

INSPECTION REPORT

Heathercroft Training Services Limited

19 May 2006



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
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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. Heathercroft Training Services Limited (HTS) is a private training company situated in Eastbourne, East Sussex. It was established in 1991 and provides training and assessment programmes for the care sector through apprenticeship programmes and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Training is funded by the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSC) for Sussex, Kent and Medway, and London South, and by the European Social Fund (ESF). It also provides privately funded training which was not in the scope of this inspection.
2. The management team comprises a general manager supported by an operations co-ordinator, a framework co-ordinator, a programme leader for early years and a development co-ordinator, together with three senior administrators. Five team leaders manage a total of 16 tutor/assessors on a regional basis. A board of two directors and the general manager supervise the strategic direction of the company.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** The quality of provision in health, public services and care is good. Leadership and management are good, arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity are satisfactory and those for quality improvement are good.
4. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** HTS carries out the self-assessment process annually and uses questionnaires to gather feedback from learners, employers and staff. Staff are involved in reviewing the feedback, identifying the strengths and weaknesses, and grading. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the report but also identified additional weaknesses.
5. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** The exceptionally effective leadership and management at HTS implemented a well-planned recovery strategy following the inadequacy judgement made at the inspection four years ago. This resulted in an improvement identified at the reinspection. The more recent quality monitoring inspection confirmed that the quality of provision had improved since the reinspection, and this inspection has shown further improvements. The results of these can be seen in the upward trend of the learners' achievement of full frameworks and timely achievement.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR HEATHERCROFT TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- continue improvement in achievement rates
- improve formal planning and monitoring of training

- further improve monitoring of quality assurance arrangements
- further promote and improve equal opportunities with employers and potential learners

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Health, public services and care			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Social care		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	304	2	
Other government-funded provision	25	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Training in health, public services and care was inspected. The programme-led pathway (PLP) in early years and ESF-funded training for the registered managers award (RMA) and level 4 have only recently started and findings have been incorporated into a generic report.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	25
Number of learners interviewed	45
Number of staff interviewed	21
Number of employers interviewed	27
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	26
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **Achievement rates have increased significantly.** For apprentices, the achievement rate has increased from 16 per cent to 26 per cent in 2004-05, and for advanced apprenticeships it has increased from 6 per cent to 18 per cent, with current framework

achievements of 39 per cent, with 41 learners still in learning. Timely achievement has improved from 2 per cent and 5 per cent for apprentices and advanced apprentices respectively, to a combined current rate of 58 per cent.

8. Some learners complete ahead of their planned end date and others make timely progress with good support from their assessor and employers. HTS amends the learners' target completion dates according to their initial assessment and the progress that they make in their first few weeks.

9. HTS monitors the learners' progress closely. It has an effective system for raising concerns about the learners' progress, which ensures that it increases the frequency of visits, which where necessary.

10. Learners develop good occupational skills and increase their personal confidence. Learners on the PLP in early years show good levels of initiative and are soon confident in initiating activities with children.

The quality of provision

11. A good induction process enables learners to quickly start achieving towards their framework. They are helped to complete activities which contribute immediately to their technical certificates and key skills evidence. A very good pack of materials effectively engages the learners immediately.

12. There is good assessment practice. HTS uses a good range of assessment methods, including online testing and modified assessment methods for learning with additional support needs. Learners work well with assessors to agree action plans. Employers are well informed of the outcome of the assessment and review visits by assessors.

13. Support for learners is particularly effective. There are good links with other agencies and HTS takes effective action to assist learners with financial, social or personal issues that might otherwise be a barrier to learning. The programme has been modified to include individual support sessions and time for specialist learning and key skills support and careers' activities and guidance.

14. All learners receive an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills and are supported to improve their skills. HTS has developed good resources to support tutors and learners, which are cross-referenced to the questions in the initial assessment. However, there is insufficient formal recording of learners' progress in literacy and numeracy.

15. Resources are satisfactory, with some good provision, including laptop computers in the early years programme. Staff are experienced and appropriately qualified. Learners work with qualified staff in the workplace who show appropriate knowledge and understanding of NVQ requirements.

16. HTS updates the learners' achievements at their reviews and discusses learners' progress against targets. At these reviews, it agrees new targets, but these are often broad, with gaps in recording target dates in review forms.

17. There is insufficient formal planning of training. Employers are not involved in planning how the training they provide for learners fits into the assessment and learning plan. There is little long- or medium-term planning of training by tutor/assessors. Assessors provide good support and knowledge to learners during their visits but there is no recorded, systematic approach that links all aspects of the training.

Leadership and management

18. The particularly effective operational management has ensured that HTS has improved the quality of its training provision. The good involvement of directors and the open management style supports the commitment of staff to be involved in new developments and to deliver high-quality provision to the learners.

19. The low proportion of team leaders to tutors enables a high level of communication and support. Tutors at HTS are out with learners for most of their time and some are a long distance from the training centre in Eastbourne.

20. New staff and those changing their work roles are well supported by induction, work shadowing and training. HTS has a comprehensive annual appraisal process for all staff. All tutors meet every four to six weeks with their team leader for an individual session. Links with the skills for life initiative have provided practical training and resources for tutors. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language.

21. A well-planned strategy has improved engagement with employers. Senior staff and directors are involved with a variety of care and/or training organisations. Collaborative working with other training providers has enabled HTS to extend its work. The comprehensive range of training and qualifications offers employers and learners structured career progress in care.

22. Assessors use effective materials to develop and explore the learners' understanding of equality of opportunity. Learners have a good level of understanding that is appropriate to their work in the care sector.

23. The effective quality improvement strategy has resulted in an upward trend of achievement of full frameworks and timely achievement. The restructuring of management and small teams has resulted in a flexible and adaptable company. HTS monitors the learners' progress and it identifies any learners at risk and provides them with additional support. The excellent links with employers enables a partnership of working with and supporting the learners.

24. A comprehensive planned schedule of observations on reviews and assessments shows an improvement in both these activities. There is very detailed feedback and actions are set for improvement with targets to achieve.

25. The analysis and use of data are satisfactory. HTS sets targets for itself and individual tutors and staff, and they are fully aware of how well the company is doing and where there are problems.

26. The strategy for support for additional learning needs is satisfactory. The use of initial

assessment, the development of support materials and the frequent visits to learners enables them to work towards their key skills. Staff have received training from the skills for life initiative.

27. Provision for equality and opportunity at HTS is satisfactory, with an appropriate range of policies and procedures. The equal opportunities policy is clear and covers bullying and harassment, but the policy is out of date.

28. Internal verification is satisfactory. It is well planned, with two days each month allocated to the team of internal verifiers who carry out the verification together. A good monitoring system helps to ensure that work is returned to tutors and then learners within a well-defined target time.

29. **There is insufficient monitoring of the quality assurance system.** There is some good monitoring of activities and corrective actions by team leaders with tutors at the individual meetings. The annual audit schedule covers all paperwork but inspection has identified some poor completion of paperwork, with corrective actions focusing on administrative errors rather than the quality of recording.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very good operational management
- very effective training and support for staff
- excellent links with employers
- particularly effective quality improvement strategy

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of quality assurance system

Health, public services and care

Strengths

- very effective strategy to improve retention and achievement rates
- good development of confidence and personal skills particularly for early years
- good induction process
- good assessment practice
- particularly effective support for learners
- very effective communications and support for staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal planning of training

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT HEATHERCROFT TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- the support from assessors
- 'always reliable, helpful, easy to contact for extra help at anytime'
- good teaching and useful information
- 'good opportunities for care, always someone there, either the assessor or at the Eastbourne office'
- 'the assessor coming to the workplace, so you don't have to travel'
- very friendly team, very supportive
- the idea of the award ceremony
- the flexibility of the RMA online
- developing their confidence

WHAT LEARNERS THINK HEATHERCROFT TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the handouts explaining the technical certificate
- the amount of writing - it could be reduced
- the length of the induction - it is too long

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- very good operational management
- very effective training and support for staff
- excellent links with employers
- particularly effective quality improvement strategy

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of quality assurance system

30. The very good operational management has ensured that HTS has improved the quality of its training provision. The good involvement of directors and the open management style supports the commitment of staff to be involved in new developments and to deliver high-quality provision to the learners. The comprehensive structure of meetings ensures that information is shared with staff, that senior managers are aware of what is happening with learners, that staff can share issues, concerns and successes, and that everyone feels part of the team at HTS.

31. Tutors at HTS are out with learners for most their time and some are a long distance from the training centre in Eastbourne. The staff schedules ensure that HTS knows where the staff are and contact is made with team leaders when working out of normal working hours. Home visits are only made if necessary and if there has been a risk assessment. The new structure of team leaders with a maximum team size of four tutors allows a high level of communication and support. The new, small office-base in Kent acts as meeting place and resource base for tutors in that area.

32. HTS provides its staff with very effective training and support. The well-planned induction process for staff includes new staff and those changing their work roles. HTS has introduced work shadowing and training and monitors new staff against targets, at three and six months. The comprehensive annual appraisal process for all staff includes self-assessment and team leaders' or line managers' assessment against a number of topics. Action points and identified training needs are discussed and planned. There can be an additional appraisal at six months. All tutors meet every four to six weeks with their team leader for an individual session which includes a review of all their activities and any feedback. Feedback and identified action points from the observation of assessments and reviews is discussed at these meetings. Training is identified to meet both business and individual needs. In-house assessor training and support have improved assessment practice. Team leaders are working towards health and safety units so they can set up and monitor placements. Links with the skills for life initiative have provided practical training and resources for tutors. Tutors are well supported by the in-house development of resources to use with their learners.

33. A well-planned strategy has improved the company's engagement with all employers, including those with government-funded learners and also private learners. Excellent links

are now in place. The four-weekly visits from tutors and the information that is sent about learners, their progress and any issues, ensures that employers are well informed about the apprenticeship programmes and any developments. Employers play an active role in the three-monthly progress reviews and, if they are unable to attend, the tutor contacts them to ensure that their comments are taken into account. Employers value the contact they have with HTS and the regular contact they have with the tutors. The active involvement of the directors and senior management team with a variety of care and/or training organisations ensures that HTS not only makes contact within the care community but also that it is aware of the latest developments. Collaborative working with other training providers has enabled HTS to extend its work and get involved in projects funded by the ESF. The comprehensive range of training and qualifications offers employers and learners a structured career progression in care, from apprenticeships to NVQs at level 4 and the RMA.

34. The analysis and use of data are satisfactory. The company sets targets for itself and individual tutors. HTS produces data to enable it to monitor these. It produces reports for the various meetings, and staff are fully aware of how well the company is doing and where there are issues.

35. The strategy for support for additional learning needs is satisfactory. The use of initial assessment, the development of support materials and the frequent visits to learners enables them to work towards their key skills. Staff have received training from the skills for life initiative. Planning of support is informal, with little recording of targets to work towards or progress achieved. This was reported in the ALI's quality monitoring inspection report in January 2005. This area has not been included in the most recent self-assessment report or in the development plan.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

36. Provision for equality of opportunity at HTS is satisfactory, with an appropriate range of policies and procedures. The equal opportunities policy is clear and covers bullying and harassment, but the policy is out of date. The last review was in 2004 and does not cover the recent amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. HTS has an up-to-date disability access audit and all of the buildings that learners use are accessible. Staff have received training in the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. Copies of the equal opportunities policies and procedures are available online to tutors and in the induction pack for learners.

37. The effective complaints and compliments procedure operates well and there is good evidence of the improvement of procedures following complaints. All learners receive a copy of the complaints and appeals procedure at induction and they are confident to contact head office with any concerns. Staff receive regular updates on equality and diversity at staff meetings and it is a standing agenda item on management meetings.

38. Learners have an understanding of equality and diversity that is appropriate to their work in the care sector. Assessors use effective materials to develop and explore the learners' understanding of equality and diversity and health and safety. HTS uses a range of appropriate questions to explore the learners' understanding in their progress reviews. An appropriate level of occupational understanding is well demonstrated in learners' portfolios of evidence. HTS has information and training materials available in an appropriate range of formats, including different-coloured paper for learners with dyslexia, and large-print

copy.

39. HTS meets and in some cases exceeds the LSC's targets for recruitment by gender, ethnicity and disability. Over 20 per cent of learners are from a non-white minority ethnic group, 15 per cent of learners are men, and 67 per cent of apprentices and 37 per cent of advanced apprentices have additional learning needs. Managers monitor and analyse data on recruitment, retention and achievement against a range of measures, including gender, ethnicity and disability. HTS seeks to recruit across the diversity of staff within the care industry, including part-time workers and those who only work nights and weekends, but there has been little activity to work with the care sector to broaden the range of workers in the sector.

40. HTS did not fully explore equality and diversity in its most recent self-assessment report. This relied on the response to questionnaires by learners and employers.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

41. HTS has a particularly effective quality improvement strategy. The company was judged as inadequate at its inspection four years ago. The well-planned recovery programme has resulted in the improvements that have been identified in this inspection and the good grades. The review of staff roles, the new senior management team and the more recent restructuring into small teams has resulted in a flexible and adaptable company. The focus of the company has changed from recruitment and numbers in learning, to retention, achievement and the quality of its training provision. The retention and achievement rates have improved significantly. The company made good use of the support of the ALI's provider development unit to work towards reinspection and achieve improved grades. The more recent quality monitoring inspection confirmed that the quality of provision has improved since the reinspection, and this inspection has shown further improvements. Key skills and technical certificates are now fully integrated with the NVQ. HTS now uses initial assessment to identify learning styles and additional learning needs. The company monitors learners' progress and identifies any learners at risk and provides them with additional support. Team leaders support their tutors where there are specific difficulties with learners and offer additional resources. The excellent links with employers enable a partnership of working with and supporting the learners. These improvements have resulted in the upward trend of achievement of full frameworks and timely achievement.

42. The comprehensive planned schedule of observations, on reviews and assessments, shows an improvement in both these activities. The detailed paperwork includes the key areas for the observation, as well as questions on knowledge and understanding. There is very detailed feedback and actions are set for improvement with targets to achieve. Follow-up is carried out at additional observations or at the four- to six-weekly individual sessions.

43. Internal verification is satisfactory. It is well planned with two days each month allocated to the team of internal verifiers who carry out the verification together. This enables standardisation of verification and helps to ensure that the workload is evenly shared. Assessors receive clear and challenging feedback on their assessment. A good monitoring system helps to ensure that work is returned to tutors and then learners within a well-defined target time.

44. The company's self-assessment process is satisfactory. It includes feedback from employers, learners and staff. The response rate from employers has improved from 5 per cent when the questionnaires were posted out, to 45 per cent now that tutors take the questionnaires out and explain the importance of them to the employers. Staff were involved in reviewing the feedback, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and grading. Inspectors agree with most of the judgements in the report but have identified some additional weaknesses.

45. The quality assurance manual and procedures are satisfactory and include the main areas of operation. The procedures and forms are computerised, with a paper copy at Eastbourne and another at the Kent office. Not all procedures are the latest version in the paper copy.

46. There is insufficient monitoring of the quality assurance system. There is some good monitoring of activities and corrective actions by team leaders with tutors at the individual meetings. The annual audit schedule covers all paperwork but inspection has identified some poor completion of paperwork, with corrective actions focusing on administrative errors rather than the quality of recording. Examples include poor target-setting on review forms and little reference, on individual learning plans and review forms, to planned training or progression for learners with additional learning needs. These have not been identified by HTS.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Social care		2
Apprenticeships for young people	304	2
Other government-funded provision	25	2

47. HTS has 304 learners funded by LSCs, comprising 148 apprentices and 144 advanced apprentices on programmes in social care. In addition, there are 12 learners on a PLP in early years. Twenty-five learners have recently started the RMA or level 4 in care, funded by the ESF.

48. All apprentices and managers are employed in a range of care settings, including residential care, nursing homes and provision for adults with learning difficulties or mental health problems. Most learners are recruited through direct marketing or existing links with their employers. PLP learners are recruited through the local Connexions services from young people who were not in employment, education or training. PLP learners attend HTS for two days each week to achieve a technical certificate and key skills, and they are in appropriate early years placements for three days each week. Care learners receive all training and assessment in the workplace and are visited by tutor/assessors at least every four weeks. RMA and level 4 learners receive training and assessment online.

Strengths

- very effective strategy to improve retention and achievement rates
- good development of confidence and personal skills particularly for early years
- good induction process
- good assessment practice
- particularly effective support for learners
- very effective communications and support for staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal planning of training

Achievement and standards

49. HTS has very successfully improved its retention and achievement rates. Since the previous inspection, retention and achievement rates have improved significantly to sector averages. In 2003-04, achievement rates for apprentices were only 6 per cent but improved to near the national framework rate at 26 per cent in 2004-05. Advanced apprenticeship achievement has risen from 6 per cent to 18 per cent in the same period. Timely achievement rates were very low in 2003-04 and 2004-05 at 2 per cent and 5 per cent. At the end of quarter three in 2005-06, timely achievement was 58 per cent with an overall framework achievement rate above the national average at 39 per cent, with 41 learners still in training. Success rates in technical certificate examinations are high, with a

pass rate of over 75 per cent for those taking them. Over 40 per cent of successful apprentices have progressed to advanced apprenticeship programmes.

50. All parts of the apprenticeship framework are now very well integrated, with clear materials to support learners' understanding. Training and assessment for key skills and the technical certificate start at induction, and many learners have completed those parts of the framework early in their programme. Assessors monitor the learners' progress closely. An effective system of raising concerns about learners' progress ensures that the frequency of visits is increased where necessary. HTS makes good use of management information systems data to monitor staff performance in relation to retention and achievement.

51. Most learners now make good and timely progress appropriate to their needs. Some learners complete ahead of their planned end date, but all of them now make timely progress with good support from their assessor and employers. Target completion dates are clear and challenging and are amended according to the initial assessment and progress shown by learners in their first few weeks.

52. All learners, but particularly those on the PLP in early years develop good occupational skills and increase their personal confidence. Most early years learners have been recruited from vulnerable groups and make excellent progress in a short space of time. They work competently with children, at an early stage of their training. Learners show good levels of initiative and are confident in initiating activities with children. In one setting, two learners regularly accompany children to a play session in the swimming pool. They work effectively to ensure that children develop confidence in the water and conceptual skills.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	116	25	51	6	27
		timely	118	11	31	1	16
	2004-05	overall	128	35	47	18	21
		timely	127	18	28	6	12
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	138	33	43	6	17
		timely	160	9	18	2	6
	2004-05	overall	139	47	46	26	29
		timely	132	11	21	5	13

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

53. A good induction process, supported by particularly effective materials, enables learners to make a good start to their programme. A very good pack of materials effectively engages learners immediately, and they very quickly complete activities which contribute immediately to their technical certificates and key skills evidence. HTS provides details of health and safety, equality of opportunity and policies and procedures. Learners also complete a learning styles questionnaire and are given activities and quizzes that

provide evidence for their portfolio to complete before the next assessor's visit. Induction is phased over a number of weeks and most learners recall the process well.

54. There is good assessment practice. HTS uses a good range of assessment methods, including online testing and modified assessment methods for learning with additional support needs. The company uses appropriate assessment methods for each learner, minimising the use of written work for learners with literacy issues. It uses a very wide range of evidence including reflective accounts, plentiful observations of practice, work products, photographs, witness statements and oral questions. Learners work well with assessors to agree action plans and assessors use effective questioning techniques when reviewing actions. Most employers are well informed of the outcome of the assessors' assessment and review visits. RMA and level 4 learners use a very effective online assessment and portfolio system.

55. Support for learners is particularly effective. Learners value the frequency of assessment planning and feedback visits. These vary between weekly and monthly, depending upon the needs of the learners or whether they have been identified as being at risk. An effective system of raising concerns about learners' progress ensures that the frequency of visits is increased where necessary. Initial advice and guidance are particularly effective for the PLP learners. There are good links with other agencies and HTS takes effective action to assist learners with financial, social or personal issues which might otherwise be a barrier to learning. The programme has been modified to include individual support sessions and also time for specialist learning and key skills support, and careers activities and guidance.

56. Support for learners with additional learning needs is satisfactory. All learners have an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Sixty-seven per cent of apprentices and 37 per cent of advanced apprentices have additional learning needs. HTS has developed good resources to support tutors, which are cross-referenced to the questions in the initial assessment. Learners with dyslexia have access to a range of support materials and strategies. All tutors have received some training in literacy and numeracy and provide support to learners who need it. However, the levels of learning and progress in literacy and numeracy are not always well recorded in learners' files. Some learners with additional learning needs repeatedly sit their key skills tests several times in too short a timeframe.

57. Resources are satisfactory, with some good provision, including laptop computers in the early years programme. Staff are experienced and appropriately qualified. Learners work with qualified staff in the workplace who show appropriate knowledge and understanding of NVQ requirements. There is good access to a range of books and materials from assessors and employers. The online assessment system used by RMA learners has an excellent resources section, with links to online materials and other documents. All learners have access to this through assessors' laptop computers and all online learners have direct access on their own or their employers' computers.

58. HTS updates the learners' achievements at their reviews and discuss their progress against targets. It agrees new targets but these are often broad, with gaps in recording target dates in review forms. While reviews as a whole are satisfactory, the carbonised forms retained by the assessor are of poor quality. They do not always give assessors information that they need to know to support planning and preparation.

59. The programmes and activities are satisfactory in meeting the learners' needs and interests. HTS is responsive in meeting the needs of local employers and the community. It is involved in a range of initiatives, including a centre of vocational excellence partnership and PLP and ESF programmes.

60. There is insufficient formal planning of training. Employers are not involved in planning how the training they provide for learners fits into the assessment and learning plan. There is little long- or medium-term planning of training by tutor/assessors. Individual training sessions to support technical certificate knowledge are not supported by advanced lesson planning. However, assessors do provide good support and knowledge to learners during their visits but there is no recorded, systematic approach that links all aspects of the training.

Leadership and management

61. Communications inside the company and support for staff are very effective. Tutor assessors are very well supported by team leaders with regular meetings, including individual supervision and standardisation meetings. New staff are particularly well supported in their induction to HTS. Professional development and support for staff are a key feature of the company. Observations of tutor/assessors are thorough and lead to support and improvements where necessary. There is close monitoring of staff performance and good use of management information systems data to monitor staff performance in relation to retention and achievement. HTS takes care to ensure that tutor/assessors have an easily managed caseload of learners to ensure effective support and assessment.

62. Internal verification is satisfactory and meets awarding body requirements. Regular internal verifiers' meetings, two days each month, effectively ensures that internal verification is fairly distributed among the team and that standardisation takes place. Feedback is detailed and effectively challenges assessors' decisions. Clear time targets ensure that most learners receive work promptly. However, the monitoring of the timely return of work and the completion of all documents by assessors are not always thorough.

