

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Skillnet**

**14 October 2005**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

### Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

## Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Grading

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

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

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Skillnet

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# INSPECTION REPORT

## DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Skillnet was established in 1999 as a training organisation specialising in apprenticeships within the automotive engineering sector.
2. In November 2002, Skillnet made a successful application to become a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for motor vehicle studies. A second specialist training facility has been developed, based in Croxley Green, and the head office facilities at the West London site in Eastcote have been upgraded. In September 2005, Skillnet took over a further unit at Eastcote to provide light vehicle workshop facilities.
3. Skillnet provides apprenticeship programmes in light and heavy vehicle repair, fast fit, vehicle body repair, vehicle refinishing and body fitting. The service is currently delivered to learners who are employed in independent garages. The fast-fit apprenticeship programme includes two national fast-fit companies. The provider operates at two sites, one in Watford and the head office site in Eastcote.
4. Skillnet contracts with London West Learning and Skills Council. The provider employs 19 full-time and two part-time staff. The management team comprises a managing director and an operations director who are supported by an administration manager, two training managers, an assessor manager and a quality assurance manager.

## OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

## Grade 3

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provider is satisfactory.** Skillnet's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Its motor vehicle provision is satisfactory.
6. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process includes all relevant stakeholders, but although it recognises many of the strengths found by inspectors, and some of the weaknesses, it does not identify the key weaknesses of low retention and achievement, focusing instead on projected achievements. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice.
7. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Skillnet has recently implemented very effective strategies to improve its provision, including retention and achievement rates. Management has introduced many effective measures. The quality of the learners' experiences has been greatly improved, but some of these new measures have not yet had a significant effect on the learning experience.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR SKILLNET:

- maintain improvements to the programme

## SKILLNET

- improve retention and achievement rates
- develop effective progress review practice
- improve the promotion of equality of opportunity
- increase the value of the self-assessment process

## GRADES

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

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

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<b>Motor vehicle</b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	267	3	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. The inspection team examined and reported on all aspects of the motor vehicle provision. The provider has a very small number of customer service learners who transferred from a fast-fit provider, but this programme is being closed and there were too few learners for the programme to form part of this inspection. The inspection took place over five days from 10-14 October 2005.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	15
Number of learners interviewed	34
Number of staff interviewed	26
Number of employers interviewed	12
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	16
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

9. **Learners acquire very good practical skills in the workplace,** and quickly assume

responsibility for increasingly complex jobs. Learners soon take on a liaison and diagnostic role to assess the work required. Employers note that the learners quickly become an integral part of the business, particularly in smaller garages.

10. Clear and significant improvements have been made over the past three years. **There have been sustained improvements in the retention and achievement rates starting from a low base.** Success rates for the completion of apprenticeship frameworks have increased from 7 per cent for 2002-03, to 52 per cent for 2005-06. Over the same period, national vocational qualifications (NVQ) achievements have risen from 33 per cent to 55 per cent. Retention rates have also improved over the past two years, from 57 per cent in 2003-04, to 80 per cent for 2005-06. Most learners are making good progress.

11. Historically, retention and achievement rates have been poor. In the three years from 2000-01 to 2002-03, only 29 per cent of advanced apprentices were retained, and 19 per cent completed the full apprenticeship framework, with 13 per cent still in training. Over the same period 22 per cent of the apprentices were retained, and only 7 per cent completed the framework, with 13 per cent still in training. This poor performance is recognised by the provider and significant measures have been introduced to improve matters. The provider is working closely with employers to improve retention rates.

### The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	0	3	2	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

12. **On-the-job training is particularly good.** Learners are instructed by an experienced craftsperson or technician, and work with different mentors to widen their experience. This provides good training opportunities, with learners acquiring skills quickly. Workplace technicians also give good feedback to the learners and sign off workplace evidence. The quality of the work placements is good, and they provide a wide variety of work and access to modern equipment. Classroom training ranges from satisfactory to good in quality. Good levels of resources are used effectively. Teaching staff are well qualified and are provided with good opportunities for staff development.

13. **Learners are provided with very effective individual support,** which they appreciate. Assessors and tutors have frequent formal and informal contacts with their learners. Combined with very good working relationships, this ensures that learners are well supported and that any issues are dealt with quickly. Many learners receive good additional support to complete their qualifications. Learners are very appreciative of this assistance. Inductions are thorough and learners receive a comprehensive information pack.

14. **Assessment in the workplace is very good.** Assessors carry out work-based assessments at least every six weeks which are thorough and provide good and detailed feedback. Work-based assessments are well planned and enable learners to start acquiring portfolio evidence at an early stage in their programmes. An on-demand assessment service is used effectively by learners. The internal verification system is satisfactory.

15. **Progress reviews are ineffective.** The reviews concentrate on the NVQ element of the programme and most reviews do not specifically measure progress for the technical certificate or key skills. Targets are often generalised and vague. Employers are not involved sufficiently in the reviews.

## Leadership and management

16. **The management of resources is very good.** The provider has made significant investments in accommodation and training resources, which are above industry standard. Local industry has made major contributions. Staff development is good and staff work well together.

17. Communications within Skillnet have improved and there is clarity of direction and a common aim by all concerned to become an exemplary training provider. The management has encouraged a focus on learners' success and support. The new management information system is used to produce good information that helps management to review all aspects of the programme.

18. The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language support is generally satisfactory, although some aspects of the provision of additional learning support are ineffective. An additional support co-ordinator has recently been recruited. All staff are clearly concerned with learners' achievements and well-being and inspectors found many examples of learners who had received good support.

19. **Skillnet's promotion of the provision to under-represented groups is good.** Targets have been set to increase the recruitment of under-represented groups. Action has been taken to recruit more women to the programme and to attract higher-achieving young people into certificated engineering training, as part of their school programmes. The representation of learners from minority ethnic groups and those with declared disabilities on the programme is higher than in the communities from which Skillnet recruits.

20. Skillnet has an appropriate complaints procedure. Its monitoring of employers' premises for equality of opportunity policies and practice is satisfactory. Health and safety is well monitored. Although most of the areas used by learners are accessible for wheelchair users, the facilities have not been suitably adapted at either training centre.

21. Learners' awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity not reinforced sufficiently during the programme. The progress review documents allow for equality of opportunity to be discussed, but the level of detail and recording of information is often cursory. There is not enough reinforcement of the wider equality of opportunity issues. Learners' understanding and awareness of equality of opportunity is generally satisfactory, although sometimes it is not sufficient.

22. **Skillnet's directors and managers demonstrate strong leadership** in the implementation of very effective strategies to improve the provision. New management personnel and staff have strengthened the team. Improved systems and procedures have been implemented. New processes have been established. There are significant improvements in retention and achievement rates.

23. The self-assessment process, although including all relevant parties, did not produce



Skillnet's effective development plan. This was developed through an external consultancy report. The self-assessment report is not critical enough.

24. The good quality improvement measures which are now having an effect on learners were delayed until after a consultancy report in January 2005. These measures have had an obvious and positive effect on most learners on the programme. However, the poor retention and achievement rates were known before the consultancy process took place, and there was a significant delay in implementing appropriately strong measures.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- very good resources
- good promotion of provision to under-represented groups
- strong leadership to improve provision

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity during the programme
- delayed introduction of quality improvement measures

## **Engineering and manufacturing technologies**

### ***Motor vehicle***

***Grade 3***

#### *Strengths*

- good acquisition of practical skills
- sustained improvements in retention and achievement rates from a low base
- particularly good on-the-job training
- very effective individual support
- very good workplace assessment

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor historical retention and achievement
- ineffective progress reviews.

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT SKILLNET:**

- interesting and enjoyable lessons
- the diagnostic equipment at Skillnet
- the support from supervisors at work
- practical and pastoral support from assessors
- being given responsibility for complex jobs
- practical training in the workshops
- the up-to-date computers at the training centres

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK SKILLNET COULD IMPROVE:**

- the cost and distance of travel to college
- the practical workshop sessions - there are not enough
- changing room and rest facilities
- access to the computers at lunchtime
- the amount of writing involved in health and safety assignments - there is too much

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

### Grade 2

#### Strengths

- very good resources
- good promotion of provision to under-represented groups
- strong leadership to improve provision

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity during the programme
- delayed introduction of quality improvement measures

25. Management of resources is very good. In addition to CoVE funding, Skillnet has made significant investments in office accommodation, classrooms and workshops which are above industry standard and make attractive environments for learning. These improvements have been well supported by substantial contributions from local industries, such as the donation of paint supplies to the paint shop. Staff development is good, and is supported by appropriate systems. Staff have good experience and are well qualified for their jobs. Learners enjoy classroom sessions and appreciate the up-to-date equipment and good accommodation. Internal communications are good and staff work well together as a team. Quarterly management meetings and regular departmental meetings take place which have appropriate agendas and well-recorded action points.

26. Significant changes have been implemented during the year, including new management personnel and systems. During this time the provider has continued to invest in improving the learners' experiences. Communications within the company have improved. This is valued by staff. There is clarity of direction, and a common aim to become an exemplary training provider which is shared by the whole organisation. Management has encouraged the prioritising of support for learners and ensuring their success.

27. The new management information system is used to produce good information that enables management to review all aspects of the programme. Skillnet collects a wide range of information for monitoring purposes, trend analysis, development planning and target-setting. Skillnet monitors the retention and achievement rates for learners, and trends are identified and discussed at management and departmental meetings.

28. Skillnet has a good range of contacts with external partners. These contacts include the CoVE steering group meetings and the local providers' network, as well as local employers. Employers, learners, and all interested parties are informed about new developments through a newsletter, presentation evenings and good staff contacts. However, the provider does not have close links with local organisations which could help those learners with specific additional learning support needs, such as the local dyslexia support agency or the drug and alcohol misuse centre. There is a heavy reliance on Connexions for this support.

29. The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language support is generally satisfactory. However, some aspects of the provision of additional learning support are ineffective. An appropriate and nationally recognised initial assessment is used to identify learners' needs for additional learning support, the results of which are noted on the individual learning plan. Inspectors saw examples of good learning support for individuals, but such support is often not recorded sufficiently. Managers do not formally monitor the effects of this support on learners' retention and achievement rates. The provider has recognised this situation and an additional support co-ordinator has been recruited to resolve the problem.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 2**

30. Skillnet's promotion of its provision to under-represented groups is good. Statistical analyses of the local situation and particular groups in training are thorough and accurate. The provider has a good awareness of its local community. Equality of opportunity data is reviewed regularly at the quarterly management meetings. Using this detailed analysis, targets are set to increase the recruitment of under-represented groups. Taster courses have been arranged for women, and presentations have been made to girls' groups at schools. Currently, there are two women in training. A partnership with two local schools has attracted 20 young people into certificated engineering training, as part of their school programmes. More than 20 per cent of the learners are from minority ethnic groups, and almost 20 per cent of staff. Fourteen per cent of learners have declared disabilities, a figure which is also reflected in the staff profile.

31. Skillnet's management has created a very caring organisation, which communicates its commitment to equality of opportunity to all staff through good staff training and the development of a very attractive package of marketing and training materials. These materials, which include Skillnet's website, show a good range of suitable and non-stereotypical images. The information given to learners and employers contains well-presented information about equality and diversity, employment rights and responsibilities and includes up-to-date legislation. Staffs' understanding and awareness of equality of opportunity is good. All staff are very aware of learners' achievements and well-being and inspectors found many examples of learners who had received good support.

32. One director has specific responsibility for equality of opportunity, and health and safety. Policies, procedures and documents are clear, well written and thorough. They are reviewed regularly and updated. Staff, learners and employers all receive copies. The learners' successes are celebrated through the twice-yearly newsletter which is issued to employers and learners as well as staff. Skillnet holds an annual awards ceremony, and individual employers also hold presentations. These are appreciated by the learners.

33. The provider's complaints procedure is well written and easy to understand. Learners are issued with clear and concise information about the procedure. Where complaints have been made they have been dealt with quickly and efficiently. These instances are well documented and actions taken are recorded thoroughly.

34. The monitoring of employers' premises for equality of opportunity policies and practice is satisfactory. Where employers do not have an appropriate policy of their own, they use Skillnet's. Inspectors found examples of unsuitable employers being removed from the programme. Special care is taken to monitor health and safety in new premises, for which

a specialist consultant is used.

35. An audit of premises based on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 has been carried out and the provider has made some changes to better accommodate those learners with disabilities. For example, better lighting and improved signage, and some new and non-slip flooring have been installed. However, although most areas used by learners are accessible for wheelchair users, the facilities have not been suitably adapted at either training centre.

36. Learners' awareness and understanding of equality of opportunity is not reinforced sufficiently during the programme. Equality of opportunity is covered well during induction, although sometimes in too much detail and at times in language not always suitable for school leavers. However, until recently, there has been no provision in the progress review documents to include comments about either health and safety or equality of opportunity, although monitoring has been carried out twice each year. The new progress review allows pre-set questions to be asked, but the level of detail and the recording of information is often cursory. Not enough opportunities are taken to reinforce the wider equality of opportunity issues through discussions or more appropriate questions. Overall, inspectors found learners' understanding and awareness of equality and diversity to be satisfactory although sometimes it is not sufficient.

## **Quality improvement**

## **Contributory grade 2**

37. Skillnet's directors and managers demonstrate strong leadership in the implementation of very effective strategies to improve the quality of the provision, including retention and achievement rates. Effective improvement measures have been rapidly introduced by Skillnet. The quality of the learners' experiences have improved significantly. Directors have become heavily involved in the operation of Skillnet, bringing in new management and recruiting additional expertise to strengthen the staff team. Improved systems and procedures have been implemented in many areas of the programme. The management information system has been improved, communications have improved and new processes have been introduced. For example, new recruitment and initial assessment processes have been implemented and key skills training is provided at the beginning of each programme. The progress review process has also been strengthened. There are significant improvements in retention and achievement rates. The procedure to observe training sessions has been improved. All tutors are observed and feedback to them is detailed. Appropriate actions are identified to improve teaching practice. Most of the sessions observed by inspectors were graded good, and none were unsatisfactory.

38. Skillnet's quality assurance system has been completely redesigned since January 2005. There are now appropriate quality assurance policies and a full range of procedures to cover all aspects of the programmes. The provider carries out regular and detailed internal audits of learners' files to ensure proper completion of important paperwork. The results of audits are discussed at management meetings. Recommendations are made for improving the quality of the provision.

39. Health and safety is closely monitored. A specialist health and safety consultant assesses the risks in companies joining the programme. All training and assessment staff receive formal health and safety training. Health and safety now forms a key part of the progress review process.

40. The provider carries out formal annual surveys of learners' and employers' views. The

information gained is used to improve training and facilities. For example, additional workshop facilities are being developed, learners receive more frequent practical training, and employers receive improved information about the progress of learners.

41. The arrangements for internal verification are generally satisfactory. Internal verifiers use a suitable sampling framework to identify units that will be internally verified. The provider has recently introduced formal standardisation meetings. The improvements to internal verification have been noted in external verification reports.

42. The self-assessment process, including all relevant stakeholders, did not contribute directly to Skillnet's effective development plan. The external consultancy report, developed with Skillnet's staff, was the basis for the current development plan. The current self-assessment report, although recognising many of the strengths and some of the weaknesses found by inspectors, does not identify the key weaknesses of low retention and achievement, focusing instead on projected achievements. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice.

43. The quality improvement measures which are now having an effect on learners were, in the most part, delayed until after a consultancy report in January 2005. These measures have had an obvious and positive effect on most learners. However, the poor retention and achievement rates were known for at least a year before the consultancy process took place. There was a significant delay in implementing appropriately strong measures.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering and manufacturing technologies

**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Motor vehicle</b> Apprenticeships for young people	267	<b>3</b> 3

44. Apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships are provided in light vehicle technician, heavy vehicle technician, body repair, and body refinishing. Apprenticeships only are available in fast fit. There are currently 154 apprentices and 113 advanced apprentices. Of these, 174 are on light vehicle technician programmes, 38 are on fast fit programmes, and the rest are on heavy vehicle technician, body repair or body refinishing programmes. All learners are employed and work in a range of establishments around London, with the exception of a few fast fit learners, who are based in establishments ranging from Kent to Norfolk. Off-the-job training is delivered by Skillnet's staff at the two training centres.

#### **Motor vehicle**

**Grade 3**

##### *Strengths*

- good acquisition of practical skills
- sustained improvements in retention and achievement rates from a low base
- particularly good on-the-job training
- very effective individual support
- very good workplace assessment

##### *Weaknesses*

- poor historical retention and achievement
- ineffective progress reviews.

#### **Achievement and standards**

45. Learners acquire good practical skills in the workplace, as recognised in the self-assessment report. They quickly assume responsibility for increasingly complex jobs, and are soon working on customers' vehicles, in an increasingly unsupervised role. Learners take on a liaison and diagnostic responsibility to assess the work required. There are examples of learners at the end of their training programmes contributing to the training and assessment of younger learners. Inspectors found examples of learners who had been considered unsuitable for a franchise dealer's own training programme achieving very good practical skills. One such learner completed his advanced apprenticeship and finished in the top five in a national competition. Employers report that learners quickly become an integral part of the business, particularly in smaller garages.

46. There have been clear and significant improvements over the past three years. Sustained improvements have been made in retention and achievement rates from a low

starting point. Success rates for framework completion have increased from 7 per cent in 2002-03, to 52 per cent for 2005-06. NVQ achievements have risen from 33 per cent to 55 per cent over the same period. Similarly, retention rates have improved over the past two years. At this stage in 2004, only 57 per cent of the learners who began training in 2003-04 remained. The corresponding figure for 2005-06 is over 80 per cent. To improve retention rates, learners now take the level 2 qualification as a motivational target on the way to an advanced apprenticeship. This has not increased the length of the programme. The provider has carried out a detailed analysis of learners from the 2004-05 intake and sets appropriate targets for the completion of the three components of the framework. Most learners show good progress, with many exceeding the targets.

47. Historically, retention and achievement rates have been poor. For the advanced apprenticeship programme, of 256 starters over the three-year period from 2000-01 to 2002-03, only 29 per cent were retained, and only 19 per cent completed the framework, with 13 per cent still in training. For the apprenticeship programme, of 294 starters over the same period 22 per cent were retained and only 7 per cent completed the framework, with 13 per cent still in training. This poor performance is recognised by the provider and significant measures have been implemented to improve performance against challenging targets. The provider goes to significant lengths to contact those learners who leave the programme before completion and to analyse their reasons for doing so. Approximately 33 per cent of such leavers found alternative employment. The provider is working closely with employers to improve the retention rate.

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		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0	0	58		75		67		100		89	100				
Retained*	0	0	4		2		18		37		18	20				
Successfully completed	0	0	4		2		12		20		17	19				
Still in learning	0	0	41		37		19		15		1	1				

\*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		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	35		103		99		126		69	100	0	100				
Retained*	0		5		13		31		29	42	0	100				
Successfully completed	0		5		3		11		6	9	0	100				
Still in learning	35		81		27		11		0	0	0	100				

\*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

48. On-the-job training is particularly good. Learners are placed with an experienced



craftsperson or technician who instructs the learner and then supervises them as they perform tasks independently. Learners quickly assume responsibility for increasingly complex jobs and work with different mentors to widen their experience. This provides good training opportunities, with learners quickly acquiring skills to the standard required by the employer. Workplace technicians also give good feedback to learners and sign off workplace evidence when standards are met. Most learners have a clear understanding of the requirements of the NVQ and the need to collect evidence from the workplace. Similarly, some employers are well briefed on the structure of the NVQ and are able to provide good assistance to their learners in completing the NVQ. For instance, in many garages, managers are willing to switch workloads to provide learners with the appropriate training and assessment opportunities. Most work placements are able to provide the range of learning and assessment opportunities for all the NVQ units. The quality of work placements is good, providing learners with a wide variety of work and access to modern equipment.

49. The standard of classroom training ranges from satisfactory to good. Some of the schemes of work and lesson plans are very effective. Resources are readily available and used well. In less effective lessons, workbooks are used a great deal. This necessitates a learning style which is not suitable for all learners. For light vehicle and heavy vehicle learners there is not enough practical work associated with the delivery of the technical certificate, a situation which learners find unsatisfactory. Practical facilities are being developed for these learners. Very good resources are made available and used for off-the-job training in body repair and body refinishing. Tutors are well qualified and are provided with good opportunities for staff development. They use their industrial experience and technical knowledge effectively. There is no formal procedure to integrate the topics covered in technical certificate training with the practical tasks carried out by learners at work. Learners are offered additional, certificated courses at one of the training centres which are part of the provider's own staff development programme.

50. Skillnet provides very effective individual support for learners, which they appreciate. Learners meet their assessors and tutors frequently, both formally and informally. Assessors meet learners in the workplace at least every six weeks for work-based assessments and every 12 weeks for a progress review. Assessors also meet their learners while the learners are at college for off-the-job training. On the workplace visits, assessors check the learners' progress with them and their employer, dealing with any issues that arise. These frequent contacts and very good working relationships ensure that learners are well supported and that matters requiring attention are dealt with quickly. Information about the support required is relayed to the appropriate member of staff to take action. Some learners who have specific personal difficulties are given extra help to ensure that they stay on their training programmes. Learners are very appreciative of this help. For example, one apprentice was made redundant, but was quickly offered alternative employment and remained on the programme.

51. Workplace assessments are very good. Assessors carry out a work-based assessment of learners at least every six weeks. These assessments are thorough and provide good and detailed feedback to learners about their performances. Work-based assessments are planned for each unit of the NVQ and enable learners to start gathering portfolio evidence at an early stage in their programmes. An on-demand assessment service is available to learners, enabling them to be assessed at short notice. Learners use this service effectively to collect evidence about jobs which become available at short notice.

52. All applicants to the programme receive an initial assessment of their mechanical competences, and literacy and numeracy skills. The results are used in the selection process. Learners are provided with the results of the initial assessment. Learners assessed at entry level are identified as requiring additional learning support. There is no clear procedure for ensuring that this support is provided systematically, but many learners do receive good extra support which is often unrecorded. Skillnet has no provision for carrying out diagnostic testing for specific learning difficulties.

53. Induction is thorough and learners receive a comprehensive induction pack. The programme is intensive and some learners are unable to demonstrate that they have understood parts of the programme. This situation has been recognised by the provider and inductions are now planned to be delivered over three days and to be more interactive. Skillnet uses a comprehensive selection process for work placements, which includes a thorough health and safety check and an annual review. Some employers have been rejected as work-placement providers.

54. The provider has sufficient qualified assessors and verifiers. The internal verification system has recently been revised to include an extensive NVQ portfolio sampling plan which exceeds the requirements of the awarding body. Standardisation meetings have been introduced recently. Observations of work-based assessments take place, and provide an adequate level of feedback to assessors. External verifier reports note the improvements made over the past year. Verification of the technical certificate is less thorough where assessments are not internally verified before use and portfolios are only verified when completed. Key skills portfolios are only verified when finalised. Feedback from verifiers to assessors is often brief and does not always highlight items of good practice or required improvements. Key skills training is delivered in dedicated lessons in a classroom environment. Exercises are designed with a motor vehicle context, but there is little attempt to integrate the training with the learners' work.

55. Progress reviews are ineffective. The review system has recently been revised, and reviews are now carried out by assessors on a planned and regular basis with learners in their workplaces, sometimes combined with a work-based assessment. However, the review concentrates on the NVQ element of the programme and most reviews do not specifically measure learners' progress towards the technical certificate or key skills qualifications. For these two components, review statements are often generalised and vague, and learners are not aware of their progress in any detail. Target-setting varies from general statements of encouragement to more specific targets. Frequently, the specific targets set for the NVQ component do not have target dates. No specific targets are set for the technical certificate or key skills qualifications. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the progress review, but they receive a copy of the written report and sometimes are given verbal feedback. Health and safety and equal opportunities are covered by using a list of questions. In some recent progress reviews, the discussion is recorded.

### **Leadership and management**

56. The management of motor vehicle training is now good, and significant changes have been made recently. Some of these changes have not been fully implemented and have not had a full effect on all learners. As identified in the self-assessment report, the training resources are good to excellent, with some impressive state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. Good computer and classroom resources create a professional, businesslike

environment for learning. This renewal and updating process is continuous. Significant numbers of staff have been recruited recently to add to the existing well-qualified and experienced team. The staff development programme is good. The training needs of all staff are determined regularly and a learning plan is devised and implemented for them. Staff training includes technical updating courses, courses related to the delivery and assessment of qualifications, and support aspects such as equality and diversity. All this is well documented.

57. Informal communications are good, including communications between the two sites. Formal communications are established through quarterly management meetings, and assessor and team meetings. Equal opportunities is covered well during induction, although sometimes in too much detail and at times in language not always suitable for young school leavers. The learners' awareness of equal opportunities after the induction often extends beyond the initial concept of racial and gender discrimination.

58. Equality of opportunity is not reinforced sufficiently at progress reviews, even under the new review system. Skillnet's objective is perceived to be more as the prevention of problems, rather than the promotion of understanding. New quality improvement documents and procedures have been implemented.

