

INSPECTION REPORT

The Financial Training Company Limited

22 September 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

INSPECTION REPORT

The Financial Training Company Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Financial Training Company Limited (FTC) is a private training company which was established in 1959. FTC has been offering training for the Association of Accountancy Technicians (AAT) since 1993, and delivering government-funded training since 1998. FTC is part of Kaplan Inc. a division of the Washington Post. The company provides government-funded work-based learning in 18 centres throughout the UK. FTC trains apprentices working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in accountancy at level 2, 3 and 4. A large part of FTC's training provides for privately funded learners. FTC currently has a contract with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for 748 learners who attend FTC's centres variously in Hull, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester. FTC also provides training under subcontract agreements with 12 providers which involve a further 683 learners. Two of these providers, the Fareport Training Organisation Ltd in Southampton and Quantica Training in London have placed a total of 319 learners with FTC for training.

2. The senior management team of FTC consists of a chief executive and 12 senior managers and directors who are responsible for strategic decision-making and development. The regional operations director, who is a member of the senior management team, is responsible for the operational training division of FTC. The company employs a total of 450 staff, 60 of whom work directly for the AAT training division. The training centre managers have responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the company, including the government-funded training at each of FTC's training centres. A course manager in each centre has responsibility for a team of tutors and assessors who deliver the AAT courses. The course manager is responsible for training and assessment, reviews, learner support, internal verification, recruitment and retention, and achievement of learners. Each of the AAT teams has an administrator.

3. FTC funds its government-funded training provision through each of its training centres which contract with their own local LSCs in West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, Greater Merseyside, Humberside, Leicestershire, and Tyne and Wear. Greater Manchester LSC provides the co-ordination for contract management.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** FTC's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. The provision in accounting and finance is also good.

5. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process included all members of staff who contributed to the process through a range of meetings and questionnaires. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and understand the value of the process. The self-assessment process is self-critical and has identified most of the strengths and weaknesses found at inspection. FTC supports the process with a range of data which is analysed effectively and

used in producing the report. FTC collects and analyses learners' and employers' feedback which is also used to contribute to the findings of the report. The self-assessment process at FTC is continuous and is integrated with the overall operational management.

6. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.

FTC responds quickly to resolving any weaknesses identified through the self-assessment process. Since the previous inspection, significant changes and improvements have been made by FTC which have successfully resolved most of the weaknesses identified at that point. The development plan is well constructed and has clear strategies to further improve retention and achievement rates and the overall quality of the provision.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE FINANCIAL TRAINING COMPANY LIMITED:

- continue to improve retention and achievement rates for apprenticeship frameworks
- maintain continuous improvements particularly in progress reviews
- continue to raise awareness of equality of opportunity with employers to widen participation
- improve planning for potential learners requiring specialist support

GRADES

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

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

Business administration and law			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Accounting and finance		2	
Adult apprenticeships	748	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection took place over four days during one week in September 2005. Additional evidence was collected relating to learners contracted to FTC by two other providers, the Fareport Training Organisation Ltd in Southampton and Quantica Training in London.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	25
Number of learners interviewed	82
Number of staff interviewed	46
Number of employers interviewed	21
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	11

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Retention rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are very good.** Over 95 per cent of learners recruited during the 2004-05 period have been retained or remain in training. The retention rate on the NVQ at level 4 programme has consistently exceeded 85 per cent each year since the programme began in 1998.

9. **Completion rates for apprenticeship frameworks have improved and are now good.** For advanced apprentices, the rates increased from 36 per cent in 2000-01 to 58 per cent in 2002-03. In the current period, 34 per cent have already completed their frameworks, and 45 per cent remain in training. The apprenticeship completion rate for the period 2004-05 already stands at 60 per cent, with 33 per cent of learners still in training. Achievements at level 4 NVQ are presently at 49 per cent, and 42 per cent of learners are still in training. Learners are developing good skills and have a clear understanding of the background knowledge required for their programmes.

10. Learners' progression to higher-level qualifications is good. Seventy-six per cent of the 2004-05 intake of learners who achieved accounting qualifications at level 2 NVQ progressed to the NVQ at level 3.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Business administration and law	0	8	1	0	9
Total	0	8	1	0	9

11. **FTC provides well-planned, off-the-job training in all of its training centres.** Lesson plans, teaching materials, and handouts are of very good quality and are standardised

throughout the company. Tutors have current professional knowledge and present lessons in a way which learners find interesting and easy to understand. Classrooms have been refurbished recently and are spacious, well lit, and air-conditioned, with comfortable seating. Tutors use a newly installed interactive computerised system to plan and present lessons.

12. Learners receive good support and guidance from FTC which is particularly effective at meeting and raising learners' aspirations. Tutors are easily accessible by e-mail or telephone and respond quickly to learners' needs and requests for help with their courses. Flexible modes of training are available to fit learners' and employers' working practices.

13. FTC gives learners good career advice as they progress through their programmes of learning and involve employers in the choice of appropriate options. Employers provide effective coaching support and help learners to develop and extend their personal and technical skills in the workplace.

14. New learners attend a one-day induction at a local FTC centre where they receive information about the AAT course and the structure of the qualification. They also receive comprehensive briefings on health and safety and equality of opportunity which are reinforced at their 12-weekly progress reviews.

15. The quality of learners' progress reviews with FTC is inconsistent. Targets set for learners are sometimes not specific enough and have unclear timescales. Some progress reviews have no employers' or learners' comments and it is unclear if the employer contributed to the review process.

Leadership and management

16. FTC has good strategic and operational planning. The strategic plan is prepared by the senior management team and uses a variety of data to reach conclusions and set objectives. All staff have an opportunity to contribute and are clear about the roles they play in helping the company achieve its objectives.

17. FTC's development plan is well constructed, having identified objectives which are assigned to specific individuals. Staff are kept well informed about the progress that the company is making towards achieving its objectives.

18. The operational management of FTC is well planned for all training centres. Each centre has a centre manager who has a clear understanding of the responsibilities involved in government-funded training. Training centre managers meet frequently with course managers to discuss learners' progress and set targets for retention and achievement.

19. The management information system at FTC is particularly effective at processing a range of data about the progress that learners are making. Staff are familiar with its use and routinely analyse the data to identify learners who are falling behind with their targets. Where this happens, FTC's staff are skilled at helping learners get back on target. Data is used effectively to set staff targets for retention and achievement. Data is also used effectively in the planning and development of programmes and courses.

20. Resources are well managed. The accommodation is well maintained and of a very

good standard. Staff have appropriate vocational qualifications, but FTC recognises that few staff have formal teaching qualifications.

21. **FTC has good strategies to improve participation by learners and staff from under-represented groups.** The company has a long-term commitment to increasing the number of learners from under-represented groups. Marketing materials are designed to encourage learners from these groups, and data about learners who apply to FTC is collected and analysed to ensure that marketing materials are being effective.

22. **The company does not plan sufficiently for learners who may require additional support,** such as learners who are visually impaired, or have restricted hearing, or require help with dyslexia.

23. Internal verification is generally satisfactory. A range of evidence is systematically planned and sampled throughout the year. The internal verification team meets annually to discuss strategies. Assessors are observed frequently and feedback is given, some of which is not sufficiently detailed. On some occasions, interim internal verification is not carried out frequently enough.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic and operational planning
- particularly effective use of data to inform planning
- good recruitment strategies for members of under-represented groups
- good continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning for potential learners' specialist needs

Business administration and law

Accounting and finance

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good achievement rates
- particularly effective off-the-job training
- particularly effective support and guidance for learners

Weaknesses

- inconsistent quality of progress reviews

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THE FINANCIAL TRAINING COMPANY LIMITED:

- staff are passionate about the course
- 'the projects that are set for me'
- 'the way I am kept informed of my progress'
- 'the facilities and the free coffee'
- the emphasis by FTC on learners' needs
- the way they teach and make it easy to learn
- the very supportive and down-to-earth tutors
- the good organisation and guidance provided by FTC

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THE FINANCIAL TRAINING COMPANY LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the revision sessions need to be closer to the skills test
- advanced notice of timetable changes could be increased
- the length of the bookkeeping course

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic and operational planning
- particularly effective use of data to inform planning
- good recruitment strategies for members of under-represented groups
- good continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient planning for potential learners' specialist needs

24. FTC has good strategic and operational planning. The current strategic plan covers a three-year period and outlines FTC's main areas of activity and areas in which the company intends to expand its provision. The plan is prepared by the senior management team and submitted to the board of directors for approval. The focus of the strategic plan is to expand and improve the overall quality of learning at FTC. Quality of provision and achievements are central to the objectives outlined in the plan. The development plan sets specific objectives for the company as a whole and for each department. The plan clearly identifies who has responsibility for each of the objectives and outlines how they will be achieved. Progress in achieving the company's objectives is clearly communicated to all FTC's staff on a visibility board that is displayed in each training centre and contains information about the extent to which targets are being achieved. All staff are clear about FTC's strategic direction and the role that they play in helping the company to achieve its objectives. FTC uses a variety of data and analysis of its market information in forming the strategic plan, and all staff have the opportunity to contribute through a variety of staff meetings. Managers are involved in agreeing the development plan.

25. FTC has good operational management in all of the training centres. Each centre has a manager who has a clear understanding of the responsibilities for government-funded training. Course managers meet regularly with centre managers to discuss learners' achievements and targets are set for the course managers. Communications among staff at all levels are good. A range of staff meetings take place, action points are identified and are assigned to individuals and followed up to ensure compliance.

26. FTC collects a range of data about all aspects of the learners' progress. The management information system manages data effectively and is used routinely to produce reports which are used in the planning and development of the programmes. Staff receive training in the use of the database and are confident in using the system to gain information about the progress their learners are making. Data about learners' progress is used routinely in team meetings to identify those learners who require additional support to enable them to achieve their targets. Data about retention and achievement rates is used systematically to set targets for staff. The company collects information to establish the number of learners who progress to higher-level courses, and this is used to plan the type of programmes being offered. Monthly reports are produced for the board, to identify areas of under-performance. This helps to focus training centre managers' attention on increasing

learners' achievement levels.

27. Resources are well managed. The accommodation is well equipped and maintained. Rooms are of a good size and have appropriate seating and equipment. Staff have appropriate vocational qualifications and are audited to assess their capabilities. FTC recognises that few of its staff have teaching qualifications, but it plans to support its staff in developing their qualifications, and to increase the number with teaching qualifications. Staff training is well planned. They are encouraged to attend training events and a range of courses is available to support staff development. The individual staff development plan is linked with the annual appraisal process, where individual staff targets are set and development needs are identified.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

28. FTC has good strategies to improve participation by learners and staff from different cultural backgrounds. FTC has a firm and long-term commitment to increasing the number of learners from under-represented groups. An equality of opportunity and diversity group has been established, chaired by a member of the senior management team and includes representatives from a broad range of staff with different backgrounds and staff from different training centres. The current focus of the group is to increase the number of learners and staff from minority ethnic backgrounds to broadly represent the population of the area in which each centre is situated. Marketing materials have been designed to reflect cultural diversity and promote social inclusion. FTC has also marketed its provision in a range of journals and periodicals catering for minority ethnic groups. FTC's website, which is the main route used by learners to apply for training, is monitored to record the ethnic background of each applicant. This data is analysed to assess how effective the marketing materials are at appealing to minority ethnic groups.

29. FTC sets clear targets for increasing the number of learners from under-represented groups and progress towards achieving these objectives is monitored by the senior management team. The company promotes cultural diversity throughout its centres and is sensitive to the cultural needs of learners and staff. For example, a multi-faith prayer room is provided for use by learners and staff. The timetable is also adapted to accommodate different cultural needs. Staff receive equal opportunities training at their induction which is reinforced with additional training in recognising and appreciating the needs of learners from different cultural backgrounds. Staff are well aware of their responsibilities in promoting equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity and diversity is a routine agenda item at all staff meetings. Where problems are identified, FTC responds quickly to remove obstacles to learning and is flexible in its approach to meeting learners' needs. FTC's staff are skilled at identifying learners' needs and giving well-targeted support to help them continue with their learning programmes.

30. FTC has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy that applies to all learners and staff. The policy gives clear guidance on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and useful information on discrimination legislation. Detailed procedures deal with bullying and harassment. Procedures for dealing with complaints are appropriate and learners have a good understanding of the process. Where complaints are made, they are dealt with promptly and effectively. FTC has identified the priority of equality of opportunity and implementation of the policy is the responsibility of the board. FTC collects a range of data about the ethnic background of its learners. Analysis of this data compares groups, and where differences occur in areas such as attendance, retention, or achievement, the

reasons are investigated and remedial action is taken.

31. Learners receive information about equality of opportunity and diversity during their inductions and have a good understanding of their employment rights and responsibilities. They are also aware of the FTC's anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity are tested using a series of questions during their progress reviews, but this is not always carried out consistently. Employers' equality of opportunity policies are checked by FTC before learners begin their programmes. Where employers do not have a policy of their own, FTC provides an appropriate policy. FTC provides useful information for its employers, aimed at raising their awareness of equality of opportunity and diversity.

32. The company does not carry out sufficient planning for those learners who may require additional support in meeting their needs. FTC has responded in a positive way to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, to ensure that wheelchair users or persons with restricted mobility are able to access their training centres. However, the provider is not sufficiently prepared to accommodate the needs of learners who are visually or hearing impaired. Dyslexia sufferers are not supported sufficiently. There are no specialist teaching materials or support resources.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

33. FTC carries out good, continuous improvement of its provision. A comprehensive quality management system is operating and includes an internal audit function which supports continuous improvement. The approach to quality improvement is systematic and well understood by staff. Action plans are drawn up as a result of the procedures and responses are prompt and very effective. Senior management identified the need to improve the teaching accommodation and have upgraded and modernised the accommodation. A new interactive computerised system has been introduced recently at all training centres to improve teaching resources. FTC has worked successfully with many of its contract partners at improving the quality of provision.

34. The introduction of a new management information system has provided valuable, accurate, and reliable data about retention and achievement which has been used very effectively to develop strategies to improve these rates. The quality improvement system is clear and comprehensive. It includes a wide range of procedures relating to key aspects of the learners' experiences. These include observations of teaching, progress reviews, assessments and interviews, surveys of employers and learners, learners' induction feedback, and internal verification and internal audits. In particular, compliance with document requirements is frequently checked by the quality assurance manager. Brief action plans are produced from all quality improvement visits and their implementation is checked at the next visit. Outcomes of learners' and employers' feedback are analysed systematically and reports are produced for programme planning, development and continuous improvement. Actions taken in response to learners' concerns include the provision of additional off-the-job training and more revision sessions being provided. The few complaints received were dealt with quickly and effectively. Recently, a new quality assurance calendar has been introduced to ensure that all procedures are carried out systematically throughout the year.

35. Self-assessment is honest and sufficiently critical. The self-assessment report identified most of the strengths and weaknesses found during inspection. The process involves all

staff. They have actively contributed to discussions about strengths and weaknesses and have completed self-assessments of their own performances. Staff meet with course managers monthly to discuss improvements to the programme. Course managers attend the best practice meetings chaired by the quality assurance manager, as part of the self-assessment process. Staff are clear about their roles within the process and recognise its importance in improving the quality of provision. The self-assessment report included consideration of the analysis of learners' and employers' feedback. The development plan is well constructed and realistic in its expectations, but it has few key performance indicators to enable progress towards objectives to be judged. The plan is reviewed and updated routinely at staff meetings. Many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been resolved. The self-assessment process uses a range of data which is analysed effectively and compared on a year-on-year basis.

36. Internal verification is satisfactory overall. The internal verification strategy for the group includes the sampling of a range of evidence and is planned systematically throughout the year. The lead internal verifier visits each training centre twice a year to monitor the overall quality of internal verification and to ensure compliance with the internal verification policy. Action points generated from the visit are reviewed and monitored by the quality assurance manager to ensure compliance. The internal verification team meets annually to discuss overall strategies. Assessors are observed frequently and feedback is given, but in some cases the feedback is not detailed enough to help assessors, and sometimes interim internal verification is not carried out frequently enough. Improvements have been made to ensure that the sampling plans cover a wider range of learners.

37. Procedures exist for the formal observations of training, and tutors receive detailed feedback. When training needs are identified, they are linked to the individual staff development plans. However, there is no analysis of the grade profiles for observations, or any evaluation of whether additional training has improved the overall quality of teaching and learning. Formal observations in some training centres are not systematically planned and carried out on a routine basis. This situation has been identified by the self-assessment process and FTC is resolving the problems where training centres are not being sufficiently compliant. Learners routinely give feedback about their perceptions of the teaching they receive and analysis of this data indicates that they enjoy and value their learning sessions.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration and law

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Accounting and finance		2
Adult apprenticeships	748	2

38. FTC provides accountancy training for their direct contract government-funded learners from six training centres in Manchester, Leeds, Hull, Newcastle, Leicester and Liverpool. Seven hundred and forty-eight learners are on programmes in these centres. Of these, 82 are apprentices, 412 are advanced apprentices and 254 are working towards a level 4 NVQ. All learners are employed. Most are recruited through employers, with a minority through Connexions, schools or by personal recommendation. Learners attend off-the-job training using a wide variety of day-release or evening-only attendance options at the training centres. The AAT provision in each training centre is managed by a course manager. Twenty-eight members of staff are directly involved in the AAT programmes for government-funded learners, of whom 26 provide off-the-job tuition and/or assessments and progress reviews. The assessors review learners' progress every 12 weeks. FTC also provides training for 12 other providers throughout the UK. The 319 learners from two of FTC's major contractors were included in this inspection.

Accounting and finance

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good retention rates
- good achievement rates
- particularly effective off-the-job training
- particularly effective support and guidance for learners

Weaknesses

- inconsistent quality of progress reviews

Achievement and standards

39. Framework completion rates have improved. Advanced apprenticeship framework completion rates stood at 58 per cent in 2002-03. For the two-year period 2003-04 to 2004-05, the completion rate is already 34 per cent, with 45 per cent of learners still in training. Apprenticeship framework completions exceeded 60 per cent during the period 2002-03. Although the rate dropped to a satisfactory level in 2003-04, it already stands at 60 per cent for 2004-05, with 33 per cent of learners still in training. The achievement rates of NVQs at level 4 were 79 per cent in 2001-02 and 2002-03. For 2003-04 to 2004-05, the achievement rate is currently 49 per cent, with 42 per cent of learners still in training. The level of skills and knowledge demonstrated by many learners during the inspection is good.

40. The retention rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are very good. Between

THE FINANCIAL TRAINING COMPANY LIMITED

2001-02 and 2003-04, FTC recruited 852 advanced apprentices. Of these, 534 were retained and a further 64 remain in training. Of the 315 learners recruited during 2004-05, over 95 per cent have been retained or are still in training. Of the 160 apprentices recruited since 2001-02, 79 per cent have been retained or are still in training. The retention of level 4 NVQ learners has been consistently in excess of 85 per cent each year since the programme began in the year 1998-99.

41. Pass rates for external examinations are consistently high in all subjects, with most being 10-20 per cent above national averages. Some pass rates have been at 100 per cent over a three- to four-year period. Key skills results have shown significant improvements, with a 92 per cent success rate for those learners taking communications tests since the beginning of 2004, and a 78 per cent success rate for those taking application of number during the same period.

42. The rate of learners' progression to higher-level qualifications is good. Seventy-six per cent of the 2004-05 intake who achieved level 2 NVQ accounting qualifications have progressed to level 3. Eighty-eight per cent of the learners who completed advanced apprenticeships have progressed to technician level 4 NVQ. Seventy per cent of the 2004-05 learners who achieved level 4 accounting qualifications are now studying for professional accountancy qualifications.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the 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	132		315		275		298	100	279	100							
Retained*	0		86		164		206	69	164	59							
Successfully completed	0		73		128		172	58	136	49							
Still in learning	132		216		50		13	4	1	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	56		75		47	100	38	100									
Retained*	0		44		27	57	30	79									
Successfully completed	0		45		21	45	24	63									
Still in learning	56		25		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																
NVQ Training	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	101		162	100	174	100	192	100	80	100						
Retained*	0		47	29	150	86	170	89	69	86						
Successfully completed	0		47	29	118	68	151	79	63	79						
Still in learning	101		108	67	34	20	11	6	0	0						

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

The quality of provision

43. The company provides well-planned off-the-job training in all its training centres. Eight of the nine learning sessions observed during inspection were graded as better than satisfactory. Lesson plans, teaching materials and handouts are standardised throughout the company and are of good quality. Tutors demonstrate their up-to-date professional knowledge and present lessons that learners find interesting and easy to understand. All new tutors complete a short in-house teaching course, followed by a similar refresher course after 18 months. The company has set targets for 50 per cent of tutors to gain teaching qualifications, although this has not yet been achieved. The company has recently refurbished all classrooms. Most classrooms are spacious and well lit, with air-conditioning and comfortable seating.

44. All tutors use the interactive computerised system to plan and present lessons. Lessons are fast-paced, yet learners do not fall behind. They receive individual help from the tutor whenever necessary and also assist each other. Learners participate actively in classroom discussions, but tutors are well organised in controlling these interactions to maintain the momentum of the session. Many learners attend just one class of two hours each week, yet their progress is as good as that of those learners who spend a day each fortnight in class. All learners also attend block sessions of several days to complete certain units and for revision before examinations. They find these sessions particularly useful. Each class is well planned, closely focused and includes a mixture of different learning activities. This represents an efficient and effective use of learners' time. Homework and coursework is set and reviewed. Learners are given professionally produced study packs for each unit which are valuable aids to home learning. Learners enjoy the flexibility of being able to attend day- and block-release sessions, as well as classes in the evenings and at weekends.

45. The support and guidance given to learners is particularly effective in meeting and raising their aspirations. FTC's staff respond quickly to learners' requests for help with their courses. Tutors are accessible and available at any time by e-mail, telephone, or in person to provide help and support. They ensure that learners keep to schedule with their work and inform employers of any non-attendance at off-the-job training. Flexible modes of training are available to fit learners' and employers' work patterns, and if learners miss particular sessions they can attend the same session at a different centre, or at the same centre at a different time. Revision and weekend classes provide extra support to learners approaching examinations. If a learner has to retake an examination, they are supported beyond the funded time free of charge. Learners joining programmes at level 3 NVQ with no previous accounting experience are provided with a bookkeeping course to ensure that they have the essential skills to begin their intermediate course.

46. Learners receive good information and guidance throughout their programmes. Potential learners are able to speak to a dedicated AAT customer services officer to gain information before deciding whether the programme is suitable for them. FTC's staff give good careers advice to learners, and involve employers in choosing the appropriate options for learners. Employers provide coaching and help learners to develop and extend their personal and technical skills in the workplace. Learners are often given opportunities by employers to broaden their skills through additional responsibilities or multi-skilling.

47. Inductions are satisfactory. All new learners attend a one-day induction programme at their local FTC centre. They are introduced to the AAT course and to the structure of NVQs. Learners receive comprehensive briefings about health and safety, and equality and diversity. They retain much of this knowledge, which is reinforced at their 12-weekly progress reviews. Some learners are given a formal induction into the workplace by their employers, others have a more informal introduction to their work.

48. The quality of progress reviews is inconsistent. Some reviews give weak targets with insufficiently specific actions such as 'collect work-based evidence', or have unclear timescales for completion. The design of the progress review form does not provide sufficient space to record targets. Many review documents do not include either employers' or learners' written comments, and it is unclear if the employer contributed to the review progress. Health and safety, and learners' well-being are covered satisfactorily during progress reviews, but the coverage of equality of opportunity is often superficial and the outcomes of discussions are inadequately recorded. The thorough approach observed in some progress reviews is not shared sufficiently between training centres to maintain consistently high standards.

Leadership and management

49. FTC plans its programmes and monitors its staff's performance well. Teamworking is effective and there are regular staff meetings to share best practice. The company has good partnerships with lead providers. The subcontracted provision has improved, as have the sharing of best practice and mutual staff development. Data is used well to monitor learners' progress. Additional support is given where required.

50. Internal verification is now satisfactory, but some recent improvements have not been fully implemented. Learners' work is sampled more widely, but observations of assessors are still undergoing improvements. The criteria for observations of assessors are not standardised sufficiently and insufficient feedback is given to the assessors. Too much emphasis is given to desktop internal verification. The use of work-based assessments has improved and is now satisfactory, but witness statements from line managers in the workplace seldom specify how competence has been evidenced.

51. Initial assessments and key skills support have been improved recently. The completion rate for apprenticeship frameworks has also improved. Not enough attention is given to correcting learners' grammar, punctuation and spelling to improve their literacy skills. The reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory, and they feel protected from bullying and harassment.