

INSPECTION REPORT

Oracle Training Consultants Limited

13 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
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

INSPECTION REPORT

Oracle Training Consultants Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Oracle Training Consultants Limited (OTC) is a private training organisation based in the centre of Doncaster. It offers modern and advanced modern apprenticeships in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and also Entry to Employment (E2E) provision for learners in hairdressing and beauty therapy. The company has been delivering work-based learning since 1999 through a contract with South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Its E2E work is subcontracted from YMCA Training.

2. OTC has 16 staff, the team having increased from seven at the previous inspection. The company has 117 learners on apprenticeship, advanced apprenticeship and national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes. This represents a considerable increase on the number of learners at the previous inspection. There are nine learners on the E2E programme, which is too few to support grading of this provision at the inspection. OTC also delivers private courses in hairdressing and beauty therapy, and works with some of the schools in the area. This work is not in the scope of this inspection.

3. Off-the-job training takes place in OTC's main centre. Learners work or have placements in Doncaster and the surrounding area, where on-the-job training and assessment take place. The geographical area covered is extensive, stretching from Barnsley to Goole, but with many of the employers based in and around Doncaster. A considerable proportion of OTC's learners have additional learning needs.

4. At 3 per cent, unemployment in Doncaster is the highest in South Yorkshire and is greater than the national figure of 2.3 per cent. The area has suffered from the demise of mining and manufacturing. Doncaster is currently ranked 44th of England's 354 boroughs according to indices of deprivation. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is small at less than 2 per cent. Doncaster is currently attracting considerable investment to meet its deprivation, unemployment and low levels of educational attainment. A key initiative is Doncaster Education City, which is seeking to pull together education providers to drive up attainment in the statutory sector and offer a co-ordinated range of choices in post-compulsory education. OTC is an active participant in this initiative.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, OTC's leadership and management are good. Its quality improvement and equality of opportunity arrangements are satisfactory. In hairdressing and beauty therapy, the provision is good.

6. **The inspection team were broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The involvement of staff in the self-assessment process was satisfactory, and the report was developed by feedback from learners and employers. OTC had identified some of the strengths and weaknesses that the inspectors identified and most of the grades awarded in the self-assessment update prepared for the inspection coincided with those

that the inspector gave. However, the report is too descriptive and insufficiently judgemental to provide a basis for focused action-planning.

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

Quality improvement is satisfactory, with OTC putting in place a range of effective strategies to improve retention and achievement. OTC has improved upon a number of weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Employer involvement has been improved from a weakness to a strength. However, some issues have not been sufficiently improved. Use of management information remains a weakness.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ORACLE TRAINING CONSULTANTS LIMITED:

- improve target-setting
- improve review practice
- make more effective use of the full range of management information
- establish clear roles and responsibilities for all staff
- continue to develop and implement strategies to improve retention and achievement

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

Hairdressing & beauty therapy			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Hairdressing</i> Apprenticeships for young people	84	2	
<i>Beauty therapy</i> Apprenticeships for young people	33	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. OTC provides apprenticeship, advanced apprenticeship and NVQ training in hairdressing and beauty therapy. This area of learning is graded generically, as most judgements are common across the provision. OTC also delivers an E2E programme under a subcontracting arrangement with YMCA Training. There were nine learners on the E2E programme at the time of the inspection, which is too few for the provision to be graded.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	38
Number of staff interviewed	16
Number of employers interviewed	13
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	13
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	7

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **Achievement of the apprenticeship frameworks is good.** In beauty therapy, advanced apprenticeship achievement rates have been consistently high from 2000 to 2002. The retention rates for apprentices are also good. In hairdressing, retention is now good, and potential achievement for apprentices and advanced modern apprentices shows a rising trend.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	0	5	3	0	8
Total	0	5	3	0	8

10. **There is good teaching of background knowledge in hairdressing.** There is a well-developed bank of lesson plans and comprehensive resources for each training session. Tutors evaluate their training sessions and improvements are the focus of weekly staff meetings. Learners particularly like the focus on their individual needs and have good support materials.

11. **There is very good learning support.** OTC uses initial assessment results to target support through a range of support measures before induction into the programme. Assignments are well marked. Lectures and assignments are available to learners on audio tape. Learners receive a lot of individual support and those who make slow progress are allocated a mentor to support them. Dyslexic learners use coloured overlays that help their reading. OTC encourages the use of information technology (IT), spell-checkers and dictionaries in order to produce assignments. If learners become pregnant, OTC successfully encourages them to attend extra training and assessment in order to finish their framework.

12. **Employer engagement at OTC is outstanding.** Many employers regularly attend the company's employer forums. There are regular newsletters that keep employers informed of developments and events at OTC. Employers take an active part in annual competitions and attend the learner of the year event. Male employers take part in some recruitment activities as role models for potential male recruits. Employers readily support assessment

in the workplace. Learners trained at OTC usually gain employment with their employers. Many employers participated in the first annual awards scheme for employers, which recognises their commitment to training.

13. **Target-setting for learners is poor.** Individual learning plans do not take sufficient account of initial assessment and the learners' starting points. Targets set at learners' progress reviews are too broad and are not given timescales. Learners are not clear about when they need to complete units, or of the end date of their programme.

14. **There are some poor review practices.** Learners' progress reviews take place every 12 weeks, with additional four-weekly reviews of progress. The review form is well designed but is not always completed fully. In beauty therapy, reviews are completed occasionally without the learners present and they receive feedback at a later date.

Leadership and management

15. **OTC employs good strategies to recruit learners to the provision.** Marketing materials are professionally produced and there is clear and attractive branding of the company. The skills road show informs young people reaching the end of compulsory education about post-16 opportunities in work-based learning. OTC co-ordinates this initiative and the sessions that the company delivers are well run. OTC also runs taster days, where it gives potential learners clear and realistic information to ensure that they have a sound understanding of the industry.

16. **OTC has good links that support learning.** Its links with employers are outstanding and its links with schools are good. OTC's links with the voluntary organisation that subcontracts E2E provision to the company are strong, and there are links to other external agencies to support learners in overcoming a range of barriers to learning.

17. **The support for new staff at OTC is good.** New tutors and assessors initially shadow more experienced staff and then carry out joint tutoring. There is frequent monitoring of all aspects of their role every three months. OTC holds staff reviews twice each year, where the company sets targets and identifies training needs. OTC supports those staff who do not have a teaching qualification on taking up their post to participate in a course, with a target time for completion.

18. **OTC employs very effective strategies to improve retention and achievement rates.** Monitoring of learners has improved and OTC now monitors learners and their workplaces every four weeks. Monitoring of learners' absence is prompt and effective. The company has also improved the monitoring and observation of teaching and assessment. Where OTC identifies learners as at risk of leaving before completing their qualifications, the company puts strategies in place to support them. OTC has negotiated a temporary framework with the LSC for beauty therapy at level 2, thereby improving the learners' opportunities for achievement and progression.

19. Staff teams meet regularly to discuss learners' progress, operational issues and to plan and review changes to curriculum delivery.

20. Internal verification is satisfactory. The company holds regular standardisation meetings but does not plan the sampling for verification sufficiently.

21. The self-assessment process is adequately inclusive. The self-assessment report identifies a number of the strengths and weaknesses that the inspectors identified, although some strengths identified by OTC are normal practice. However, much of the body of the report was descriptive rather than judgemental, providing an insufficiently analytical basis for focused action-planning.

22. **Although tutors and assessors have clear and up-to-date job descriptions, the roles and responsibilities of some of the other staff are not sufficiently clear.** Responsibility for aspects of management is spread over several members of staff, with no formal identification of the limits of respective responsibilities.

23. **Managers have insufficient overview of literacy, numeracy and language support.** Learners take an appropriate diagnostic test at their initial interview, which identifies their learning needs. However, OTC has no formal procedure to ensure that it meets those needs through individualised and appropriately monitored learning programmes.

24. **There is insufficient training of staff in equal opportunities.** Staff do not have a good understanding of the wider issues of equality and diversity.

25. **OTC does not use management information sufficiently to drive forward improvement within the company.** There is insufficient analysis of learners' characteristics to set targets for recruitment, retention and achievement.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good recruitment strategies
- good links to support learning
- good support for new staff
- very effective strategies to improve retention and achievement

Weaknesses

- insufficient overview of literacy, numeracy and language support
- insufficient staff development in equality and diversity
- insufficient use of management information to drive improvement

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Strengths

- good achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- good teaching of background knowledge in hairdressing
- very good learning support
- outstanding employer engagement

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting

ORACLE TRAINING CONSULTANTS LIMITED

- some poor review practice

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ORACLE TRAINING CONSULTANTS LIMITED:

- 'like the fact it is work-based, I gain a lot of experience in the salon'
- 'it's fun, everyone gets along'
- 'we get a lot of help'
- 'we get better training here'
- 'teachers are great and we get treated like adults'
- the modern uniform

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ORACLE TRAINING CONSULTANTS LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of practical experience - 'we are only shown how to do things once.'
- the temperature at the training centre - 'it gets really cold'
- the number of days spent at OTC

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good recruitment strategies
- good links to support learning
- good support for new staff
- very effective strategies to improve retention and achievement

Weaknesses

- insufficient overview of literacy, numeracy and language support
- insufficient staff development in equality and diversity
- insufficient use of management information to drive improvement

26. OTC employs good strategies to recruit learners to the provision. Marketing materials are professionally produced and there is clear and attractive branding of the company. The current prospectus is of a high standard. It is well produced, informative and clearly set out in accessible language. Its availability in community languages is indicated. Images are welcoming and there is some challenging of stereotypes. There is good promotion of OTC through advertising on buses and at significant local venues. Again, this advertising is professionally produced and branded. OTC has recently accessed external expertise in marketing, which has led to analysis of the effectiveness of different approaches to advertising. A skills road show informs young people reaching the end of compulsory education about post-16 opportunities in work-based learning. This initiative, which involves a significant number of providers in the area, is co-ordinated by OTC and now involves all secondary schools in Doncaster, including four special schools. The skills road show gives initial information and a taster of work-based learning, and the sessions that OTC delivers are well run. OTC also runs taster days at its premises where it gives potential learners clear and realistic information to ensure that they have a sound understanding of the industry.

27. OTC has good links that support learning. The company's links with employers are outstanding and are particularly effective in ensuring the co-ordination of learner support. Communication between OTC and employers is frequent and this is a monthly monitoring system. There is an employers' newsletter, and an employers' forum. Employers' awards have been introduced, with a good level of involvement by employers. Links with schools are good, with OTC particularly active in the success of the skills road show. Links with one of the local special schools has resulted in opportunities for some of OTC's learners to gain experience of working with clients with a disability. Staff at the school are now being encouraged to become clients for learners at OTC. Links with the voluntary organisation that subcontracts E2E provision to OTC are strong, and there are links to other external agencies to support learners in overcoming a range of barriers to learning. OTC is an active partner in the Doncaster Education City initiative.

28. Over the past year there have been a number of staff changes, and a considerable proportion of OTC staff, particularly tutors and assessors, are new or fairly new in their

posts. The support for new staff at OTC is good. New tutors and assessors initially shadow more experienced staff and then carry out joint tutoring. There is monitoring of all aspects of their role every three months. That monitoring includes the observation of teaching and learning and of assessment. There are also opportunities for new staff to observe more experienced staff. OTC holds staff reviews twice each year, where the company sets targets and identifies training needs. OTC supports those staff who do not have a teaching qualification on taking up their post to participate in a course, with a target time for completion. The company holds staff meetings regularly. There are weekly meetings where the company timetables monitoring visits and discusses learners' progress. Curriculum teams also meet regularly.

29. Financial management of OTC is satisfactory. The directors are working with an external consultant who is focusing support on financial management of the company in light of the strategic plans for further expansion. Those plans involve a controlled growth in learners' numbers. A renegotiation of the lease is nearing completion, allowing for expansion of the current first-floor premises and additional accommodation on the ground floor to improve access.

30. The roles and responsibilities of some staff are not sufficiently clear. Not all staff have job descriptions that are up to date and accurate, and an appreciable number have no job description at all. The staffing structure included in the handbooks and appended to the self-assessment report is not up to date, and responsibility of aspects of management is shared between several members of staff, with no formal identification of the limits of respective responsibilities. Co-ordination responsibilities are not clear. However, there is an up-to-date and clear job description for tutors and assessors, and the quality of the learners' experience remains good.

31. Managers have insufficient overview of literacy, numeracy and language support. Learners take an appropriate diagnostic test at their initial interview, which identifies their learning needs. However, the company has no formal procedure to ensure that it meets those needs through individualised and appropriately monitored learning programmes. Learners receive very good support from tutors and this is helping them to improve their literacy skills. There is no co-ordinated approach to identifying and planning to meet staff development needs to increase the effectiveness of literacy, numeracy and language support.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

32. OTC has a range of detailed policies related to different aspects of equality of opportunity that have been updated in the past year. The policies are comprehensive and cover equality of opportunity, sexual harassment, racial equality, disclosure, diversity, disability, grievances, complaints, discipline and smoking. OTC displays all of its policy statements relating to equal opportunities on noticeboards in the main corridor of the training centre. The centre is welcoming and there is a general welcome notice in a number of community languages. At the beginning of their programmes, apprentices receive an induction that covers the main points of the policies, and reference is also made to these in a learners' handbook. OTC used external speakers as part of induction this year to raise learner awareness of diversity. A few weeks into training, learners carry out imaginative exercises that are designed to make them more aware of aspects of equality, such as disability. Exercises include what it would be like to be a wheelchair user, or to have a hearing or visual impairment. Learners have participated in events with local special

schools, including giving treatments to pupils and involving them in a major fashion show. Despite these extra activities to reinforce learners' awareness, apprentices have a basic understanding of equality of opportunity, focusing on their understanding of fair treatment at work.

33. OTC produces professional marketing materials and an attractive prospectus is available in different community languages. OTC features in adverts on buses and on prominent buildings in Doncaster. Although OTC previously used an equal opportunities strapline on advertising materials, this has been removed from recent materials. There is a clear procedure for complaints that employers and apprentices understand, and the company deals promptly and effectively with issues raised. OTC's training centre is not accessible to wheelchair users, being located on the first floor of a building that can only be reached up a flight of stairs. OTC is in negotiation to lease a ground-floor area below its current premises and has arrangements with local salons should they recruit apprentices with mobility difficulties. Equal opportunities is a standard agenda item at staff meetings. Employers have been given guidance on their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and all but one salon seen was accessible. OTC checks that employers have equal opportunities policies, and although there is an expectation that they will produce a policy if they do not have one in place, OTC does not follow this up effectively to see if they produce one or adapt the company's policy.

34. OTC collects data on apprentices' gender, ethnicity and disabilities, but the company does not carry out sufficient analysis in order to set targets for recruitment of learners from under-represented groups or to compare performance. OTC has been involved in recruitment initiatives involving schools and community organisations to target men and young people from minority ethnic groups. They are also involved in seeking accreditation for skills for specialist areas, such as threading, for potential learners who gained their initial qualifications in Asia. Male employers take part in some recruitment activities, presenting themselves as role models for male potential learners. These initiatives have yet to have an effect on actual recruitment. At 4 per cent, the proportion of male learners is low.

35. There is insufficient training of staff in equality of opportunity. Staff receive training in dyslexia awareness and there was a recent session to raise awareness of language used with apprentices after an incident involving the use of inappropriate words. Staff do not have a good understanding of the wider issues of equality and diversity. They do not sufficiently reinforce equality of opportunity during reviews of apprentices' progress in the workplace.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

36. At the end of the 2003-04 contract year, OTC became aware that retention and achievement rates had dropped significantly. Management information had not been adequately used to alert them to the problem as it developed over the year. Once the situation was recognised, however, measures were put into place to improve retention and achievement and these are now having an identifiable effect. Monitoring of learners has improved. Prior to the current contract year, learners were reviewed in the workplace every 12 weeks. For this contract year, OTC has divided the area and its on-the-job venues into four, and learners and their workplaces are now monitored every four weeks. This has enabled more responsive and prompt assessment arrangements, and the earlier identification of problems. The monitoring of learners' absence is prompt and effective. If a learner fails to attend without previous authorisation, the salon is contacted and then

contact made with the learner. Problems with attendance and attendance patterns are discussed at the weekly staff meeting and appropriate action is identified.

37. The monitoring and observation of teaching and assessment have also been improved. Monitoring and observation are carried out quarterly and are particularly focused on the high proportion of new staff. OTC documents observations which include some self-assessment by the member of staff observed. However, observations are not currently graded. Where the company identifies learners as at risk of leaving before completion because of pregnancy, they are fast-tracked to help them achieve. Where a learner's place of employment is geographically remote from OTC, the company uses video evidence to ensure that it can retain the learner and that the learner can achieve. OTC has negotiated a temporary framework with the LSC for beauty therapy at level 2, improving the learners' opportunities for achievement and progression.

38. Operational management of quality improvement is the responsibility of the quality assurance co-ordinator, who answers to one of OTC's directors. The quality assurance co-ordinator carries out an audit of quality control procedures, but there is no timetable for the audit process or record of the audit. The quality assurance policy and procedures are based on the self-assessment process, with the self-assessment report and the action plan being seen as the drivers for improvement. The self-assessment process is adequately inclusive. The directors compiled an initial report, following which a workshop was held over half a day with the staff team to agree and challenge the strengths and weaknesses identified. The company subsequently produced an update of the self-assessment report, which identified a number of the strengths that the inspectors identified, although some of the strengths that the company identified are normal practice. The self-assessment report also identified a significant number of the weaknesses highlighted by inspectors. However, much of the body of the report was descriptive rather than judgemental, providing an insufficiently analytical basis for focused action-planning.

39. Arrangements for feedback are satisfactory. Learners provide written feedback on their programmes, and hold learners' meetings. OTC gathers feedback from staff about programmes and gathers annual feedback from employers by questionnaire. In addition, OTC facilitates an employers' forum. Each year it analyses and produces a report. There are identifiable improvements as a result of this process, but there is no process to formally feed back details of those improvements to learners, staff and employers.

40. Internal verification is satisfactory. The company holds regular standardisation meetings. It supports new assessors well. Communication with work-based assessors is appropriate. However, feedback to assessors does not always result in an action plan. Identification of the verification sample is not sufficiently well planned.

41. The management information system is used appropriately for contract-compliance purposes. However, OTC does not use management information sufficiently to drive forward improvement within the company. There is insufficient analysis by learner characteristic to set targets for recruitment, retention and achievement. Although OTC gathers data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability, there is no analysis of achievement by such characteristics to identify significant variations in performance. There is no analysis of performance against postcode. Although OTC recruits considerable numbers of learners with additional learning needs, there is no comparative analysis of performance. No number or time-bound targets are set using management information to deal with issues of

under-representation. There is no analysis of comparative length of stay or of early leavers by learner characteristic.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hairdressing Apprenticeships for young people	84	2
Beauty therapy Apprenticeships for young people	33	2

42. In hairdressing, OTC has 58 apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2, and 26 advanced apprentices working towards NVQs at level 3. There are six learners taking NVQs at level 2 and one taking an NVQ at level 3. There are 33 learners on beauty therapy apprenticeship programmes, of whom 13 are advanced apprentices working toward NVQs at level 3, and 20 are apprentices on a temporary apprenticeship framework working towards NVQs at level 2. OTC provides vocational training for nine learners in hairdressing and beauty therapy on an E2E programme as a subcontractor to YMCA Training. These learners are working towards an NVQ at level 1. Forty-nine hairdressing learners have identified additional learning needs, representing approximately 50 per cent of hairdressing learners. Most hairdressing learners and advanced apprentices are employed. Beauty therapy learners on NVQ at level 1 and the apprenticeship programmes are not employed, but most of them have salon placements. Apprentices work towards key skills throughout their training.

43. Three full-time and three part-time staff deliver training and assessment in hairdressing. Two of the part-time staff are also work-based assessors. There are a further four work-based assessors for hairdressing. Two full-time and one part-time staff deliver beauty therapy training and assessment. OTC deals with 116 salons in Doncaster and the surrounding area.

Strengths

- good achievement of apprenticeship frameworks
- good teaching of background knowledge in hairdressing
- very good learning support
- outstanding employer engagement

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting
- some poor review practice

Achievement and standards

44. Achievement of the apprenticeship frameworks is good. In beauty therapy, advanced apprenticeship achievement rates have been consistently high from 2000 to 2002. The retention rates for apprentices are also good. Of the 43 learners who have started apprenticeship programmes since August 2002, over 82 per cent are still in learning or

ORACLE TRAINING CONSULTANTS LIMITED

have successfully completed their programmes. In 2001-02, the actual framework achievement rate was 77 per cent. Retention has improved to good levels after slipping in 2002-03. NVQ achievement rates are satisfactory.

45. Learners have developed appropriate practical skills and can carry out a range of services and treatments with confidence. In beauty therapy, portfolios of those learners working towards NVQs at levels 1 and 2 are of a good standard. Learners take care in the presentation of their work and most of their assignments are word processed, although ICT is no longer a mandatory component of their apprenticeship programme. The portfolios of those learners working towards NVQs at level 3 are less well organised. In hairdressing, apprentices have developed appropriate practical skills and can carry out a range of services with confidence. Those at level 3 are able to work as stylists.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00		1998-99		1997-98	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	14		26		20		15		14		0		0		0	
Retained*	0		0		10		10		12		0		0		0	
Successfully completed	0		0		3		8		11		0		0		0	
Still in learning	10		19		8		1		1		0		0		0	

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00		1998-99		1997-98	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	39		65		26		22		5		0		0		0	
Retained*	0		2		14		19		4		0		0		0	
Successfully completed	0		2		12		17		3		0		0		0	
Still in learning	33		44		1		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	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00		1998-99		1997-98	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0		20		26		4		1		0		0		0	
Retained*	0		0		15		2		1		0		0		0	
Successfully completed	0		0		15		2		1		0		0		0	
Still in learning	0		11		0		0		0		0		0		0	

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

The quality of provision

46. There is good teaching of background knowledge in hairdressing. OTC has a well-developed bank of lesson plans and comprehensive resources for each training session. The lesson plans suggest teaching strategies to make sessions interesting and encourage the development of key skills. Tutors evaluate their training sessions and weekly staff meetings focus on improvements. OTC delivers hairdressing training on an individual basis in hour-long timetabled sessions with good explanations of facts. The company spends extra time where required. Learners particularly like the focus on their individual needs and have good support materials, such as handouts and books available. Lessons in beauty therapy are generally well planned. OTC takes care to make lessons interesting, with particular emphasis on industry practice and requirements. During the inspection, all of the lessons observed were satisfactory or better.

47. Learners enjoy key skills training and appreciate their relevance. Practical training benefits from small group sizes, with never more than 10 learners in a group. The company uses professional products and most learners get a client in practical sessions but the number of models available is limited. OTC has introduced some early evening practical sessions to try to overcome this.

48. Assessments are well planned and learners have a clear understanding of the process. They receive clear and prompt feedback on their performance. In hairdressing, work-based assessments take place regularly and learners can and do request additional assessments. Learners can borrow equipment in order to video assessments in the workplace and several do so. In beauty therapy, all assessments are carried out within the training centre in commercial salons working on clients.

49. There is very good learning support. OTC uses initial assessment results to target support through a range of support measures before induction into the programme. Assignments are well marked. The company corrects errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar so that learners can improve their literacy skills. Lectures and assignments are available to learners, on audio tape. Learners receive a lot of individual support, particularly where they have difficulties with written tests. OTC allocates mentors to those learners who make slow progress. Dyslexic learners use coloured overlays to help their reading. OTC encourages the use of IT, spell-checkers and dictionaries in order to produce assignments. If learners become pregnant, OTC successfully encourages them to attend extra training and assessment in order to finish their framework. Although the company is meeting the learners' literacy and numeracy needs through the amount of learning support it gives, the co-ordination of the process is not clear and planned support and progress are not recorded on individual learning plans.

50. Employer engagement at OTC is outstanding. The directors are well known and respected throughout the region by hairdressing and beauty therapy employers. Many employers regularly attend employers' forums and value the guidance and debate that they provide. They particularly value guidance received on employment legislation and the chance to hear external speakers' views. The employers' forum has helped foster better relationships between employers. There are regular newsletters that keep employers informed of developments and events at OTC. Employers participate in annual competitions and attend the learner of the year event. Male employers take part in some recruitment activities, presenting themselves as role models for male potential learners.

Employers readily help facilitate assessment in the workplace by OTC staff where there are no work-based assessors. Learners trained at OTC usually gain employment with their employers as the company is committed to working with employers who are also committed to training. Employers report a consistently high standard of service from OTC and many have participated in the first annual awards scheme for employers that recognises their commitment to training.

51. OTC has a satisfactory range of programmes to meet the learners' needs. Programmes range from NVQs at level 1 to NVQs at level 3. OTC has successfully negotiated a temporary framework for level 2 in beauty therapy. This has significantly increased the learners' opportunities for achievement and progression in beauty therapy. Learners at OTC have access to additional qualifications and training. The company organises annual trips to exhibitions and holds an annual hair and beauty competition and awards evening to celebrate the learners' achievements.

52. Target-setting for learners is poor. Individual learning plans do not take sufficient account of initial assessment and the learners' starting points. Targets set at learners' progress reviews are too broad and are not given timetables. Learners are not clear about when they need to complete units, or of the end date of their programme. Some learners are not progressing sufficiently quickly through their programme. The monitoring systems that managers, tutors and learners use to monitor achievement and progress only indicate when work has been successfully completed and give no indication of timely achievement. Managers have no clear overview to identify when learners are falling behind schedule. However, learners receive particularly good individual support and this weakness is not having a significant effect on their progress at the current time.

53. There are some poor review practices. Learners' progress reviews take place every 12 weeks, with additional four-weekly reviews of progress. The review form is well designed but is not always completed fully. In particular, health and safety and equality of opportunity are often left incomplete. Staff are not clear about how to deal with these areas at reviews. In beauty therapy, reviews are occasionally completed without the learners present and they receive feedback at a later date. On two occasions, significant issues were discussed without the learner present and one learner left a work placement without having the opportunity to discuss this with the salon owner. In hairdressing, practices are more consistent.

Leadership and management

54. Staff teams meet regularly to discuss operational issues. A number of training staff are new and are well supported by the management team. They meet regularly to discuss learners' progress and to plan and review changes to curriculum delivery. Staff training is regular, focused on the needs of the individual and linked to annual appraisals.

55. Accommodation is satisfactory. There are three rooms used to teach background knowledge, all of which have computer access, and two training salons in hairdressing and beauty therapy. However, all accommodation is on the first floor, with no lift access. There are plans to extend the first-floor accommodation and to add further training rooms at ground-floor level. OTC has arrangements with local salons should the company recruit apprentices with mobility problems. There are limited retail products for use in beauty therapy.

56. Equality of opportunity is part of the learners' induction and they have a satisfactory understanding of the broad issues. At each progress review, OTC seeks learners' views on fair treatment at work, but they do not understand wider-ranging issues encompassing equality and diversity and staff do not reinforce this.

57. Internal verification is satisfactory. However, the verification sample is not sufficiently well planned. Feedback to assessors on their performance during assessment does not always include an action plan that is reviewed and evaluated. The company holds regular standardisation meetings and tapes these so that those missing them can hear what was said and receive minutes of the meeting.

58. All of OTC's staff contributed to the company's most recent self-assessment report. The report was too descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative or analytical. As a consequence, the development plan is not sufficiently focused on improvements. Inspectors agreed with the grades in the revised self-assessment report but identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

