

INSPECTION REPORT

ITEC North East Limited

14 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

ITEC North East Limited

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for ITEC North East Limited	2
Grades	2
About the inspection	3
Key Findings	3
What learners like about ITEC North East Limited	7
What learners think ITEC North East Limited could improve	7

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	8
Equality of opportunity	9
Quality improvement	10
Information and communications technology	12
Business administration and law	15

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. ITEC North East Limited (ITEC NE) was established as a limited company and a charitable trust in 1986. It operates from three sites in the northeast of England, with one site in Newton Aycliffe, one in Middlesbrough and one in Gateshead. ITEC NE provides work-based learning in information and communications technology (ICT), and business administration and customer service, funded through contracts with Tyne and Wear, County Durham, and Tees Valley Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). At the time of the inspection, there were 316 learners, of whom 111 were in ICT, 28 were in customer service and 177 in administration.

2. ITEC NE employs 32 staff, of whom four are part time. It has a senior management team of four, including the managing director. The senior managers, together with three centre managers, make up the full management team. A board of trustees oversees the strategic direction of the company.

3. Unemployment in the Tyne and Wear LSC region is 3.1 per cent, compared with 2.3 per cent nationally. Just under a third of those unemployed are under 25 years of age. The proportion of schoolchildren gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above is 49.2 per cent in Tyne and Wear, compared with 53.7 per cent nationally. The proportion of 16 year olds in work-based learning in Tyne and Wear is almost twice the national average.

4. ITEC NE was inspected by the ALI in 2001 and all aspects of the provision were judged to be unsatisfactory. It was reinspected in 2003, and all the provision was judged to be satisfactory. Since the reinspection, the company has gone through a further period of reorganisation which has involved the centre managers taking on more responsibility for all aspects of the provision in their area. Assessors, also known as training supervisors, visit the learners in their workplaces. Most of the training, assessment and progress reviews take place in the workplace, apart from some support for key skills, literacy, numeracy and the technical certificates.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Leadership and management and equal opportunities are good. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Training in ICT, administration and customer service is also satisfactory.

6. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** ITEC NE revised its self-assessment process in 2004. Self-assessment now draws on satisfaction surveys of learners and employers, as well as discussions in focus groups. Staff in each occupational area review their strengths and weaknesses using the Common Inspection Framework. They contribute to a draft report which is then reviewed by senior managers before distribution for final comment from staff. ITEC NE accurately identified strengths in support for learners and the quality of workplaces in its self-assessment report.

The company also identified slow progress for some learners as a weakness. However, it did not identify weaknesses that inspectors found in the planning and monitoring of some aspects of the programmes.

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

Since the inspection in 2001, ITEC NE has made considerable changes to its operations. Many of these changes were in place at the time of the reinspection in 2003. However, some of the changes had not begun to affect learners. Since the reinspection, ITEC NE has again reviewed how it operates and manages its training provision. It has placed particular emphasis on retention rates, and these have shown significant improvement over the past four years. Most retention and achievement rates are now satisfactory.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ITEC NORTH EAST LIMITED:

- continue to improve retention and achievement rates
- review the management of the vocational areas
- improve employer involvement in the training programmes
- review the structure and purpose of assessor visits

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		3

Information and communications technology			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Developing IT systems</i>		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	98	3	

Business administration and law			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Administration</i>		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	177	3	
<i>Customer service</i>		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	28	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The inspection team spent four days in ITEC NE during the early part of October 2005. They inspected and reported on LSC-funded apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in ICT, administration and customer service. Inspectors visited all three ITEC NE learning centres and several employers' premises, and interviewed learners, staff, employers and representatives from partner organisations.

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	24
Number of learners interviewed	64
Number of staff interviewed	33
Number of employers interviewed	36
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	41
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. Retention and achievement rates across all areas of learning are satisfactory and are much improved since the previous inspection in 2001 and the reinspection in 2003. In all three occupational areas, two-thirds of advanced apprentices and over a half of the apprentices in 2003-04 have either completed or are still in learning.

10. **Most learners develop good occupational skills** which meet the needs of the employers. Learners in ICT make good progress through their qualifications, achieving individual national vocational qualification (NVQ) units at regular intervals. Some learners in administration and customer service make slow progress in having units of their NVQs signed off by assessors or verifiers.

The quality of provision

11. **Most of the training for learners is provided in the workplace and is generally good.** ICT learners benefit from the good individual coaching and instruction they get from colleagues and supervisors in good placements. In administration and customer service, they have good access to appropriate resources and help from supervisors to gain very good occupational skills, but their training is not always well planned to support their apprenticeship.

12. **Off-the-job training is good when it is well planned and supplementing the occupational training at work, such as for network support in ICT.** However, some off-the-job workshop and supported self-study sessions in key skills or technical certificate theory are too unstructured to make good use of learners' time in the learning centres.

13. Pastoral support for learners is good in all areas. ITEC NE's staff work well to find appropriate work placements for the learners and visit them frequently to assess their work and review their progress. Employers also provide good support through the training and in giving learners opportunities to broaden their experience in different job roles.

14. Employers in all three occupational areas have too little involvement in the apprenticeship programmes. They rarely work with assessors and learners to plan the structure of the training, for example by suggesting which NVQ units to start first. Assessors do not sufficiently encourage them to provide witness testimony for learners' portfolios. Supervisors at work are rarely involved in progress reviews, and many are not sufficiently aware of the progress their learners are making through the qualification.

Leadership and management

15. Leadership and management is good. ITEC NE has made many improvements to its strategic and operational management since the previous inspection in 2001 and the reinspection in 2003. Some structures and responsibilities have been changed several times in the last four years, as ITEC NE has tried out different approaches to improve its provision. Some of the recent changes have yet to impact on areas of learning.

16. Equal opportunities arrangements are good. The subject is introduced well to learners at induction, and regularly and frequently reinforced in progress reviews. They have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work, and the confidence to exercise their rights. ITEC NE makes good use of well-chosen case studies to promote the concept of diversity. Learners' interests are well protected by both ITEC NE and their employers. Support for learners is also good.

17. Quality improvement is satisfactory. ITEC NE has continued to focus on improving retention and achievement through a good range of action-planning activities. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate and included most of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. However, it did not give sufficient emphasis to weaknesses in the planning of apprenticeship programmes found in customer service and administration.

18. Staff development is good. Training needs are identified well in an annual appraisal and six-monthly review, and staff are supported well to improve their skills, especially in working with learners.

19. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory but verification activities are not always sufficiently well planned. Customer service learners who have their portfolios verified in an interim check, have often completed too few units of their NVQ to benefit from detailed feedback.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic management
- very effective partnerships

- good promotion of equality and diversity
- good use of data to monitor and improve performance

Weaknesses

- ineffective observations of teaching and learning
- insufficient planning of training

Information and communications technology

Developing IT systems

Grade 3

Strengths

- good development of IT skills and confidence
- good progress by most learners
- good promotion of equal opportunities in progress reviews

Weaknesses

- some poorly planned off-the-job training
- poor employer involvement in programmes

Business administration and law

Customer service

Grade 3

Strengths

- good workplaces
- good pastoral support for learners
- good staff development

Weaknesses

- poor programme planning
- insufficient employer involvement in programmes
- insufficiently planned internal verification

Administration

Grade 3

Strengths

- good workplaces
- highly effective recruitment and placement
- good additional support

Weaknesses

- some slow progress

ITEC NORTH EAST LIMITED

- insufficient planning of on-the-job training

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ITEC NORTH EAST LIMITED:

- the regular visits by ITEC NE's staff
- the opportunity for real work experience
- 'the variety of tasks I do as part of my work placement'
- 'I can call my assessor on their mobile phone'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ITEC NORTH EAST LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- off-the-job training - make it more relevant to learners' career aims
- the atmosphere in the training centres - make it less regimental
- the software in the training centre - install updates more regularly

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic management
- very effective partnerships
- good promotion of equality and diversity
- good use of data to monitor and improve performance

Weaknesses

- ineffective observations of teaching and learning
- insufficient planning of training

20. Strategic management is good. ITEC NE senior managers actively participate in a range of external groups such as local and regional learning networks and an association of learning providers' strategic forum. This contributes to the development of a clear strategic vision for how ITEC NE can develop and contribute to meeting the changing needs of learners and employers. A detailed three-year development plan identifies priorities. These are effectively converted into targets with some detail as to how they will be achieved. The plan provides a rationale for both the volume and the mix of the provision offered to support local and regional priorities as identified by the local LSC. ITEC NE's staff have a good understanding of business objectives and how their work contributes to achieving them. Managers and assessors negotiate their individual retention and achievement targets as part of the appraisal process and these are monitored effectively. The previous inspection highlighted particularly good internal communications processes. These have been maintained and in some case enhanced. Managers are still available for guidance and support. Joint manager and senior management team meetings improve knowledge and understanding. Awaydays, biannual whole staff briefings and regular newsletters continue the good communication previously identified. The company intranet is very effective in sharing documents and resources. This also ensures that common resources are used across all learning centres. The board of trustees provides a good oversight of the performance and direction of ITEC NE. They make a good contribution to the development and review of the strategic direction at meetings. Priorities are supported through sound financial management and there is effective and efficient use of resources available.

21. ITEC NE has very effective partnerships with a range of key organisations to develop and enhance training in the Northeast. These partnerships have enabled the development of a range of very successful projects including achievement of centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) status in administration in Gateshead, young apprentice schemes in schools, and training for staff. Five training providers and the local further education college are partners in the Gateshead Collective of which the CoVE forms a part. Another partnership, with five other providers in southwest Durham, is to share staff expertise and good practice. Other providers are used very effectively to review and comment on self-assessment reports.

22. Procedures to recruit new staff are satisfactory. Most staff are occupationally competent and qualified as assessors and/or verifiers. The staff appraisal system is effective as a development review tool and links to the achievement of corporate and individual objectives. However, it is less effective at identifying and recording judgements on job effectiveness. Staff and managers agree personal development plans, and ITEC NE provides good support to ensure they are fully implemented.

23. ITEC NE has a satisfactory system to identify learners' literacy and numeracy needs. All learners complete an initial assessment using key skills diagnostic assessment. Staff are qualified in managing the process and specialist training is available to provide literacy and numeracy support. Trainers and assessors provide effective individual support as well as running designated group support sessions. Off-the-job training for key skills units provides additional support for these needs.

24. There is insufficient planning of training in vocational areas. There is no initial assessment of learners' occupational skills. Learners and employers are not given a clear starting point in terms of knowledge, understanding or performance capabilities. Some elements of the apprenticeship are introduced late and progress in achievement of NVQ units is slow for many learners. Key skills are sometimes assessed at the end of a programme of learning. Employers are not fully engaged in either the planning or reviewing of on-the-job training. Progress reviews do not adequately identify on-the-job training opportunities to link them to the programme requirements.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

25. ITEC NE has continued to build on the significant improvements it made to its equal opportunities arrangements since the inspection in 2001 and reinspection in 2003. Staff now make good use of a range of methods to promote diversity among learners and employers. ITEC NE uses case studies of past learners to highlight success stories, particularly for non-stereotypical learners, such as women in information technology (IT). The organisation celebrates its learners' successes through these case studies, which are displayed prominently in their main learning centres, and in the regular newsletter sent out to employers and partners. A well-designed, helpful and informative guide on work-based learning is circulated to employers when they agree to take on an apprentice. The guide provides a clear explanation of both ITEC NE and the employer's responsibilities to the apprentice, described under key activities such as induction, health and safety, the right to off-the-job training and equal opportunities. Equality and diversity impact measures are monitored regularly, and the organisation is ahead of its targets to achieve its targets for retention and achievement rates by 2006.

26. Policies and procedures are satisfactory. The equal opportunities procedures are regularly updated to include changes in relevant legislation. Apprentices have a satisfactory understanding of equal opportunities. Most learners are introduced to employees' rights and responsibilities during their induction at ITEC NE and are provided with a useful booklet. Their understanding is regularly monitored during progress reviews using a series of standard questions.

27. When learners are identified through initial assessment as needing additional support, to help with their literacy and numeracy skills, the support provided is good. Each learning centre has a well-qualified literacy or numeracy tutor who works directly with learners and provides useful guidance to other staff who teach or assess learners. ITEC NE works well to

find appropriate work placements for its learners. On the few occasions when a work placement proves to be unsatisfactory or not sustainable, learners are relocated quickly to avoid interrupting their training.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

28. ITEC NE makes good use of data to monitor and improve business performance. Operational and senior managers hold effective joint monthly meetings to review key performance indicators such as retention and achievement rates. These meetings are good, and a wide range of business issues is shared and discussed, raising centre managers' knowledge and understanding of the impact of these targets on the business as a whole. Data is used to identify trends in performance against a wide range of criteria. These include areas of learning and individual learning centres. This analysis is successful in identifying underperformance, and actions to tackle these issues are implemented. For example, managers determined that assessors were not visiting learners sufficiently often to encourage speedy completion of programme requirements. They developed specific targets for visits as well as an incentive scheme for achievement of NVQ units. Training centre managers hold monthly meetings with assessors to review learners' progress in detail. Good use is made of a system to identify if learners are at risk or are meeting/exceeding targets. Learners at risk receive additional support and more frequent visits. Data is also analysed with respect to gender, ethnicity and disabilities, although not for employment status.

29. ITEC NE uses a set of comprehensive operational procedures to guide and manage all of the key business processes, including those directly related to the learning programmes. These procedures are satisfactory and include a newly developed strategy for quality improvement. This identifies the key processes that contribute to quality improvement such as the self-assessment process, development planning, use of feedback and other quality systems. The procedures effectively focus on the learners' experience and, in particular, on measures to improve retention rates. The development of this strategy is too new to judge its overall effectiveness.

30. The self-assessment process was revised in 2004 and is satisfactory. Revisions are made to include the use of satisfaction surveys from learners and employers as well as focus groups. Emphasis is placed on the learners' experience and occupational groups review against the Common Inspection Framework. A draft version is developed and reviewed by senior managers before distribution for final comment from staff. Relevant staff have attended training sessions delivered by the LSC and the Learning and Skills Development Agency. Consultants and key partners are used to review and comment on self-assessment reports.

31. Internal verification is satisfactory. The lead internal verifier holds regular minuted standardisation meetings with assessors. Sampling plans are in place to record what has been sampled but these do not always clearly indicate what will be sampled next. The process requires an interim portfolio assessment as well as a final verification before submission. Interim reviews do not always take place at the appropriate time. Observation of assessors takes place using the set standards for assessment as observation criteria. This process is not always effective in identifying issues such as poor programme planning.

32. A new system of observation of off-the-job teaching and learning has been introduced over the past year and is part of a suite of observation processes. However, this process is

ineffective and does not improve teaching and learning or the sharing of good practice between trainers. Staff carrying out observations have not received specific training in observation and many do not have appropriate qualifications to support this role. No analysis of observation grades has been completed and the process does not include moderation meetings to ensure a common approach across the organisation.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Information and communications technology

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Developing IT systems</i> Apprenticeships for young people	98	3 3

33. Sixty-three apprentices and 35 advanced apprentices are following a developing IT systems programme that includes installation and support, an NVQ for IT practitioners or IT professionals. A further eight apprentices and five advanced apprentices are following an ICT for users programme, but this qualification was not inspected or reported on in detail. ITEC NE has also previously offered a communication technologies programme, but there are no learners currently enrolled on it. Eight learners are women. Seventy-one learners are employed by local employers and 31 are on work placement. Nine learners have a disability. Three learners are from minority ethnic groups. All learners have an initial assessment and induction before starting their programmes. Basic literacy and numeracy support needs are identified as part of the initial assessment. Training supervisors/assessors carry out regular assessments of learners' practical skills in the workplace. They also identify off-the-job training needs during the monthly progress reviews.

Developing IT systems

Grade 3

Strengths

- good development of IT skills and confidence
- good progress by most learners
- good promotion of equal opportunities in progress reviews

Weaknesses

- some poorly planned off-the-job training
- poor employer involvement in programmes

Achievement and standards

34. Learners' development of IT skills and confidence is good. They gain real work experience from work placements that include the telecommunications industry, call centres, local schools and colleges. For example, one learner is benefiting from wide experience in telecommunications installation and support, and has been recruited to a team installing computer networks in one of the royal palaces. Learners in school and college work placements are frequently involved in providing effective individual IT support to teaching staff. This includes assisting with the operation of electronic whiteboards and data projectors and producing instruction. Other learners take on high levels of responsibility for the maintenance and development of intranet or extranet websites.

35. Most learners make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Many complete their programmes early with good support from assessors. Most learners rapidly

demonstrate good work skills and several have been offered permanent employment, sometimes before completing their qualifications. Most learners now achieve individual units of their NVQ at regular intervals, an improvement introduced at the reinspection in 2003.

36. Retention and achievement rates are continuing to improve and are now satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, only 25 per cent of apprentices and 21 per cent of advanced apprentices completed their frameworks. At the reinspection, retention rates were improving for both apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships. Seventy-one per cent of the advanced apprentices who started in 2003-04 and 92 per cent of those starting in 2004-05 are still in learning. Thirty-four per cent of the apprentices who started in 2003-04 completed their frameworks, with 18 per cent still in learning. Seventy-three per cent of the 2004-05 apprentices are still in learning.

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	3		12		17		26		17							
Retained*	0		0		2		7		5							
Successfully completed	0		0		0		4		2							
Still in learning	3		11		12		6		3							

*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							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	10		56		68		55	100	72	100						
Retained*	0		4		24		22	40	37	51						
Successfully completed	0		4		23		20	36	32	44						
Still in learning	10		41		12		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

37. Guidance and support for learners is satisfactory. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are identified effectively during initial assessment. Assessors visit the workplaces at least monthly and sometimes more often to observe learners, check their portfolios and review progress. These visits are very supportive and assessors often make more frequent visits to help learners make better progress. One learner is visited weekly by his assessor to support his goal of early programme completion. However, high staff turnover has slowed progress for some learners. Most learners have individual learning plans but these are not always reviewed or used to monitor progress.

38. Weaknesses in the planning of learning identified at the previous inspection and at

reinspection have been partially rectified. However, some off-the-job training remains poorly planned. Most training is organised through shadowing experienced ICT professionals in the workplace. This training is satisfactory. Workplace supervisors monitor the skills of the learners and gradually increase the complexity of tasks allocated to them as they grow in confidence and competence. For most learners, the pace of this is satisfactory, though some are not given sufficient responsibility early in their work placement. When specific IT training needs are identified during progress reviews, such as installing or supporting computer networks, arrangements to provide this away from the workplace are generally good. However, much of the training for key skills and technical certificates is carried out in workshop sessions in ITEC NE's main learning centres. These sessions are poorly planned and do not make effective use of learners' time. Some hardware and software are not of current industrial standard, further limiting the value of working in the learning centres.

39. Employer involvement in planning learners' programmes is poor. Some employers contribute well to their learners' action plans and are fully involved in the whole training programme. However, many employers concentrate entirely on developing the skills they require for their business, and have insufficient involvement in the apprenticeship programme. Few supervisors or employers take part in progress reviews. Too often the notes and action plans from progress reviews are not sufficiently detailed or are too full of jargon to be useful to employers in supporting their learners. There is not enough contact between employers and assessors, and poor communication causes cancelled or late visits. Some of these weaknesses were identified at the reinspection in 2003.

Leadership and management

40. ITEC NE's staff work well to promote equal opportunities during progress reviews. Assessors reinforce learners' understanding of equal opportunity issues using a bank of relevant questions covering employment rights, harassment and bullying, complaints procedures, and working with people with disabilities. ITEC NE is effective at raising learners' awareness of a wider range of disabilities.

41. Managers provide clear leadership and direction, and set clear and specific targets for assessors and other staff. They hold regular, effective meetings which lead to specific, well-recorded actions. Self-assessment is satisfactory and involves all staff, as well as drawing on views of learners and employers. Staff development is satisfactory and is focused on raising the effectiveness of staff who work most closely with the learners. Communications with employers are good and use a wide variety of methods including newsletters and an employers' forum. The forum is informative and assists employers in supporting learners.

Business administration and law**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Administration Apprenticeships for young people	177	3 3
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	28	3 3

42. ITEC NE has 205 apprentices in business administration and law. Fifteen apprentices and 13 advanced apprentices are working towards customer service qualifications. Most of them are employed and receive on-the-job training in the workplace. One hundred and thirty-one apprentices and 43 advanced apprentices are working in administration. Most learners are employed, but a significant minority are not on permanent contracts at the start of training. For these learners, employers provide work placements for a fixed period pending an offer of permanent employment.

43. Most learning is on the job with regular visits every four to six weeks carried out by ITEC NE's staff who assess learners' work, plan assessment, provide coaching and review progress. In some cases, visits take place more often when learners need extra support. Learners attend ITEC NE's learning centres for help with key skills and technical certificates and to take online tests. A lead internal verifier and a panel of internal verifiers meet once a month to verify portfolios and improve standardisation. Apprentices remain on programmes for 12 to 18 months while advanced apprentices usually take between 18 and 24 months to complete.

44. The number of apprentices recruited to customer service programmes has declined steadily over the last four years, and is now around a quarter of that in 2001-02. Numbers in administration have also declined.

Customer service**Grade 3***Strengths*

- good workplaces
- good pastoral support for learners
- good staff development

Weaknesses

- poor programme planning
- insufficient employer involvement in programmes
- insufficiently planned internal verification

Achievement and standards

45. Retention and achievement rates are satisfactory and have steadily improved since the previous inspection and reinspection. Only 14 per cent of apprentices and 13 per cent of advanced apprentices completed their frameworks in 2001-02. These figures improved to

46 per cent and 40 per cent respectively in 2002-03, and 44 per cent and 27 per cent in 2003-2004. Eighty-six per cent of the advanced apprentices who started in 2004-05 are still on programme. However, of the 11 apprentices who started in 2004-05, five have already left early.

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	2		7		11		15	100	24	100						
Retained*	0		0		3		7	47	3	12						
Successfully completed	0		0		3		6	40	3	12						
Still in learning	2		6		5		0	0	0	0						

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		1999-00					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		11		25		28		44	100	0					
Retained*	0		0		14		16		8	18	0					
Successfully completed	0		0		11		13		6	14	0					
Still in learning	5		6		3		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

The quality of provision

46. Workplaces are good and provide apprentices with appropriate customer service experience and effectively facilitate learning and skills development. This was identified as a strength at the reinspection in 2003. Workplaces are well resourced and most provide good access to intranet and internet sites to help learners develop research skills. Learners follow links to relevant websites to help them complete specific tasks, such as completing exercises in an employment rights and responsibilities induction booklet. Apprentices are in relevant, responsible jobs which are customer focused. They can progress in the workplace and some achieve internal promotion. When apprentices have completed an apprenticeship in other occupations, their key skills and, in some cases, some of their existing NVQ evidence, are used well to accredit prior achievement.

47. The visiting training supervisors give good pastoral support to their learners, through a review process which covers equal opportunities issues well on every visit. This strength was identified at the reinspection in 2003 and has been further developed. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. When unemployed learners ask for work placements with particular employers, ITEC NE's staff make every effort to arrange this. While they are waiting for a work placement to be arranged, learners attend one of the ITEC NE's learning centres where they benefit from useful customer-focused work experience in a range of roles such as reception duties, general administration and

recruitment services. The training supervisors work well to develop very friendly professional relationships with learners and employers, which helps learners to recognise the effect of providing good customer service.

48. Literacy and numeracy support is satisfactory. Staff have appropriate qualifications to support learners' needs, identified through initial assessment. They have developed support materials and lesson plans to support literacy and numeracy. There are no current learners in need of this support.

49. Resources are satisfactory. Staff have developed a good training booklet for the level 3 learners, which directs them to websites and textbooks and aids research skills. They use various materials such as workbooks, exercises from textbooks and past test papers to help learners gain occupational knowledge. However, these materials are not used systematically enough to help learners to prepare for the technical certificate tests. Some learners have failed parts of the test, and this has reduced their self-confidence. Some learners struggle to complete the volume of work given to them by their assessors.

50. Some aspects of the apprenticeship programmes are poorly planned. Some of the planning weaknesses were identified at the reinspection on 2003, where they were associated with slow progress or delayed framework achievement. Although learners gain new skills and understanding at a satisfactory rate, achievement for some remains slow. Learners are often on programmes for 12 months without achieving any individual NVQ units. When assessors help learners to draw up action plans following an assessment visit, these plans do not focus enough on achieving individual NVQ units. Although initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills, learning styles and key skills is satisfactory, there is no thorough occupational initial assessment involving the learner and the workplace. This means that learners and their employers are not able to plan exactly how they will best use their normal work to provide evidence for their portfolios, for example, by starting on NVQ units matched to their most regular tasks. In a few cases, some elements of learners' programmes, such as key skills, are not provided until the end of the programme.

51. Employers do not get sufficiently involved in learners' programmes. This was identified as an improvement need at the reinspection in 2003, but there has been little or no progress. Employers do sign and comment on the records of monthly progress reviews, but they are rarely involved in the reviews themselves. They have little or no understanding of the framework requirements, and training supervisors do not develop their understanding when they visit. On-the-job training is regularly recorded on the individual learning plans. However, training supervisors do not ask employers to provide witness statements often enough. These statements could be used to confirm the learners' competence for the NVQ assessment.

Leadership and management

52. Staff development is good. Training needs are identified effectively through an annual staff appraisal, and staff are financially supported to take part in training and achieve the qualification. The four training supervisors are qualified assessors and up to four other staff can be used to internally verify the programme. Some of the assessors and verifiers have had training or achieved qualifications enabling them to provide specialist literacy or numeracy support. Some have gained key skills qualifications at level 2 and level 3. Others have gained qualifications such as the customer service NVQ, learning and development

NVQ, IT qualifications, teacher training qualifications and dyslexia awareness. Two of the assessors have gained dyslexia diagnostic qualifications.

53. Self-assessment is satisfactory. Learners and employers are involved through the use of a customer satisfaction survey. The most recent report was updated in time for the inspection. ITEC NE accurately identified most of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors.

54. Internal verification is insufficiently planned to cover all NVQ units and elements of the framework. Verifiers check a sample of learners' portfolios when they have been on their programme for between four and six months. This sample looks at portfolio contents, but internal verification records often state that evidence has not been sampled because the candidate has not completed full units. Portfolios are not then re-checked until learners are near the end of their programme, leaving learners with insufficient opportunities to make improvements. The lead internal verifier does inform the training advisers of current issues through meetings, but there is insufficient contact with learning centre managers who are responsible for managing the assessors' workloads. Internal verification has failed to pick up poor programme planning, such as the delayed introduction of an employment rights and responsibilities booklet, or of key skills work.

Administration

Grade 3

Strengths

- good workplaces
- highly effective recruitment and placement
- good additional support

Weaknesses

- some slow progress
- insufficient planning of on-the-job training

Achievement and standards

55. Retention and framework achievement rates are satisfactory and have consistently improved over the last four years. For example, for learners who started in 2001-02 and 2002-03, completion rates for advanced apprentices have improved from 28 per cent to 54 per cent. Apprentice framework completion rates during the same period improved from 29 per cent to 45 per cent. Retention rates also improved significantly. Nearly three-quarters of apprentices and advanced apprentices left without completing that framework in 2001-02, while in 2003-04 this figure had improved to just under half of the apprentices and around a third of advanced apprentices. Fifty-six per cent of the apprentices and 72 per cent of the advanced apprentices who started in 2004-2005 are still in learning, with three of the apprentices having already completed their framework.

56. Some learners make slow progress particularly on the apprenticeship programme. A significant number of learners have completed too few NVQ units, including some who have only two units after 12 months of training. Progress reviews do not deal effectively with slow progress in a number of cases. Assessors do not make enough changes to learning plans to improve progress and do not involve employers sufficiently as partners in

monitoring and improving slow progress. Some learners experience delays in preparation and testing for components of their framework. Some learners have trouble in obtaining sufficient time to work towards the apprenticeship framework. Very few learners have agreed and planned study time during working hours. Programme planning arrangements are not sufficiently thorough in tackling this issue with employers, although it is a part of the employers' agreement.

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	8		25		26		24		71	100						
Retained*	0		0		5		14		22	31						
Successfully completed	0		0		2		13		22	31						
Still in learning	8		18		16		1		0	0						

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	42		117		122		105	100	162	100						
Retained*	0		10		61		49	47	58	36						
Successfully completed	0		3		40		47	45	47	29						
Still in learning	41		66		24		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

57. Learners' workplaces are well resourced and provide good work opportunities for learning and progression. Learners work alongside experienced and qualified colleagues with appropriate administration and ICT skills. Workplace supervisors take an active interest in their training and progress. Learners receive good pastoral support from employers, many of whom take on the role of mentor. They provide a good point of contact between ITEC NE's staff and learners. ITEC NE has good working relationships with its companies. The workplaces are well matched to the qualification framework so that learning complements business needs. ITEC NE takes good care to ensure that workplaces are safe and healthy settings for learning to take place. Learners develop good workplace skills, largely through on-the-job coaching from their employers.

58. ITEC NE's recruitment and placement process is highly effective. Learners benefit from the speed and efficiency of this part of their programme. ITEC NE works effectively with the local Connexions service. Assessment and interview are well managed and effective. ITEC NE has a specialised team of recruitment officers who work well with employers, learners and other partners. They support learners well to improve job-seeking skills and prepare for interviews, through a combination of workshop training, work experience and

assessment. Initial assessment of learners is comprehensive and effective and their prior learning and additional learning needs are accurately identified. Induction is well planned and learners have a good recall of the material covered. Learners have a good appreciation of equal opportunities and diversity, health and safety, and qualifications. In particular, learners have a good understanding of the health and safety aspects of using computers.

59. The additional support provided for those learners who require it is good. Assessors make well-planned additional visits to the workplace to provide coaching and teaching. In some cases, learners attend the learning centre. Learners benefit from well-organised learning sessions for literacy and numeracy development, supported by good teaching materials and resources. Additional support and learning goals are well planned and recorded. One learner with poor spelling, punctuation and grammar skills has made good progress and is now able to produce letters and memos to the required standard for their job role. Two other learners following an apprenticeship framework, who gained low grades in mathematics at GCSE, are working towards application of number at level 2. They are able to deal with ratios and percentages. Some learners gain additional qualifications. Staff resources to support this additional training are satisfactory. Two assessors are qualified at level 4 NVQ, one to provide specialist support in numeracy and one in literacy. Learners are encouraged to work towards levels of qualifications, such as key skills or ICT, that are higher than the framework requirements.

60. ITEC NE's use of individual learning plans is satisfactory. Plans cover all aspects of the framework. As training progresses, trainers update the plans with learners' achievements. Learners have a satisfactory appreciation of their progress through the use of progress monitoring charts in the plans. Resources for learning are satisfactory. Trainers draw from a range of textbooks, self-study packs and their own resources to support learners. The company provides a good range of appropriate workshops at the learning centres. Staff effectively share learning resources using the company's intranet and during assessors' regular meetings.

61. On-the-job training is insufficiently planned. The nature of a learner's job is explored with employers and the skills that learners need are identified at the start of their programme. However, this is rarely followed up sufficiently well to plan a structured approach to learning on the job. Most learners are developing good administration skills on the job that lead to progression at work, but these are not always identified as part of the assessment process. Progress reviews do not involve the workplace supervisor sufficiently in planning learning or training to complement the requirements of the NVQ qualification. Most of the time during visits is taken up by assessment, action-planning and coaching. Records of visits have insufficient details of on-the-job training, although the company has a policy that requires staff to discuss this with employers and record this at every visit. It is common practice for many employer representatives to merely sign review sheets at the end of the visit without any discussion.

Leadership and management

62. Management of the area of learning is satisfactory. Staff have access to appropriate learning and development opportunities to support learners effectively. They are appropriately qualified and some have recognised qualifications relating to literacy and numeracy, dyslexia and teaching. Some trainers are additionally qualified in complementary skills such as ICT, and use these to support others and develop resources. However, they lack strategies and time for engaging employers more effectively in learning.

Managers do not sufficiently monitor the effectiveness of arrangements for involving employers in the planning and reviewing of on-the-job training.

63. Quality improvement is satisfactory. Good use is made of data to evaluate retention and achievement, and report on trends in achievement. Internal verification arrangements meet the requirements of the awarding body and provide assessors with adequate feedback. Staff understand their targets for improving retention and achievement and they identify learners at risk of not completing their qualification. The improvement strategy following the previous inspection and reinspection has had a positive impact on staff performance.

64. Staff are very much involved in the self-assessment process and have strong sense of ownership of the current report for their area of learning. The self-assessment report for business administration is broadly accurate. ITEC NE accurately identified strengths in support for learners and the quality of workplaces. The company also identified slow progress for some learners as a weakness, although it did not identify a weakness in the planning of on-the-job learning.

