5	42								
Successfully completed	0		0		3	18	1	8								
Still in learning	5		13		1	6	0	0								

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2003-04		2002-03													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5	100	11	100												
Retained*	1	20	5	45												
Successfully completed	1	20	5	45												
Still in learning	1	20	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

59. The arrangements for induction are well planned. The process is thorough and makes good use of a handbook which provides learners with a clear understanding of the requirements of the programme, and their rights and responsibilities. Exercises, questionnaires and a range of activities are organised and used effectively to ensure a memorable and meaningful experience for the learners. Health and safety and equality of opportunity are covered comprehensively and learners are awarded a certificate on successful completion of induction.

60. The resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory. A dedicated training room for the learners is well resourced. This gives them an identifiable base in a pleasant environment. There are adequate numbers of books, journals and learning materials to support the learners. IT equipment is based in the care room and has internet access. This is supported by an IT suite that has open access to all learners on all programmes. Most staff make effective use of learning materials to support the learning process, and link the materials with clear lesson plans. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and are working for further qualifications and professional development.

61. The assessment of learners is satisfactory. A holistic approach is adopted and units are accredited. A variety of assessment methods is used and there are clear assessment procedures. Learners receive verbal and written feedback which they regard as helpful, although the written work is not corrected for spelling errors. Assessors visit learners frequently in the workplace to observe work practice and to provide support. Learners' progress reviews are planned to take place every 12 weeks. The reviews are used well to set targets and actions for learners, and to explore health and safety and equality of opportunity issues. Employers are not always involved in progress reviews.

62. Support for learners is satisfactory. The pastoral and vocational support provided is valued by the learners. Staff are flexible, committed and make themselves available to support learners at a range of locations and at various times.

63. Off-the-job training is not delivered effectively for employed learners. Many of them do not attend planned training sessions, do not complete work for their qualifications and often leave the programme before completing their training. NWCS's staff introduced a number of strategies to resolve poor attendance at training sessions. These include encouraging employers to release staff from work commitments and improving employers' understanding of apprenticeships. Open learning packs have been introduced for the technical certificates and evening classes have been provided. An informative employer

information pack is given to employers which includes, for example, policies about health and safety and equal opportunities, a guide to apprenticeships, learner induction and the progress review process. Some strategies have not been particularly effective, but staff are continuing to look for ways of improving retention and achievement rates. For those few learners who are on work placements and who attend off-the-job training, their experiences are positive ones. Learners are involved in discussions and ask relevant questions. One employer is employed on a part-time basis by NWCS to deliver some of the off-the-job training.

64. The arrangements to support learners with literacy and numeracy needs are inadequate. Classes are held to provide learners with additional support, but few learners attend these classes and insufficient support is offered in the workplace. No member of the care team staff has the qualifications or experience to deliver appropriate support. Many learners who are attempting the technical certificate and key skills examinations are not adequately prepared.

Leadership and management

65. Performance management of staff and the supervision sessions carried out by the programme manager are effective. Monthly team meetings are used to monitor learners' targets and achievements. The team is working hard to involve employers, and the work-placement officer makes regular telephone calls to employers to monitor the arrangements. The self-assessment report was sufficiently critical and identified a number of key weaknesses that matched the findings of the inspection.

66. Historically, a number of quality assurance procedures have not been implemented and monitored appropriately. The procedures relate to internal verification arrangements, learners' progress and staff targets. NWCS is aware of these issues and has recently introduced a series of measures to monitor how existing and established systems and procedures are implemented. These systems and procedures include sampling plans, standardisation meetings, monitoring the progress of learners, and the supervision of staff performances and targets linked to the retention and achievements of learners. The new measures are not sufficiently established for any judgements to be made about their effects on the learners, but the arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i> Entry to Employment	47	2 2

67. NWCS became the lead provider for the E2E programme in August 2005. Before that date NWCS delivered E2E as a subcontractor to another provider. Many of the systems and procedures for managing the E2E programme are well established and have been carried over into the new contracting arrangements, but retention and achievement data for the previous three years were collected under the subcontracting arrangements and are not included. The current E2E programme is managed by a programme manager who oversees a team of four members of staff, most of whom are employed full-time.

68. At the time of inspection there were 47 learners. Of these, 44 were women. Two of the learners were from a minority ethnic group. Learners attend for a minimum of 16 hours and a maximum of 35 hours each week. At the beginning of the programme, learners go out on work placement for two days each week which increases to four days each week. Most learners register on the childcare vocational pathway. The three main vocational routes offered by NWCS are childcare, IT and social care. Qualifications are available from entry level through to level 2 and include the foundation award in caring for children, the level 2 certificate in early years practice, a basic computer literacy course, the certificate in life skills and an examination-based qualification in IT. Learners can also gain internally awarded certificates for good attendance and achievement.

Employability training**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good development of personal and social skills
- good resources to support learning
- good monitoring of progress

Weaknesses

- some weak target-setting

Achievement and standards

69. Learners develop good personal and social skills on the programme. They have a clear sense of direction and enjoy their learning. Learners are very well motivated to achieve their learning goals and to work productively during learning sessions. For example, in a personal and social development session, learners worked effectively as a group to make an omelette. One learner had never made an omelette before and the other learners had few cooking skills. The learners worked well as a team to cook the omelette and to tidy the flat after they had finished cooking. They then reflected on what they had learnt and achieved and discussed ways of adapting the omelette recipe.

70. Learners are enthusiastic about their work placements. For example, one learner volunteered to work extra hours at her work placement and is making excellent progress towards reaching her target of being employed as a nursery assistant. Learners are able to link what they learn on placement with their off-the-job training. In one session, learners worked well on the design of a nursery and drew on their experience of being on work placement in nurseries to develop the designs. Learners work well on individual assignments during class, and also work well as part of a group, supporting each other's learning. Their achievements are acknowledged with wall displays and photographs.

The quality of provision

71. There are good resources for the support of learning. Each subject has dedicated classrooms. Tutors use the classrooms as a base for resources and also make good use of wall space to regularly display learners' work. NWCS has built a flat at the training centre which is well used and is very popular with the learners. It is a simulated living environment which contains a fully equipped kitchen and a living room. The flat is used effectively to deliver personal and social development sessions on cooking, ironing and other household tasks.

72. Overall, training is satisfactory. No unsatisfactory sessions were observed during inspection. Fifty per cent of the sessions were graded good and the rest were satisfactory. The better sessions fully involve the learners, but also make good use of questioning to challenge them. Also in the better sessions, learning from previous sessions is reinforced and learners are very enthusiastic. Tutors work hard to motivate the learners and maintain their interest during training sessions. For example, in an application of number session, each learner used their number skills to measure the wrapping paper for a shoe box which they then transformed into a colourful gift box. The boxes were part of a project to send gifts to under-privileged children in other parts of the world. Each learner used a different set of number skills to weigh out the gifts which they had bought previously. Learners developed their number skills and creative skills during the session and also gained increased awareness of the lives of children in different parts of the world.

73. The training programme is very appropriate to learners' interests and needs. The learners are well matched to their learning programmes and have a clear commitment to their training. Most of them want to work within childcare and the provision is effective in enabling them to achieve their goals. There is a clear progression route for learners who begin with the foundation award in childcare. They develop their literacy and numeracy skills before progressing to complete a key skills qualification. As they progress through the E2E programme, learners can transfer to the mainstream provision and achieve a level 2 qualification. Some learners also have the opportunity of a work placement which provides them with a progression route to employment. One employer is offering a progression route from an E2E work placement to the mainstream provision and then to employment as a nursery assistant.

74. NWCS works well with three personal advisers from Connexions to support the learners. Approximately seven hours each week are offered at the training centre by Connexions advisers, who meet regularly with the learners and with E2E staff for case conferences. Additional support and advice is offered to learners through personal and social development sessions. NWCS has good links with various external agencies that provide information for drugs awareness, budgeting, countering bullying, and sexual health.

75. Some of the target-setting in progress reviews is weak. In some review documents, learners are set targets for 'regular' or 'continued' attendance at training sessions which are common to all learners. Other reviews record only the title of a training session without indicating what target is being set for the learner. Some targets are not specific to individual learners, and other targets are too general to be measurable or meaningful to the learners.

Leadership and management

76. NWCS's monitoring of learners' progress is good and thorough. In addition to completing the E2E passport with learners, tutors produce regular tutorial reports about learners' progress. Their progress is also monitored and recorded when they attend 'surgeries' with a Connexions adviser. Monthly reports are produced for each of the vocational areas for the E2E manager. Reports are produced by the literacy and numeracy and key skills tutor as appropriate. The E2E manager communicates regularly with employers by telephone and personal visits to discuss the progress of learners on work placement. Records are also produced detailing learners' progress during work placements. Learners' progress is thoroughly and comprehensively monitored, but there is some unnecessary duplication of information in the E2E passport and in other records.

77. The E2E area of learning is managed effectively, although at the time of inspection NWCS had only been operating the programme as a lead provider for three months. Staff meet regularly to discuss recruitment, the performance of learners, and issues arising from the vocational areas and quality assurance. Trainers are appropriately qualified. Staff take advantage of a wide range of staff development opportunities. All staff have completed equal opportunities training and have also attended courses in subjects such as managing conflict, key skills for E2E, and Common Inspection Framework awareness. The three-year development plan outlines NWCS's plan to widen the vocational provision offered to learners.

78. Quality assurance systems are established to evaluate the programme. Session evaluations and progress reports on the achievements and retention of learners have been collected and analysed. Equal opportunities is satisfactory and learners complete a module on equality as part of personal and social development. Many wall displays and posters reinforce key messages about equality and diversity and there are timetabled sessions about equal opportunities. Learners are aware of the procedures for making a complaint and feel well supported.

