

INSPECTION REPORT

STL

11 November 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*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. STL is a private training provider that offers apprenticeship programmes in South Yorkshire, Nottingham and Derbyshire. The company has training centres in Sheffield, Rotherham, Doncaster, Derby, Chesterfield and Nottingham and a head office in Sheffield. All the senior management team, accounts, information and communications technology (ICT) and administration functions are based at the head office in Sheffield.
2. STL was established in 1984. It has 140 full-time staff, of whom 110 are directly involved in dealing with the learners. They recruit learners and employers, conduct initial assessment, provide induction and train and assess learners. STL's business operations are controlled by two directors and a head of training and operations. The company has been accredited with the Investors in People standard, which is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.
3. STL provides learning in retail, hairdressing, hospitality, business administration, customer service, sports and care of the elderly. At the time of the inspection, STL had approximately 1,300 learners.
4. The unemployment rate in September 2005 was 2.6 per cent in South Yorkshire, 3.7 per cent in Nottingham and 1.8 per cent in Derbyshire compared with the national rate of 2.5 per cent. The proportion of school leavers in these areas achieving five general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above in 2004 was 43 per cent in South Yorkshire, 53.6 per cent in Derbyshire and 37.8 per cent in Nottingham compared with the national average of 53.7 per cent. According to the 2001 census, minority ethnic groups make up 4.7 per cent of the population in South Yorkshire, 7.2 per cent in Derbyshire and 15 per cent in Nottingham compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, STL's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for quality improvement. Its approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Provision is good in retail and commercial enterprise, and in business administration and law. STL overall has consistently maintained the standards of provision in all areas of learning over the past three years. It improved the standards of learning in retail programmes but standards have fallen in hairdressing from outstanding to good.
6. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The current self-assessment report is the third report that STL has produced. It includes the views of all main stakeholders such as staff, learners and employers. It makes good use of data to make judgements on retention and achievement rates. It accurately identifies all the strengths and weaknesses and is critical and well written. It gives all the relevant evidence to support its judgements and identifies clearly how the weaknesses and strengths significantly affect the learners' experience.

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

Retention and achievement rates have consistently improved in all areas of learning. Achievement rates have also consistently improved in most areas of learning except in hairdressing. The achievement rates in hairdressing are maintained at a good level. STL has made good progress since its previous inspection in 2002 and its reinspection in 2003. It has managed the growth in numbers in some areas of learning and in other geographical areas successfully and has maintained good standards in all areas of learning. STL's self-assessment and development plans are reliable and have improved on the weaknesses and have continued to maintain standards.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR STL:

- continue good improvements in retention and achievement rates
- raise awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity for staff, learners and employers
- develop the independent learning skills of all learners
- continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning
- further improve the employers' involvement in training
- further establish quality improvement in all aspects of the learners' experience

GRADES

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

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

Retail and commercial enterprise			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Retailing and wholesaling		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	79	2	
Hairdressing		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	283	2	
Hospitality and catering		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	276	2	

Business administration and law		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Administration		2
Apprenticeships for young people	198	2
Customer service		2
Apprenticeships for young people	181	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. A team of eight inspectors inspected the provision in November 2005. The team inspected retail and commercial enterprise, business administration and law, and leadership and management. In retail and commercial enterprise, the inspectors gave contributory grades in retail and wholesaling, hairdressing and hospitality and catering. In business administration and law the inspectors gave contributory grades for business administration and customer service. The inspection team did not inspect provision in health, public service and care or in sport, leisure and recreation. The health, public service and care programme was reinspected 18 months ago and was given a grade 1. The programmes in sports are too recently established to be inspected yet.

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	38
Number of learners interviewed	73
Number of staff interviewed	66
Number of employers interviewed	26
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	42

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **Retailing and wholesaling learners' achievement rate for technical certificates is very good.** In the current year, 98 per cent of the learners have achieved this newly introduced qualification. Most of these learners have either achieved a credit or a distinction grade.

10. **In hairdressing, retention rates have improved over the past three years and are now good.** Forty-seven per cent of apprentices starting in 2002-03 were retained. The proportion of the 2003-04 and 2004-05 intakes who were retained or are still in learning is 62 per cent and 91 per cent respectively. For advanced apprentices the rates of learners who are retained or are still in learning have gone up from 48 per cent for 2002-03 to 73 per cent for 2003-04 and 100 per cent for 2004-05. All learners are making good progress.

11. **The standard of learners' practical work in hairdressing is good.** Most learners demonstrate good standards of professional skills, particularly in colouring techniques.

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They work with confidence and maturity with due regard to health and safety. All learners adopt professional working practices.

12. In hospitality, many learners develop a good level of practical skills. They demonstrate good customer service skills in bar settings. They develop good knowledge of technical aspects of cellar work and pay due regard to security, health and safety issues. Employers notice a marked improvement in learners' professionalism and confidence at work. Some learners successfully take on additional responsibilities at work and gain promotion to supervisory roles.

13. The retention rates for hospitality learners have been improving for the past four years and are now good. Of the apprentices who started in the three years of 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05, the proportion being retained or who are still in learning has improved from 43 per cent to 47 per cent and then to 65 per cent, respectively. The rate of advanced apprentices starting in the same years, who have been retained or who are still on programme, has also gone up from 30 per cent to 49 per cent and 74 per cent respectively. These rates are good for an industry that traditionally has high rates of staff turnover.

14. Retention rates for learners in business administration have been improving and are now good. Of the learners starting apprenticeships in 2004-05 and 2005-06, 75 per cent and 86 per cent respectively have been retained or are still on programme. For advanced apprentices who started in 2004-5 and 2005-06, 90 per cent and 100 per cent respectively have been retained or are still on their programmes. The learners are making the progress expected of them.

15. Business administration learners develop good practical skills which are admired by their employers. The learners are more effective at doing their jobs and gain a great deal of confidence. They demonstrate good information technology (IT) skills and effectively use a variety of programmes such as database and spreadsheet applications. They produce some very useful work for their companies.

16. Customer service learners develop good skills in the workplace that they can use throughout the whole business. They receive good on-the-job training in the workplace and develop relevant vocational skills to a high degree. Workplaces are of a high standard and offer learners the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills.

17. Customer service learners' achievement rate for key skills qualifications is good. For example, the pass rates for application of number qualification are good at 81 per cent and 74 per cent at level 1 and 2 respectively. The pass rate for the achievement of a communication qualification is also good at 83 per cent for level 1 and 67 per cent for level 2. The achievement rate for key skills qualifications in ICT is also good at 87 per cent.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Retail and commercial enterprise	0	3	7	0	10
Business administration and law	0	3	1	0	4
Total	0	6	8	0	14

18. **Off-the-job training for the technical certificate and key skills qualifications is good for retailing learners.** The training is informative, well resourced and interesting. Tutors use a variety of training methods and resources such as case-study exercises, videos, relevant leaflets and learning journals. STL has developed well-illustrated and context-specific learning materials for key skills knowledge.

19. **Learning resources, such as training centres, learning materials and staff, are good and benefit the retailing learners very well.** All training centres are equipped well with spacious rooms, training materials, videos, computers, photocopiers and stationery. All assessors and internal verifiers have laptop computers with wireless internet connections. They visit the learners very regularly to assess and support them in their learning. The company's essential skills team are well qualified to assist learners with literacy and numeracy needs.

20. **STL provides good numeracy support for hairdressing learners in the workplace.** The tutors use good occupationally relevant visual aids to simplify concepts such as ratios. Assessors make good use of practical examples to demonstrate how numbers are used in the workplace.

21. **On-the-job training in hairdressing is good.** Occupational training is delivered on the job in all well-resourced salons at specified times. The trainer/assessors visit the salon to deliver training and conduct assessment.

22. **Hospitality learners benefit greatly from short-term target-setting.** STL's assessors make frequent visits to their learners to set and review short-term targets. This approach helps keep learners focused. It gives the learners a sense of achievement as they progress towards full achievement of national vocational qualification (NVQ) units or other aspects of their programme.

23. **Hospitality learners receive highly effective support.** This covers support in developing occupational skills as well as literacy and numeracy skills. It is provided flexibly to meet the learners' needs, often outside the normal office hours.

24. **Hospitality programmes are well matched to meet learners' and employers' needs.** STL offers a range of programmes which accommodate the interests of learners and meet the needs of employers. Employers actively encourage learners to take additional qualifications such as an intermediate food hygiene course. Employers value the training provided by STL and report clear benefits to the learners and their business.

25. **Business administration learners benefit from good off-the-job training.** The sessions are well structured and learning materials are of good quality. Trainers give clear explanations and use questioning well to press learners to think and reason.

26. **Assessment in business administration is good.** Assessors visit learners regularly and frequently. Observations are thoroughly recorded and are cross-referenced well to NVQ standards. Assessors set precise short-term targets for learners to collect further evidence and check the targets at the next visit.

27. **The planning of learning programmes in business administration is good.** This covers all aspects of provision such as initial assessment, on- and off-the-job training and

assessment. The learners, employers and the assessor agree the full training programme including the optional units. This is recorded on a learning delivery plan. They also agree their respective roles and responsibilities in achieving the targets in the learning delivery plan.

28. Training for customer service learners is well planned. All learners have an individual delivery plan that identifies what training will be delivered, by who and when. This plan is drawn up by the learner, the assessor and the employer. Assessors help the learners and employers to identify the areas of on-the-job training that will help them to complete their qualifications quickly.

29. NVQ assessment practice in customer service is good. It is regular and demonstrates the learners' competence over a period of time. The assessors actively involve the learners and employers in the process. Portfolios contain a good range of evidence. Target-setting is very effective. It covers all aspects of the apprenticeship framework and learners' personal development. Assessors make frequent visits to the learners to set them challenging targets. These help them to focus on what needs to be done and by when.

30. Retailing learners are not fully involved in the assessment process. Most of the time assessors lead the assessment. They complete portfolios for learners. The learners do not fully understand the layout of their portfolios and what evidence they need to collect to claim competence in a particular unit. Some of the learners do not achieve some of the core units early enough in their training.

31. Some hairdressing apprentices are making slow progress. Some learners make slow progress towards the accumulation of units. This includes some learners who are taking longer than expected to complete their apprenticeship and some whose prior experience has received insufficient accreditation.

32. Hospitality learners are insufficiently involved in many aspects of their programmes. They are not involved in setting the pace of their learning and do not sufficiently develop independent learning skills. They are not sufficiently challenged to manage their own learning and assessment. Many of them do not know enough about developing portfolios and collecting evidence. The learners do not fully understand what exactly they have left to do to achieve the full qualification.

33. Business administration learners are not sufficiently involved in progress reviews. Learners are not encouraged to evaluate their own performance or identify barriers to learning. The assessors set most of the targets.

Leadership and management

34. The strategic leadership and management of the provision is good. The directors have developed a niche for the company to work with small employers who do not normally access training. It aims to establish a unique advantage for itself by offering training in full frameworks rather than just NVQs. STL has been heavily involved in 'train to gain' employer training pilot (ETP) and valuable skills programmes.

35. Business planning is good. It is based on the needs of the sector and skills shortages as identified by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). STL has increased the number of

learners in key sector areas such as hospitality and hairdressing. It is working with key local education authority (LEA) partners in response to green paper for 14 to 16 year old learners, to encourage future recruitment into work-based learning. It has carefully managed the growth in its provision.

36. STL is very effective at engaging small and medium-sized employers into training. It has a large database of 852 employers and delivers the training flexibly to fit in with the requirements of these businesses. STL now has access to a huge variety of good-quality work placements in all areas of learning. It matches the learners to the businesses carefully. STL is making a good contribution to the development of the business through providing well-trained learners and potential employees. It is developing the skills of the local workforce greatly, leading to the businesses gaining a competitive advantage.

37. Performance management is good at STL. It includes monthly reports that monitor the performance of each assessor, team leader and region of provision on key aspects such as numbers in learning, achievers, early leavers and causes of early leaving. Staff performance appraisal is also good. In addition to a thorough annual appraisal, STL conducts three quarterly reviews. All staff are set challenging targets for retention and achievement rates.

38. Programme management is good in most areas of learning. Initial assessment, literacy and numeracy support, on- and off-the-job training and assessment are effectively planned and delivered. STL monitors learners' progress very effectively and provides targeted support. The learners' independent learning skills are not developed to the expected degree, however. Many learners are able to progress more quickly than they are doing.

39. STL has made extensive investment in resources to improve the quality of training. These include new staff, learning resources, and the purchase and development of new centres, hardware and mobile technology. STL's investment in mobile computing technology is excellent. It has provided all its assessors with laptop computers with wireless internet connection. All of STL's centres have a good number of broadband internet-enabled computers. The company has increased the number of assessors since the previous inspection from 40 to 60 for an overall similar number of learners. All staff are well qualified or are training to become qualified up to level 3 in learning and development. This is above the national requirements.

40. Literacy and numeracy skills support is particularly effectively managed and delivered. STL has substantially increased the number of staff providing support, from one at the previous inspection to a current total of eight, although the number of learners requiring support has not increased. Twenty-eight per cent of all learners are receiving literacy and numeracy support. The support is provided by well-qualified essential skills staff and assessors who make flexible use of good learning resources.

41. STL has a strong culture of quality improvement. The company has invested in a quality management system that is available to the managers and assessors online. It has improved or maintained the grade profile of all its provision over the years as well as managing growth in numbers in some areas of learning. The company has a thorough and effective audit system to check the quality and consistency of various processes in areas such as health and safety, and equality and training.

42. The self-assessment process is inclusive. STL took into account the views of all parties.

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It used data, employers' views, staff members' views, teaching and learning feedback and grade profiles very effectively to compile a self-assessment report for each area of learning. The report is accurate, critical and focused on key issues that have a significant effect on the learners' experience.

43. The development plan is good. It is thorough. It sets realistic yet challenging milestones, allocates resources and creates appropriate monitoring mechanisms to bring about improvements. STL has maintained the strengths and improved on the weaknesses and satisfactory aspects of training.

44. STL's sharing of good practice is particularly effective. The company has established its own intranet. All examples of what has worked well are posted on to the intranet and staff can remotely access it by using their wireless internet connection and mobile computing technology. STL has five good practice case studies on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's (ALI) online good practice database. It uses the online database very effectively and frequently to get more ideas for improvement.

45. STL reviews its learning resources on a regular basis. For example, the provider has invested in a good range of learning resources including mobile computing technology to give learners the best experience.

46. STL makes good use of data to target recruitment, measure performance and set benchmarks. Assessors and managers can monitor each learner's progress online. A detailed chart is produced that outlines the progress of the learners from the start to the end of their programme, including their final destinations. Slow progress is identified and appropriate support is provided immediately. Staff and managers can monitor their own targets for learners' retention and achievement rates.

47. STL makes good, innovative use of internal verification. It brings in all aspects of learning and standardisation under one system. Internal verifiers observe six key processes of learning including initial assessment, induction, reviews and direct training. STL employs a very good number of internal verifiers. It has currently 24 internal verifiers, who meet every six weeks. The quality of learning is improving on a continuous basis.

48. The monitoring and analysis of data on equality of opportunity is good. STL collects and evaluates information about recruitment, selection and early leavers on the basis of ethnicity, gender and disability. It also conducts some analysis regarding the progression and attainment of different groups of learners. It uses this information in its decision-making, action-planning and target-setting.

49. **Staff do not have sufficient understanding of equality and diversity issues.** STL has provided some training for staff members, raising their awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity at a superficial level. However, staff are unable to explore the issues of discrimination and harassment in a sensitive manner with the learners during induction or reviews.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic management
- good programme management in most areas of learning
- very effective engagement of employers
- extensive investment in resources
- particularly effective management and delivery of literacy and numeracy skills support
- strong culture of quality improvement
- good monitoring of data on equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- insufficient understanding by staff of equality and diversity issues

Retail and commercial enterprise

Retailing and wholesaling

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good pass rates for technical certificates
- good training to support learners' achievement
- good resources
- good programme management

Weaknesses

- insufficient learner involvement in the assessment process

Hairdressing

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good standard of practical work
- good on-the-job training
- good numeracy skills support

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some apprentices

Hospitality and catering

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates

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- good levels of practical skills
- good short-term target-setting
- good matching of programmes to learners' and employers' skills
- highly effective support
- good programme management

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of learners in many aspects of their programme
- inadequate staff development in equality of opportunity

Business administration and law

Administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates
- well-developed practical skills
- good off-the-job training
- good assessment practice
- good management of learning programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of learners in reviews

Customer service

Grade 2

Strengths

- good development of workplace skills
- good achievement rates for key skills qualifications
- good planning of training to meet learners' and employers' needs
- thorough target-setting and assessment practice
- good programme management

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT STL:

- the valuable additional support
- the good training
- 'the effort STL made in getting me a job'
- the frequent and responsive contact with the assessors
- acquiring skills and qualifications - 'great to know that I am getting a qualification'
- the convenience of learning - 'great to learn at work rather than having to go somewhere else'
- everything - 'had a really positive experience', 'finished earlier than planned'
- 'enjoy all aspects of training'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK STL COULD IMPROVE:

- the challenge for individual learners - 'would like to progress faster'
- 'sometimes it's difficult to find time to fit it everything in'
- the clarity of information on qualifications - 'NVQ units could be made clearer'
- the explanation of the tasks - 'work is not always explained enough'
- nothing - 'STL are doing a good job'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic management
- good programme management in most areas of learning
- very effective engagement of employers
- extensive investment in resources
- particularly effective management and delivery of literacy and numeracy skills support
- strong culture of quality improvement
- good monitoring of data on equality of opportunity

Weaknesses

- insufficient understanding by staff of equality and diversity issues

50. STL's strategic leadership is good. The directors have developed a niche for the company to work with small employers who do not normally access training. The managing director is a member and chair of various strategic groups such as an association of learning providers and a network of training providers in Nottingham, Derbyshire and South Yorkshire. He actively advocates the needs of work-based learning to various government bodies. STL has conducted good market research to identify underachieving learners and small, but committed, employers. Having identified the gaps in the provision, it has moved swiftly to fill those gaps. STL has substantially grown its business in Derbyshire and Nottingham, and has carefully managed this growth. It has achieved its objectives and established itself as a key player in the training field. The company has a strong reputation for provision in work-based learning. It has advanced plans to develop its business in other parts of the country. It aims to establish a unique advantage for itself by offering training in full apprenticeship frameworks rather than just NVQs. It has positioned itself ideally to meet the business needs of the employers. To this effect in September 2005, it gained accreditation for a national award that puts the needs of the business first. STL is the first provider in the region to have achieved this new national accreditation in the pilot phase. It has been heavily involved in 'train to gain' ETP programmes and valuable skills programmes for employers. Its learners have been used extensively as case studies in national marketing campaigns to promote work-based learning and ETP programmes. Business planning is good. It is based on the needs of the sector and skills shortages as identified by the LSC. STL has responded very quickly and effectively to meet the challenging growth targets in a very short period in South Yorkshire. It has increased the number of learners in key sector areas such as hospitality and hairdressing. It carefully divested its Entry to Employment contract but decided to offer progression to the learners from other providers. It is working with key LEA partners in response to green paper for 14 to 16 year old learners, to encourage future recruitment into work-based learning.

51. Programme management is good in most areas of learning and satisfactory in hairdressing, the area with most learners. Provision including initial assessment, literacy and

numeracy support, on- and off-the-job training and assessment is effectively planned and delivered. Assessors work effectively with the employers and learners to plan the training. STL's management of learners' and assessors' performance is good. It is carried out through the monthly profile and programme review meetings. The monthly reports include aspects such as numbers in learning, achievers, early leavers and causes of early leaving. STL has taken effective action to reduce the number of early leavers. It monitors learners' progress very effectively. The details of every learner are carefully recorded on a central computerised system. All staff can access this information remotely. Assessors spot slow achievement promptly and take effective steps to rectify the situation by providing targeted support and training. The learners' independent learning skills are not developed to the expected degree, however. The pace of learning is very much dictated by the assessors. Many learners are able to progress faster. Staff members are well supported by the managers. Staff performance appraisal is good. In addition to a thorough annual appraisal, STL also conducts three other reviews at three-monthly intervals. The staff also meet individually with their manager each month to measure performance and deal with any issues arising. All staff members have clear job descriptions and job plans. They are set challenging targets for retention and achievement rates. Communications are good. Staff make effective use of mobile phones and text messages.

52. STL is very effective at engaging small and medium-sized employers into training. It has a large database of 852 employers which have been very carefully chosen and vetted by dedicated teams of telesales staff. These staff contact small employers who are not targeted by large providers and would not necessarily have the volume of learners to purchase customised training. The training is delivered flexibly to fit in with the requirements of the businesses. STL now has access to a huge variety of good-quality work placements in all areas of learning. It matches the learners to the businesses carefully. STL is making a good contribution to the development of the business through providing well-trained learners and potential employees. The employers are carefully vetted for their commitment to training and resource allocation, and are engaged into learning from very early on. STL is only prepared to work with those employers most committed to training and prepared to release learners for a certain minimum number of hours of training. It is developing skills of the local workforce greatly, leading to the business gaining a competitive advantage. Communications are good with the employers. STL also produces a newsletter for employers every six months.

53. STL has made extensive investment in resources to improve the quality of training. These include new staff, learning resources, and the purchase and development of new centres, hardware and mobile computing technology. For example, STL has equipped a new centre in the centre of Sheffield at a substantial cost. Its investment in mobile IT is excellent. It has provided all its assessors with laptop computers with wireless internet connections so that they can access the company's intranet at anytime and anywhere. All of STL's centres have a good number of broadband internet-enabled computers. STL has provided broadband-enabled computers to some assessors in their homes if their mobile technology has failed. STL has also made 20 more appointments of frontline assessors, increasing the total from 40 at the previous inspection to the current amount of 60 for an overall similar number of learners. All staff are well qualified or training to become qualified to level 3 in learning and development. This is above the national requirements. STL provides much satisfactory staff development. Most of this development, including management training, is provided in-house by the managers. Staff do not have the opportunity to learn from the experience of other managers from other sectors of industry.

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Many staff have limited recent industrial experience, and many do not have teaching qualifications.

54. Literacy and numeracy skills support is particularly effectively managed and delivered. Since the previous inspection, STL has substantially increased the number of support staff, from one to eight, although the number of learners requiring support has not increased similarly. Twenty-eight per cent of all learners are getting literacy and numeracy support. Staff are well qualified and undergo continuous professional development. They carefully conduct initial assessment to find out the scale of the need among the learners. The essential skills team is involved in selecting STL's learners. They run a well-developed induction programme that includes screening for literacy and numeracy skills support needs. The team also trains the assessors so that they can provide support to the learners. They provide tailored support to meet learners' needs. STL has provided a good range of learning resources to support learners. Achievement rates for key skills qualifications have gone up in all areas of learning. STL does not provide language support. It does not have any learners who need such support.

55. STL's strategies to improve retention and achievement rates are working satisfactorily in most areas of learning. The provider was awarded a grade 1 in hairdressing and was also awarded a grade 1 for care of the elderly at the reinspection in May 2003. It has not improved achievement rates at the expected pace, however. Its grade for one area of learning with the largest growth has fallen from a grade 1 to grade 2. Retention and achievement rates are on an upward trend but have not reached the expected level for an outstanding provider. The inspectors did not inspect care of the elderly or the newly introduced programmes in food and drink manufacture and in sport. Currently 128 learners are on care programmes and food and drink manufacturing has 35 learners. Retention and achievement rates in care are good. Retention rates for sport, and food and drink manufacture are also good. The learners are making expected progress.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

56. The monitoring and analysis of equal opportunities data is good. STL collects and evaluates information about recruitment, selection and early leavers on the basis of ethnicity, gender and disability. It also conducts some analysis regarding the progression and attainment of different groups of learners. It uses this information in decision-making, action-planning and target-setting. For example, STL identified learners' need for literacy and numeracy skills support through initial assessment and monitored the subsequent achievement levels of those learners. It has invested heavily in making more staff appointments. Currently eight staff members support approximately 28 per cent of learners from across all areas of learning. The learners are making good progress and achieving their qualifications. STL also makes sure that it recruits learners proportionately from the various localities in which it operates. The company is meeting its targets for equality and diversity measures. It gives its employers comprehensive information to emphasise the importance of equality of opportunity, including a guide for employers on work-based learning and an employers' equal opportunities policy. STL also monitors employers' compliance to equality of opportunity. It conducts thorough vetting of new employers to check whether they have an equal opportunities policy. Assessors ensure that the employers are fully involved in the review process. If learners face any issues of unfair treatment the situation is rectified immediately.

57. Health and safety management is effective. All learners are working in safe and healthy

workplaces. Assessors make satisfactory initial and ongoing checks on employers' premises to ensure that the learners are adequately protected.

58. STL has a clear commitment to equality and diversity. It has produced a simple equal opportunities policy supported by an equality of access strategic plan, and an equality and diversity development action plan. These are focused on learners' attainment. Fair and inclusive practices are integrated with all aspects of the learning process. One member of staff has delegated responsibility for developing equality of opportunity in provision. STL has produced a broad range of user-friendly materials. These are intended to promote awareness of equality of opportunity. STL works very closely with schools and Connexions by participating in recruitment fairs to attract more women and minority ethnic groups on to its programmes. It ran a very successful taster programmes for 14 to 16 year old learners in two of its regions. It has a simple and easily accessible complaints procedure. Learners know how to use the complaints procedure effectively and STL quickly resolves any complaints made. Most learners are able to discuss their rights and responsibilities. They know, for example, how to deal with issues such as bullying, harassment and discrimination in their work environment.

59. STL promotes equality and diversity well. It has produced a good range of case studies on learners from all areas of learning, celebrating their achievement. Posters are prominently displayed in all centres. Some of the learners feature in the LSC-led national publicity advertising apprenticeships.

60. STL has also produced a simple and easy-to-read induction package for use with all new learners. It comprehensively covers the legal requirements and definitions of issues such as discrimination and harassment. Learners are able to identify issues at work in a supportive learning environment.

61. Access to all of STL's buildings is satisfactory. All the buildings have lifts and wide aisles to make it easier for wheelchair users to attend sessions.

62. Staff do not have sufficient understanding of equality and diversity issues. STL has provided some training which has raised staff members' awareness or understanding of equal opportunities at a superficial level. However, staff are unable to explore the issues of discrimination and harassment in a sensitive manner with the learners. For example, learners who think that everyone should be treated the same are not being challenged to explore if all members in society are equal. The issues of disadvantage and discrimination and how they affect the various groups in society are not fully explored. This has had a direct effect on the lack of awareness and understanding by learners. At the induction and during reviews equality and diversity issues are not discussed in any meaningful way and, on occasions, are covered incorrectly. STL has produced a very useful resource called 'toolbox talks'. This is very useful guidance which provides prompts for staff to use as discussion topics at reviews involving learners and employers, which evaluates learners' understanding of equality of opportunity. Not all staff are fully familiar with such positive initiatives and well-developed in-house materials. They do not have sufficient confidence and understanding to use them effectively.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

63. STL has a strong culture of quality improvement. Quality assurance is established in its business plan. The company has improved the grades for its provision apart from

hairdressing.

64. STL makes good use of feedback from employers, learners and staff. Staff feed back their views through an extensive range of meetings. They also make effective use of monthly profile meeting with their managers to feed back their suggestions for improvement. Staff collect employers' views on a regular basis as and when they visit the learners. Learners' and employers' views are sought through a variety of means including a telephone survey by an independent telemarketing company. The results are analysed and acted upon. STL seeks feedback from learners at various intervals such as induction, during the course and on their leaving the programme. As part of its quality improvement strategy, STL invited learners to design the feedback questionnaire in a language that they understood and to which they related well. In addition, STL has provided suggestion boxes in each of its centres for the learners to give their views. It has set itself a target of 80 per cent satisfaction across the board for all aspects of the learners' experience. STL takes effective action to deal with the suggestions and improvements but does not inform the learners and employers of how things have improved or what action it has taken after their suggestions.

65. The self-assessment process is inclusive. STL took into account the views of all parties. It used data, employers' views, staff members' views, teaching and learning feedback and grade profiles very effectively to compile a self-assessment report for each area of learning. The company has substantial experience of producing self-assessment reports. The most recent report is the third that STL has produced. It is accurate, critical and focused on key issues that have a significant effect on the learners' experience.

66. STL produced a good development plan after the previous inspection. The plan was thorough and achieved STL's objective of improving the provision in most areas of learning. The company set realistic yet challenging milestones, allocated resources and created appropriate monitoring mechanisms to bring about improvements. It has maintained the strengths and improved on the weaknesses and satisfactory aspects of training.

67. Sharing of good practice is particularly effective. The internal verification team and the assessors meet on a regular basis and discuss what has worked well. This information is then shared with all assessors. The provider has established its own intranet. All examples of what has worked well are posted on to the intranet and staff can remotely access it by using their wireless internet connection and mobile computing technology. STL has five good practice case studies on the ALI's online good practice database. It uses the online database very effectively and frequently to get more ideas for improvement.

68. STL also reviews its learning resources on a regular basis. For example, it has invested in a good range of learning resources including mobile computing technology to give learners the best experience.

69. STL makes good use of data to target recruitment, measure performance and set benchmarks. Assessors and managers can monitor each learner's progress online. This has had very beneficial effect. The proportion of non-funded learners has fallen from 8 per cent in 2002 to less than 3 per cent today. STL also conducts analysis of early leavers. It has identified the reasons that learners leave their programmes early and has improved the processes of induction, screening for literacy and numeracy support needs and selection criteria. The proportion of learners leaving early has gone down to 15 per cent in the

current year. Staff have their own personal targets as well as team targets for retention and achievement rates. STL monitors the progress of learners very effectively. A detailed chart is produced that outlines the learners' progress from the start to the end of their programmes, including their destinations in terms of further education, training or employment. Slow progress is identified and rectified immediately.

70. STL has a strong and thorough audit system to check the effectiveness and consistency of various processes. It has appointed an auditor who conducts sampling, in some cases with a coverage of 100 per cent, of various processes related to the learners' experience and training. However, STL does not have sufficient control over the documents it uses. The inspectors saw various versions of the same documents on health and safety, equal opportunities training materials and learning delivery plans.

71. STL makes good, innovative use of internal verification, bringing in all aspects of learning and standardisation under one system. Internal verifiers observe six key processes of learning including initial assessment, induction, reviews and direct training. STL has a very good number of internal verifiers, with 24 currently employed. They meet regularly every six weeks. They share information on the number of new learners starting in each programme and the progress of existing learners. The sampling strategy for each qualification is clear. Each learner's portfolio is sampled in the first four months to check their progress against technical certificates, key skills qualifications and the NVQ. All assessors' activities are observed at least once every year. Verifiers give constructive feedback to the assessors including how they could further improve their practices. The quality of learning is improving on a continuous basis. The improvements include a learners' development plan that monitors the learners' training, regardless of whether he or she has left a particular employer. They also include improved induction and selection of the learners and employers, the production of an interactive equal opportunities booklet, the introduction of new course in employment rights and responsibilities, assessment throughout the sessions broken down into small chunks, and the production of a learning log for the learners.

72. The observation of teaching is satisfactory. STL has produced a good guide for observers. The grades awarded to the observed teaching sessions remain broadly similar to those given at the previous inspection and in the current self-assessment report. None of the sessions observed were outstanding. Observers give constructive feedback on how things could be improved. In many cases the points for development are not always followed through in subsequent observations. For example, the tutors do not have a clear idea of how they could turn a satisfactory session into a good session. STL has not fully thought through how to deliver some aspects of learning to a commonly agreed standard to all learners. For example, staff deliver training in portfolio development to all learners on an individual basis. STL has not thought through how this training could be delivered more efficiently and effectively. STL's staff do not observe on-the-job training.

73. STL's quality improvement practice has some gaps and inconsistencies. For example, progress reviews are good in customer service but poor in hospitality. Individual learning plans are not consistently used by all assessors in all areas of learning. STL is aware of the issues and is dealing with them appropriately.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing and wholesaling Apprenticeships for young people	79	2 2
Hairdressing Apprenticeships for young people	283	2 2
Hospitality and catering Apprenticeships for young people	276	2 2

74. STL provides training for 79 apprentices in retailing and warehousing in South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Eight learners are on warehousing programmes and 71 are on retailing programmes. Forty-one learners are men and three are from minority ethnic backgrounds. None of the learners has any disability. Learners are employed in a range of independent and national companies. Employers provide on-the-job training to the learners. Assessors and tutors also coach and support learners in the workplace. Learners can also attend local training centres for specific training and support. STL recruits learners to specific job vacancies for local employers. Assessors visit learners every two to three weeks. They carry out progress reviews every 12 weeks. The retailing programme is managed and supported by two internal verifiers.

75. STL currently provides training in hairdressing for 283 learners. Eighty-three are advanced apprentices and 200 are apprentices. All learners are employed in salons throughout South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. The vocational practical training and assessment takes place on the job in 181 local hairdressing salons. Assessors visit the salons fortnightly depending upon the support required by the learners. They teach background knowledge either in the workplace or at one of the six STL training centres. Learners are recruited to the training programme either by their employer or through referral by Connexions or by STL. The apprenticeship programme is planned to last 25 months, and the advanced apprenticeship a further 18 months. STL employs eight vocationally qualified staff who coach, assess or verify. Twenty-three per cent of the advanced apprentices and 59 per cent of the apprentices are identified as requiring literacy and numeracy skills support. Nine per cent of the learners are men and 3 per cent belong to minority ethnic groups. A further 3 per cent have disabilities.

76. STL offers a range of apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in hospitality throughout South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire to 276 learners. Programmes cover bar service, quick service, food and drink service, food preparation and hospitality supervision. Fifty learners are on advanced apprenticeships, with the remainder on apprenticeships. Learners are employed in a wide range of hospitality establishments including public houses, local and national restaurants, hotels, care homes and leisure centres. Most learners are directly recruited from the hospitality industry. They are given an introduction to their training programme at their place of work. Most training is provided on an individual basis at employers' premises, either by the learners' supervisors or by STL's assessors. Technical certificate training is provided at one of STL's training

centres. Eleven assessors and three internal verifiers train, assess and manage the programme.

Retailing and wholesaling

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good pass rates for technical certificates
- good training to support learners' achievement
- good resources
- good programme management

Weaknesses

- insufficient learner involvement in the assessment process

Achievement and standards

77. Achievement rates on the technical certificates are very good. In the current year, 98 per cent of the learners have achieved this newly introduced qualification. Of the 113 learners who entered the qualification, 111 have achieved technical certificates. Eighty-nine per cent of the learners have either achieved a credit or a distinction grade. The key skills qualification achievement rate is satisfactory.

78. Framework retention and achievement rates are now satisfactory. Considerably more learners are staying on the programmes and achieving qualifications than at the previous inspection. The retention rate has gone up from 21 per cent for learners starting apprenticeships in 2001-02 to 32 per cent for the 2002-03 intake and 41 per cent for the 2003-04 starters. In the current year, 75 per cent of the learners are still on programme and making good progress towards achieving their qualifications. Of the learners who enrolled in 2005-06, 90 per cent are still in learning.

79. Learners satisfactorily attain the skills required in the workplace. They gain positions of responsibility quickly and are fully involved in a range of roles in the workplace. They deal with cash and credit card payments, order stock, place orders and deal with customers.

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

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	20		99		153	100	223	100	117	100						
Retained*	0		14		63	41	72	32	24	21						
Successfully completed	0		14		62	41	66	30	23	20						
Still in learning	19		60		0	0	0	0	0	0						

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

The quality of provision

80. Off-the-job training for the technical certificate and key skills components of the apprenticeship is good. The training is informative, well resourced and interesting. Tutors use a variety of training methods and resources such as case study exercises, videos, relevant leaflets and learning journals. The needs of each learner are met through good support. Visiting assessors provide very effective individual training to those learners who are unable to attend any sessions on STL's premises. STL provides particularly effective literacy and numeracy skills support to the learners to help them develop skills and complete their qualifications in time. Initial assessment of the learners is thorough. Along with the assessors, the essential skills team provides very effective individual support to the learners in their workplace. The additional support exercises are relevant to the learners' particular workplaces and interests. Learners highly value this support.

81. Learning resources are good and benefit the learners very well. They include physical resources, learning materials and staff. All assessors receive good continual professional development including updates on health and safety and management qualifications. They hold relevant training and assessing qualifications as well as adult literacy, numeracy or key skills qualifications. STL has a very good ratio of assessors to learners, with nine assessors and two internal verifiers supporting the 79 retailing learners. They visit the learners very regularly to assess and support them in their learning. The essential skills team members are well qualified to assist learners with literacy and numeracy skills support needs. All training centres are well equipped with spacious rooms, training materials, videos, computers, photocopiers and stationery. STL has made a significant investment in training. It has provided all of its assessors and internal verifiers with laptop computers with wireless internet connections. The assessors use the laptops to keep learners' records and support them in the workplace, as well as to deliver induction packages to the learners in the workplace. Mobile phones are used effectively to encourage learners to prepare for assessment visits. Learners are also encouraged to use the calculator facility on their mobile phones during numeracy support sessions. STL has developed well-illustrated and context-specific learning materials for key skills training.

82. Learners' reviews are satisfactory and are carried out every 12 weeks, as required by the funding body. The courses are appropriately matched to the learners' needs. Learners gain useful knowledge through informative materials and training on employers' rights and responsibilities. The tutors use these sessions to update learners on very useful topics such as the minimum wage, discipline procedures, maternity and paternity leave regulations, equality of opportunity, and health and safety.

83. Learners are not fully involved in the assessment process. Assessors duplicate a lot of effort in assessment. They duplicate the referencing of observations onto assessment documents and then again on documents charting qualification units. Learners become bored towards the last few months of their programme. Some learners are not achieving some of the more fundamental units early in their learning. For example, the units on 'giving a positive impression of yourself and your organisation' and 'process payments' are not completed until very near the end of their programme. These units can be achieved by learners who work in retailing after a relatively short period of time. Learners with good literacy and numeracy skills are not encouraged to reference their own assessment results. Assessors lead the assessment most of the time. Learners do not always understand the layout of the portfolio or where to find evidence.

Leadership and management

84. Programme management is good. Initial assessment is managed well. The results from initial assessment are used to construct an individual delivery/learning plan. The training is well managed and delivered from the three training centres at appropriate times to prepare learners for the technical certificate. Data management and communications are good. STL has recently developed a 'global management information system' to monitor learners' progress. Every process relating to each learner, including all components of programmes, achievement and support needs are monitored. The system is updated regularly and all assessors are able to gain the information at any time of the day or night through wireless internet technology. This helps them to prepare for the target-setting meetings held every six weeks. Target-setting is particularly effective. Inspectors observed the good practice of internal verifiers being involved in target-setting for assessors.

85. Internal verification sampling includes quality assurance of the whole programme delivery rather than just portfolio assessment or assessor observation. Learning sessions are also included in the verification process. Currently, verification sampling is satisfactory and its practice can be followed in portfolios at the relevant stages stated in the verification strategy. Verification has not picked up the passive experience of learners during assessment.

86. Self-assessment is accurate in this area. Staff and learners have made satisfactory contributions to the process through workshops for staff and evaluation questionnaires for learners.

87. Learners' progress reviews are satisfactory and cover issues relating to equality of opportunity. Not all assessors are using the support pack that is designed to stimulate discussion, however. Learners do not have sufficient understanding of equality issues.

Hairdressing

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates
- good standard of practical work
- good on-the-job training
- good numeracy skills support

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some apprentices

Achievement and standards

88. Retention rates over the past three years have improved and are good. The advanced apprenticeship retention rate was 48 per cent for learners starting in 2002-03. Of the learners starting advanced apprenticeships in 2003-04 and 2004-05, 73 per cent and 100 per cent respectively, have been retained or are still in learning. The retention rates on the apprenticeship programme have also improved, with 47 per cent of the 2002-03 starters retained, 62 per cent of the following year's intake retained or still in learning and 91 per cent of the 2004-05 starters still on their programme.

89. The standard of learners' practical work is good. Most learners demonstrate good standards of professional skills, particularly in colouring techniques. They work with confidence and maturity. They have good role models in their workplaces. Most learners adopt professional working practices and have an appropriate awareness of health and safety. Learners' written work is of a satisfactory standard. Portfolios are well presented and appropriately indexed and cross-referenced.

90. Achievement rates have also improved and are now satisfactory. The achievement rate of advanced apprentices starting in 2002-03 is 48 per cent, 12 per cent higher than that of the previous intake. Of the 59 advanced apprentices who started in 2003-04, 24 per cent have completed the full framework. The apprenticeship achievement rate has also improved. Thirty-nine of the 167 apprentices who started in 2003-04 have completed the full framework. The attainment of advanced apprentices in July 2005 was good. Eleven of the 12 learners who were entered for the diploma passed the exam.

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	30		29		59		62	100	44	100						
Retained*	0		1		14		30	48	16	36						
Successfully completed	0		1		14		27	44	16	36						
Still in learning	27		27		29		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							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	43		125		167		197		91	100						
Retained*	0		7		41		92		43	47						
Successfully completed	0		7		39		91		43	47						
Still in learning	39		99		61		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

The quality of provision

91. On-the-job training is good. A standardised initial assessment and induction is used across the company. This is often carried out at the workplace and is delivered by STL's assessor using a laptop. All learners undergo a thorough diagnostic assessment. This helps learners to identify the areas of work on which they need to concentrate. Some learners are now working towards key skills qualifications at levels which are above framework requirements. Occupational training is delivered on the job in all salons. Each salon is resourced well to support training and assessment. Most employers allocate time for weekly on-the-job training. Every two weeks the trainer/assessor visits the salon to deliver

training and conduct assessment. During each visit assessors devise an action plan for every learner which outlines clear targets for assessment and training for the subsequent visit. Key skills qualifications are delivered well at the workplace. Assessors make good use of practical examples to demonstrate how numbers are used in the workplace. Learners see how key skills are directly relevant to their work role.

92. STL provides good numeracy skills support for learners. Tutors provide good-quality individual tuition to the learners in their workplace. Sessions are broken down into understandable bite-sized pieces which build up to a higher level. Tutors use good, occupationally relevant visual aids to simplify teaching about ratios. They follow this with good practical activities to reinforce teaching on the subject of direct proportion. Assessors provide good-quality handouts that are clear, simple and explain how the concept of ratios is related to hairdressing.

93. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most of the practical training is delivered in the workplace by STL's staff, usually each fortnight. All six of STL's learning centres offer off-the-job training. The times of the sessions are very flexible. Learners can attend training sessions at a time and place suitable to them. The background knowledge sessions are clearly structured and link theory to practice. Colourful and well-focused learning aids are used to enhance the learning. However, the pace of learning is slow. Some of the activities are not sufficiently challenging for the learners.

94. Some learners make slow progress. They do not accumulate units as they work through their training, instead waiting till the end of their training programme. Thirty-six per cent of the learners interviewed during the inspection are completing units late into the programme. Some apprentices take two years or more to complete the programme. Some learners are not introduced to some of the core activities early enough. For example, one learner did not practise his first haircut until they had been on the programme for 18 months. Some assessors do not give due recognition and regard to the learners' previous experience. In some cases, insufficient workplace assessment is conducted.

95. Employers are usually present at progress reviews and during fortnightly action-planning visits. However, they do not formally contribute to the target-setting process or to the supporting activities that the learner is required to complete for the assessor's next visit.

Leadership and management

96. Lines of accountability and responsibility within the hairdressing section are clear. Good communication takes place through a variety of effective methods, including individual monthly progress monitoring meetings with assessors. All the components of the apprenticeship framework are covered during these meetings and are linked into internal verification monitoring. Team meetings take place every six weeks and provide an opportunity for staff to share good practice. Managers meet monthly and information is shared both from senior management meetings and operational team meetings.

Hospitality and catering

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates

STL

- good levels of practical skills
- good short-term target-setting
- good matching of programmes to learners' and employers' skills
- highly effective support
- good programme management

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of learners in many aspects of their programme
- inadequate staff development in equality of opportunity

Achievement and standards

97. Many learners develop a good level of practical skills. They are able to work efficiently and effectively. One learner, relatively new to the programme and the industry, was able to demonstrate good customer service skills by coping with a number of customers waiting to be served in two bars. Another learner was able to work logically in dealing with drinks delivery while paying due care to security, health and safety issues and technical aspects of cellar work. Employers notice a marked improvement in learners' professionalism and confidence at work. Some learners make good career progression while on their programme. They are promoted to supervisory roles and successfully take on additional responsibilities at work. Learners also share ideas and enter competitions. A group of learners has been short-listed for one regional and one national award.

98. The retention rates have been improving for the past four years and are now good. Retention rates on the advanced apprenticeship programme have improved considerably. For learners starting in 2002-03 and 2003-04, the proportion retained or still in learning were 30 per cent and 49 per cent respectively. Of the 2004-05 intake, 74 per cent of advanced apprentices have been retained or remain in learning. On the apprenticeship programme, the retention rate for the 2002-03 and 2003-04 intake was 43 per cent and 47 per cent respectively. Sixty-five per cent of the 2004-05 starters have been retained or remain on their programmes. These rates are good for an industry that traditionally has high rates of staff turnover.

99. Achievement rates are also improving and are now satisfactory. On the apprenticeship, the achievement rate has increased from 42 per cent for 2002-03 starters to 46 per cent for the 2003-04 intake. Key skills qualification achievement rates are good, with 12 per cent of learners achieving one key skills qualification above the level required by their framework.

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	16		39		53		89	100	83	100						
Retained*	0		4		15		27	30	22	27						
Successfully completed	0		3		14		26	29	22	27						
Still in learning	14		25		11		0	0	0	0						

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	81		356		538	100	543	100	374	100						
Retained*	0		78		254	47	233	43	155	41						
Successfully completed	0		73		248	46	229	42	150	40						
Still in learning	73		153		0	0	0	0	0	0						

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

The quality of provision

100. Learners benefit greatly from short-term target-setting. STL's assessors make frequent visits to their learners as required by the circumstances. These visits can be as frequent as weekly and not less than monthly. Every visit includes agreement of clear targets for the learner to achieve for the next visit. These targets are reviewed at the next visit and the results of these discussions are clearly recorded. This approach to target-setting helps keep learners focused and gives them a sense of achievement as they progress towards full achievement of NVQ units or other aspects of their programme.

101. STL provides support which is highly effective and valued by learners. Learners receive frequent visits that are arranged to suit their needs. Assessors ensure that appointments are made to make the best use of time. They will, for example, visit at specific times, such as early mornings and evenings to collect specific evidence for assessment. Learners are able to easily re-arrange appointments if circumstances change. Assessors are easily contactable. They make very effective use of text messaging to pass brief messages between themselves and to learners. Assessors conduct a thorough initial assessment to identify learners' occupational, literacy and numeracy skills. Newer learners have their learning style assessed as part of a recent revision to initial assessment. Assessors also identify support needs as part of their work with learners. Once identified, assessors devise a detailed plan to meet these needs using various options. However, for a few learners the plan and the support offered are not adequately recorded.

102. Members of the support team work effectively with assessors and learners. Learners can choose to attend support sessions at one of STL's training centres to fit in with their work and personal commitments. Most support sessions are delivered in the learners'

STL

workplaces using good-quality support materials. These support packs have been recently updated with examples from the hospitality industry. Flexible additional support is available to all learners who need it. For example, learners request support to build confidence in numeracy skills before completing key skills tests. The support is well planned and improves the learners' confidence and numeracy skills. Twenty-six per cent of learners are receiving either literacy or numeracy support. The achievement rates in key skills qualifications have improved.

103. The programmes are matched well to meet learners' and employers' needs. STL offers a range of programmes which accommodate the interests of learners and meet the needs of employers. STL takes good care at the start of the programme to ensure that learners are on the most appropriate programme. Workplace supervisors work well with assessors and learners. For example, employers alter the learners' rotas to help them complete the tasks and meet the assessment criteria of their programme. Employers work supportively with assessors by creating a range of on-the-job training opportunities and information. Employers actively encourage learners to take additional qualifications such as an intermediate food hygiene course. Most employers take an active part in learners' reviews. Some provide constructive feedback to learners for specific aspects of work undertaken. Employers value the training provided by STL and report clear benefits to the learner and their business.

104. The induction process is satisfactory. Newer learners benefit from a much-improved, interactive computer-based induction. It tests out learners' understanding of key points covered.

105. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Tutors plan sessions well and use relevant industry examples. They make appropriate links to the occupational or technical certificate requirements of learners' programmes. The resources to support the occupational aspects of learners' programmes are good. Assessors use a broad range of books and learning materials. The learners have much improved access to the internet. This is beginning to improve the development of their knowledge. Staff have adequate and relevant occupational qualifications and experience. Assessment is satisfactory. It is well planned. Observations are well recorded, detailed and clearly referenced to the relevant NVQ units. Tutors give satisfactory written and verbal feedback to the learners after assessments. Portfolios are well structured.

106. Learners are insufficiently involved in many aspects of their programmes. They do not sufficiently influence the pace of their learning programme. The more able learners are not challenged to manage their own learning and assessment. Some learners are insufficiently aware of their programme requirements. In training sessions, learners are not fully involved in discussions and reflection. The tutors answer their own questions without allowing the learners to share their own experiences. Tutors lack knowledge of effective questioning techniques. Assessors reference the portfolios for apprentices, who are not involved in the compilation and management of their own portfolios. Some advanced apprentices are not sufficiently involved in the compilation of their portfolios, which is against accepted practice. The learners do not fully understand what exactly they have left to do to achieve the full qualification. This reduces learners' ability to recognise valuable evidence in the absence of their assessor. Learners are too passive in reviews, with assessors dominating the discussion. Some learners have a very narrow understanding of equality of opportunity.

Leadership and management

107. Programme management is good. All staff have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Communication between staff and employers is good. A range of meetings take place to help facilitate effective communication. These include monthly team meetings that update all staff about any changes and developments. Technology is used very effectively. Staff maintain regular contact, in some cases daily, with each other and some learners by mobile telephone. All staff have wireless internet-enabled laptop computers for ease of access to the internet, STL's website and e-mail. In some cases where the wireless signal is not strong, STL has installed broadband internet connections in assessors' homes. Performance management is strong. Each assessor has monthly meetings with their line manager. These focus on learners' progress and achievements. Those learners whose progress is of concern are identified, and assessors develop an effective action plan to support them. Programme managers have detailed and up-to-date knowledge of the developments in the hospitality sector. STL has produced a detailed and good action plan to meet the proposed revisions to the hospitality apprenticeship framework.

108. STL has recently made satisfactory revisions to the observation of teaching and learning sessions. At present this tends to focus on off-the-job training. Staff have insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity. STL has provided some training in recent months but staff still do not have enough knowledge to deal appropriately with the range of situations that occur. They are not able to address issues of direct and indirect discrimination in professional discussions and in training sessions. For example, the tutor in one of the sessions did not correct learners on stereotypical images. Learners in the hospitality industry potentially face many difficult situations regarding appropriateness of behaviour. They are not fully prepared to deal with such situations. Learners do not fully understand the information on equality of opportunity given to them on their induction. Staff do not discuss such issues effectively during progress reviews. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. STL has made improvements and the range of discussion at reviews is beginning to improve.

Business administration and law**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Administration Apprenticeships for young people	198	2 2
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	181	2 2

109. STL provides apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in business administration to 198 learners. Nineteen of these learners are on advanced apprenticeships, with the remainder on apprenticeships. Most learners are aged from 16 to 18. Twenty-seven per cent of the learners are aged 19 or over. Eighty per cent of the learners are women. Nine per cent of the learners are from minority ethnic groups. Learners can start programmes at any point throughout the year. They are recruited either by employers or directly by STL and are placed with employers in South Yorkshire, Derbyshire or Nottinghamshire. For learners aged from 16 to 18, apprenticeship programmes are planned to last for 14 months and advanced apprenticeships for 21 months. For learners aged 19 or over, the programmes are expected to last for 12 and 18 months respectively. Training and assessment take place largely on employers' premises. Tutors provide literacy and numeracy skills support to the learners either at one of STL's centres or in the workplace. Assessors normally visit learners monthly in the workplace.

110. STL provides training in customer service to 43 advanced apprentices and 138 apprentices. Four per cent of the learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 1 per cent have some form of disability. Sixty-six per cent of the learners are women. Nineteen per cent of the advanced apprentices and 35 per cent of the apprentices require additional support. All learners are employed in a range of organisations including independent and national companies. Some learners are already employed by companies before joining the programme. Other learners are referred by Connexions or are recruited by STL to fill employers' vacancies. Apprentices aged from 16 to 18 years old are expected to complete their apprenticeship programme in 14 months. Those aged 19 years or over are expected to complete their apprenticeship in 12 months. The maximum timeframe to achieve an advanced apprenticeship is between 18 to 20 months depending on prior NVQ achievement. The training is offered from centres in South Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Nottingham. Customer service learners are included across three areas of learning which are business administration, retailing and hospitality. Assessors visit learners approximately every two or three weeks to carry out assessment and progress reviews or to agree action plans. All learners receive a standardised induction that includes an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills support needs. The training for the technical certificate is provided either at STL's training centres or on an individual basis in the learners' workplaces.

Administration**Grade 2***Strengths*

- good retention rates

- well-developed practical skills
- good off-the-job training
- good assessment practice
- good management of learning programmes

Weaknesses

- insufficient involvement of learners in reviews

Achievement and standards

111. Retention rates are good and improving. Of the apprentices who started in 2004-5 and 2005-06, 75 per cent and 87 per cent respectively, have been retained or are still in learning. For advanced apprentices starting in the same years, 90 per cent and 100 per cent respectively, are retained or still on programme. The learners are making the progress expected of them. For the apprenticeship learners who started in 2003-04, retention rates are satisfactory.

112. Learners develop good practical skills. They are more effective at doing their jobs and gain a great deal of confidence. Those near the end of their programmes are particularly confident and relate well to work colleagues and customers. They demonstrate good IT skills. One learner observed dealt with customer service queries on the telephone to a high degree of customer satisfaction. She clarified the nature of the problem, identified how it would be resolved and informed the caller when they would get response. She used a database effectively to record the call details and referred the matter to the appropriate colleagues for further action. Another learner is due to be promoted as soon as she completes her apprenticeship. A further learner is the 'communications champion' in her company. She collects good news stories and produces copy for the company newsletter, which is circulated to employers. Employers are very positive about the standard of work produced by most learners. Most learners gain jobs or continue to work more effectively after completing their programme.

113. Achievement rates are satisfactory and improving. For apprentices starting in 2003-04, the overall framework completion rate is 45 per cent. The corresponding achievement rate for advanced apprentices starting in the same year is 35 per cent. Pass rates for key skills tests in numeracy for learners who started in 2004-05 are very good, at 83 per cent and 93 per cent respectively, for level 1 and level 2. The pass rate in the same year for key skills qualifications in communications is satisfactory at 63 per cent. Similarly, test results on the technical certificate in 2005 are also good at 85 per cent. Learners are making good progress towards completing their full framework.

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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	7		10		17	100	38	100	31	100						
Retained*	0		1		7	41	13	34	10	32						
Successfully completed	0		1		6	35	13	34	8	26						
Still in learning	7		8		3	18	1	3	0	0						

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	63		192		229	100	161	100	161	100						
Retained*	0		26		105	46	45	28	48	30						
Successfully completed	0		22		102	45	42	26	42	26						
Still in learning	54		118		7	3	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

114. Off-the-job training is good. The sessions are well structured. Learning materials are of good quality, including attractively produced computer-based presentations. Tutors give clear explanations and, in most cases, use questioning well to press learners to think and reason. One learner was able to clearly explain and illustrate the organisational structure in her department. Other learners have developed an appropriate understanding of different methods of filing. STL's training centres are comfortable and well equipped. The training centres at employers' premises are comfortable and private, enabling learners to concentrate without distraction. Learners have access to appropriate equipment in their workplaces to help them meet NVQ standards.

115. Assessment is good. Assessors visit learners regularly and frequently, particularly in the latter stages of their programme when visits are often fortnightly. Assessment methods are appropriate. Observations are thoroughly recorded and are cross-referenced well to NVQ standards. Assessors set precise, short-term targets for learners to collect further evidence. They follow up these targets rigorously at the next visit. Learners generally produce the required evidence on schedule.

116. Learning programmes are planned very well. Qualification competences are broken down onto a clearly recorded job activity sheet. Tutors discuss with learners and employers the elements of the apprenticeship framework that can be completed within the learner's routine job role. They also agree appropriate optional units within the NVQ. This information is then used to develop a learning delivery plan. All parties agree areas of the programme where on- or off-the-job training is needed. The learner is given a clear indication of the further research he or she has to undertake. At the point of recruitment,

learners go through a rigorous initial assessment. This is followed by a diagnostic assessment during induction. The skills for life team or assessors quickly and effectively meet any additional learning support needs identified. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Learners now have greater grasp of literacy and numeracy skills. For example, some learners passed key skills tests soon after receiving support. Assessors visit learners regularly and can be readily contacted by phone, text or e-mail. Learners appreciate such good support. Most learners complete their programme by their planned end date.

117. Induction is satisfactory. It is useful in establishing the focus of the programmes for the learners.

118. Learners are not sufficiently involved in progress reviews. Even though reviews take place regularly, learners are not encouraged to evaluate their own performance or identify barriers to learning. The assessors, and not the learners, set most of the targets. Often learners do not write comments on their review report. They are not encouraged to do so by the assessor.

Leadership and management

119. The programme is managed well. All aspects of training are planned well, including initial assessment, on- and off-the-job-training and assessment. Performance management is thorough. STL has recently introduced an excellent computerised monitoring record. Assessors update this after each assessment visit to learners or after test results are received. This database identifies the progress of every learner at each NVQ unit, for key skills qualifications and in the technical certificate. It gives a clear picture of learners' performance against their target dates for achievement of each component of the framework. Team leaders meet with each assessor monthly to review, in detail, the assessor's overall performance and the performance of their learners. Senior managers also review performance monthly with team leaders for their curriculum area or region. Internal verification is thorough and frequent, adding to the comprehensive review of assessors' and learners' performance. Teamwork is good.

120. Assessors, trainers and internal verifiers are appropriately qualified and have suitable commercial experience. Staff development opportunities are plentiful. Staff and learners show a satisfactory appreciation of equality of opportunity and have a sound understanding of health and safety requirements.

121. The self-assessment report is well presented, evaluative and includes a good quality and quantity of evidence. The report is broadly accurate and matched the inspectors' judgements. However, it does not identify the key weakness identified at inspection.

Customer service

Grade 2

Strengths

- good development of workplace skills
- good achievement rates for key skills qualifications
- good planning of training to meet learners' and employers' needs
- thorough target-setting and assessment practice

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- good programme management

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

122. Learners develop good skills in the workplace. They receive good on-the-job training in the workplace and develop relevant vocational skills to a high degree. Workplaces are of a high standard and offer learners the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills. Learners develop skills that are adaptable across the whole shop in which they work. One learner has redesigned the company's website in two weeks to attract new customers by displaying all their products online. Other learners have progressed into supervisory roles and are involved in training other staff.

123. The achievement rates for key skills qualifications are good. For example, the pass rates for the application of number qualification are good at 81 per cent and 74 per cent at level 1 and 2 respectively. The pass rates for the communication qualification are also good, at 83 per cent and 67 per cent at level 1 and 2 respectively. The ICT key skills qualification pass rate is also good at 87 per cent. Learners' achievement of technical certificates is satisfactory. Of the current learners, 86 per cent have achieved the certificate. The current learners are also making good progress towards achieving their NVQs. Eighty-eight per cent of the learners have completed approximately 80 per cent of their framework.

124. Achievement and retention rates overall are satisfactory for apprentices and advanced apprentices. They show an improving trend. More learners are staying in learning and making the expected progress.

125. Retention and achievement rates have improved from 22 per cent for advanced apprentices starting in 2001-02 and 2002-03 to 40 per cent for those starting in 2003-04. For those advanced apprentices who started in 2004-05, 22 per cent have completed their framework and 72 per cent are still in learning.

126. Retention and achievement rates for the apprenticeship programme are now satisfactory. The achievement rate has steadily increased from 31 per cent for learners starting in 2001-02 to 52 per cent for the 2003-04 intake. For learners starting in 2004-05, 70 per cent have either completed or are still in learning. Of the 2005-06 starters, 89 per cent are still in learning. All learners are making significant progress in all aspects of the framework.

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	13		32		47		116	100	100	100							
Retained*	0		7		19		25	22	24	24							
Successfully completed	0		7		19		25	22	22	22							
Still in learning	12		23		8		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								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	44		240		368	100	225	100	77	100							
Retained*	0		73		194	53	77	34	25	32							
Successfully completed	0		69		192	52	73	32	24	31							
Still in learning	39		98		1	0	0	0	0	0							

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

The quality of provision

127. Training is planned well and effectively to meet learners' and employers' needs. At the start of the programme an individual delivery plan is drawn up which identifies what training will be delivered, by who and when. It uses appropriate and relevant learning materials to suit the learners' styles of learning. Assessors provide ample opportunities for the learners and employers to identify the areas of on-the-job training that will help them complete their qualifications quickly. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. It is thought through well and is appropriately paced. It is available on a flexible basis. Learners can either attend training at the centres or STL's staff will visit them to provide training in the workplace.

128. NVQ assessment practice is good. Assessors actively involve the learners in the process. The learners fully understand how their evidence or observations meet the standards. Portfolios contain a good range of evidence. Regular and continuous assessment demonstrates the learners' competence over a period of time.

129. Target-setting is very effective. It covers all aspects of the framework and personal development. Assessors visit learners regularly, often every two or three weeks, and set challenging targets at each visit. Learners find that the targets are very useful in helping them to focus on what they need to do and by when. Assessors refer back to the individual learning and delivery plans and check that learners have met the targets. In addition, targets and action points are also set in the progress reviews. Employers are fully involved in the process.

130. Initial assessment is satisfactory. It correctly identifies each learner's starting point,

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including their skills, abilities, prior learning and experience. A diagnostic test is used to identify their levels of literacy, numeracy and key skills and any additional support needs. Assessors also identify learners' preferred learning styles. The results of the initial assessment process are used effectively to produce an individual learning and delivery plan. Assessors monitor learners' progress effectively against the plan.

131. STL provides a satisfactory standardised induction to the learners, either in the training centre or individually in their workplace. Learners receive a range of useful information relating to their programmes, with equality of opportunity, and health and safety included.

132. Learning materials are satisfactory. Standard packs of handouts and questionnaires are available in each centre. In addition, each tutor and assessor has their own laptop computer that is loaded with a wide range of interactive learning materials. These can be accessed at any time by any of the staff for use with the learners.

133. Support for the learners is satisfactory and generally planned well. Learners are all very positive about their learning experience and appreciate the support they receive from STL's staff. They highly value the frequent visits and the opportunities to contact their assessors at any time with any queries or problems. However, a small number of learners requiring literacy and numeracy support did not receive it on time. This weakness is now rectified.

Leadership and management

134. The area of learning is managed well. Provision is effectively planned and delivered, and all aspects of the frameworks are covered. Learners' and assessors' performance is monitored through the monthly profile and programme review meetings. STL monitors learners' progress very effectively through the rigorous system of monthly profile meetings. The details of every learner are carefully recorded on a central computerised system. All staff can access this information remotely. Assessors spot slow achievement promptly and take effective steps to rectify the situation by providing targeted support and training. Staff members are well supported by the managers. Communications are very good. STL explores all staff suggestions thoroughly to improve the provision on a continuous basis. Literacy and numeracy support is well managed and delivered either by the essential skills team or the assessors.

135. STL celebrates learners' success very effectively. Learners who have done something really well are used as the subject of case studies which are prominently displayed round the centres to motivate other learners. Learners' and staff members' awareness of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners receive good information during their induction, and staff check their understanding during the review process. Staff have received some training on equality of opportunity. However, they have not sufficiently thought through how this will affect the learners. Employers' policies are checked when they first sign up for the programme and discussions take place to identify any issues during the reviews.

136. Internal verification is satisfactory. It is used effectively to maintain and raise standards of learning. All staff were effectively involved in the self-assessment process. They have many opportunities to contribute to quality improvement process through the computerised system on the intranet.

137. The self-assessment report is fairly accurate and critical. The self-assessment grades

identified for this area of learning match those given by inspectors.

