

INSPECTION REPORT

Inter Training Services Limited

15 June 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
- **learn**direct 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

Inter Training Services Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Inter Training Services Limited (ITS) is a private limited company established in 1996. Its head office was relocated to Horndean in January 2004. The provider has a contract with Surrey Learning and Skills Council (LSC). A company restructure in January 2004 included the recruitment of a non-executive director to the board of directors. Day-to-day affairs are managed by a managing director and a finance and administration manager. A team of seven staff trains the learners and assesses progress. Two support mentors provide additional learning support and key skills training. All trainers/assessors are qualified assessors, and most are teacher trained with two still working towards their qualifications. Four administrative staff support the provision. The value of ITS's contract with the LSC has reduced over the past two years, and the posts of head of work-based learning and lead internal verifier have not been refilled.

2. At present, ITS provides work-based learning in hairdressing for 117 apprentices and two advanced apprentices based in salons in Surrey, Berkshire and Hampshire. It also offers an 'increased flexibility' programme for 27 young people aged 14 to 16 years. A small number of privately funded adult learners follow national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing, and assessor awards. ITS is one of six providers nationally to offer 25 places on a pilot young apprenticeship programme that will commence in September 2006.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Leadership and management and arrangements for equality of opportunity are good. Provision in retail and commercial enterprise is satisfactory. Arrangements for quality improvement are satisfactory. There have been good initiatives to improve the provision, but these are too recent for achievement to be more than satisfactory at the present time.

4. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Staff are clear about their role in the self-assessment process, and learners' and employers' views are taken into account. Management information is used with increasing effectiveness. The self-assessment report identifies most of the areas for improvement, although it is insufficiently clear on the action needed to tackle the key weakness in achievement.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** ITS's development plan and policies provide a realistic framework for improvement. The company is making increasing use of learners' and employers' feedback to improve its provision. Key skills training has improved, and the achievement of frameworks has increased. ITS has made staff changes in the past year and plans to enhance the roles of existing staff to increase its capacity to carry through improvement plans. The management information system provides easy access to information on learners and their progress, and data is increasingly used for improving quality.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR INTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- continue to improve timely success rates
- continue to implement quality improvement strategies
- increase the involvement of employers, particularly with regard to equality of opportunity
- further develop capacity to improve provision

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		2
Quality improvement		3

Retail and commercial enterprise			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Hairdressing		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	119	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. This is the ALI's second full inspection of ITS. A team of four inspectors, including three hairdressing specialists, spent four days visiting salons mainly in Surrey. In the previous inspection in July 2002, all aspects of the provision were judged satisfactory. At the subsequent quality monitoring visit, good progress had been made in the post-inspection action plan.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	16
Number of staff interviewed	18
Number of employers interviewed	9
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	12
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **Learners demonstrate very good hairdressing skills in their workplace.** Salons provide good-quality workplaces, and several are part of prestigious national chains. Effective training encourages learners to be creative and experimental. Learners take part in competitions and two have reached national finals in 2005-06. Learners enjoy their programmes and gain in personal skills and confidence. They are involved in setting their own targets at trainer/assessors' visits and are proud of the skills they gain.

8. **A significant number of learners are making slow progress.** In 2003-04, 37 per cent of apprentices completed their framework within the planned time. This declined to 9 per cent in 2004-05 and has risen slightly to 11 per cent in 2005-06. On the advanced apprenticeship programme, the overall framework achievement rate was only 14 per cent in 2003-04 and 20 per cent in 2004-05. All learners who started application of number and communication key skills in 2005 achieved within their first year.

9. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. The standard of learners' written work is satisfactory. Portfolios are well organised. Attendance is satisfactory.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Retail and commercial enterprise	1	1	5	0	7
Total	1	1	5	0	7

10. **Salons provide good-quality workplaces** in prime locations with modern equipment and decor. Good-quality products are used during both training and assessment, and learners have access to a good variety of clients. They work alongside well-qualified and experienced stylists who are skilled in sharing their knowledge and experiences. Employers encourage their learners as they work towards ITS's annual hairdressing competition and national competitions.

11. **Individual coaching is effective.** Learners receive individual coaching in the workplace. Each session has a detailed lesson plan with clear objectives, which are shared with the learner. In the best sessions, tutors ask probing questions to check learners' background knowledge in relation to their practical performance. On-the-job training is good, with employers offering well-structured additional training to support the learning experience. Learners use work packs to support their background knowledge training.

12. **Support for learners is good.** Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed effectively and learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Learning support mentors are qualified and experienced specialists. Learning support sessions are highly effective. The objectives are clear and sessions are well structured, well paced and challenging.

13. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Trainers and salon assessors correctly complete assessment records. Feedback on written work, review action plans and visit logs are not

sufficiently detailed to help learners improve. Individual learning plans are regularly updated to reflect learners' progress and achievement. Learners find this useful in monitoring their own development. Assessment is discussed at a monthly assessors' meeting.

14. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Support mentors administer the tests for literacy, numeracy and key skills during induction, and ensure learners receive the type and range of support that will meet their needs. Literacy and numeracy support is satisfactory. Learners may receive both short- and long-term support depending on their needs, and this additional support is effective.

15. The arrangements for induction and progress reviews are satisfactory. Staff set learners targets for unit completion, and use them as milestones in the review process. Learners' targets are reviewed at the three-weekly visit and the 12-weekly review meeting. Learners retain a copy of their targets in their files, and receive a company unit of achievement each time they complete an NVQ unit. Learners are encouraged by this reward system.

Leadership and management

16. Senior managers offer dynamic leadership and set a **clear strategic direction** to enable the company to bring about improvements. All the staff understand ITS's strategic aims and objectives and are informed about development plans. Careful management of the company's finances provides stability. ITS is innovative in identifying new provision where there are gaps in skills training.

17. **Change has been managed effectively** at ITS. The restructure and relocation have been managed well. Managers have taken an open, honest and consultative approach to the review and evaluation of the company. Managers are approachable and they value and respect their staff and learners. Personnel management is effective in retaining staff and improving organisational performance. Staff morale has been preserved and improved.

18. **Communication within the organisation and with employers is good** and teamwork is highly effective. Internal informal communications are very good. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and they work effectively together to improve the experience of learners. They share information about learners in regular, well-planned and documented meetings. Managers' meetings ensure that information is passed easily between teams and managers. ITS communicates well with employers through newsletters, meetings and an annual competition.

19. **Staff training and development are good.** ITS is effective in supporting staff to improve organisational performance. All staff, including part-time staff, have an annual appraisal. Staff are encouraged to update and expand their skills to fulfil their job roles. Inductions, coaching and work shadowing help staff settle quickly into new roles. There is a good range of staff development opportunities available to meet the needs of the company as well as of the individual. For example, staff training in the use of spreadsheets has meant that data is better organised and presented to trainer/assessors to use with learners. Staff negotiate their caseloads and duties according to their strengths and preferences, and work alongside more experienced staff if coaching is required.

20. Equality of opportunity and diversity are managed and promoted effectively.

Learners have a good knowledge of equality and diversity issues. They are confident that they will be treated fairly and that discriminatory practices will not be tolerated. All learners work on an equality of opportunity project at the start of their programme. They remember its content and understand its messages. The monthly newsletter includes regular features on equality of opportunity and diversity.

21. The use of management information is satisfactory overall. The provider monitors learners' progress effectively. It collects a wide range of information for the purpose of monitoring, trend analysis, planning and target-setting. This is used effectively to maintain the quality of provision and to make decisions about improvements. ITS is working towards identifying how to use this information to make further improvements.

22. Arrangements for health and safety are satisfactory. Sound policies and effective training have been implemented to raise the standards of employers' premises, making them safer and healthier places to work.

23. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. Managers and staff meet regularly to review the standard of training and assessment. ITS's development plans include sound strategies to improve the quality of provision. Paperwork has been improved and standardised. However, some quality improvement arrangements have not been in place long enough for their effects to be judged.

24. Internal verification is satisfactory. ITS has developed new systems and has appointed and trained new verifiers. It now has more balanced caseloads for internal verifiers. The systems are new, and some work-based assessors are only now being internally verified.

25. The self-assessment and action-planning process is comprehensive. ITS uses a range of information to help identify its strengths and weaknesses, including feedback from learners and employers. The self-assessment report is generally accurate, identifying most of the strengths and weaknesses found during inspection. The quality improvement plan focuses clearly on actions to improve learners' retention and success rates.

26. **ITS has been slow to improve its key weaknesses.** Until 2005-06 it gave insufficient priority to dealing with the poor achievement of frameworks. Before 2005, the achievement rate in key skills was weak. Key skills are now introduced earlier in the programme and all learners complete their key skills qualifications within their first year.

27. **Some employers remain insufficiently involved in their learners' training.** A few provide little training between trainer/assessors' visits, and take no part in progress review meetings. Some of the workplace assessors do not attend assessors' meetings, even though this is one of ITS's written criteria for grading salons. ITS has recently changed its policy and, in future, will cease to work with employers that do not meet the required standards.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear direction
- effective management of change

INTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED

- good communications
- good staff training and development
- effective management and promotion of equality and diversity

Weaknesses

- slow action to implement improvements

Retail and commercial enterprise

Hairdressing

Strengths

- good standard of practical hairdressing
- good-quality workplaces
- effective individual coaching

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- insufficient involvement of some employers

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT INTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- the numeracy teaching - 'it makes sums easy'
- working in good salons
- the in-depth knowledge - 'you definitely feel you know everything'
- the competition - it really help learners to be creative
- 'the trainer/assessors are always there for you'
- the way ITS treat its learners as adults
- the friendly and supportive trainer/assessors

WHAT LEARNERS THINK INTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the number of training visits to the salons - there should be more
- the use of language in training sessions - it is too complicated
- the time it takes to get the qualification - it is too long

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- clear direction
- effective management of change
- good communications
- good staff training and development
- effective management and promotion of equality and diversity

Weaknesses

- slow action to implement improvements

28. Senior managers set a clear strategic direction for the company. Leadership is dynamic and sound strategies have been put in place to bring about improvements. ITS works well to maintain a high profile and is well respected in the local hairdressing industry. Learners train in prestigious salons, and partnerships with employers are effective. ITS has worked with over 45 per cent of its employers for five or more years. Staff at different levels of the company understand its strategic aims and objectives and are informed about development plans. The use of staff and resources is well planned. The company's finances are managed carefully and provide stability. ITS achieves a good balance of commercially successful activities that add value to the experience of learners and employers, and is innovative in identifying new provision where there are gaps in skills training. For example, in 2004-05 it ran a successful increased flexibility programme for learners aged 14 to 16 on which all the learners gained a level 1 qualification. Most of these learners intend to progress to apprenticeship training. All the staff are set clear targets, and are paid bonuses for their achievement.

29. Change has been managed effectively at ITS. Directors have supported staff while making difficult decisions, and staff morale has been preserved and improved. A management restructure involved the loss of several key staff. Most of the staff are new, and new roles have been negotiated with those who transferred. The relocation of the main headquarters from Farnham to Horndean has been managed well and all staff have benefited from greater space and better standards of accommodation. Managers have taken an open, honest and consultative approach to the review and evaluation of the organisation. Managers are approachable and they value and respect their staff and learners. All staff have been kept very well informed throughout the changes. They are closely involved in the training and assessment programmes and the improvements being made. There is a strong, common focus on supporting the individual needs of learners.

30. Communication within the company and with employers is good. Teamwork is highly effective. Informal internal communications are very good. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and they work effectively together to improve the learners' experience. Arrangements to support staff in carrying out their duties are clear and flexible. Managers are particularly supportive of the personal and domestic circumstances

of their staff and organise work patterns to ensure staff have sufficient time and enthusiasm to meet the needs of learners. Work patterns are planned to ensure staff can manage the long distances they travel to visit some learners. Staff are highly committed and focus on the quality of the training their learners receive. They share information about learners in regular, well-planned and documented meetings. Managers meetings ensure that information is passed easily between teams and managers. ITS is active in communicating with most employers, and offers good advice. An informative monthly newsletter for employers and a bimonthly newsletter for in-salon assessors are entertaining and raise awareness. The website is an effective source of information. ITS holds an annual competition to enable learners to present their work and experience a challenge. Most learners and employers enjoy this enrichment, and learners celebrate the skills they have gained.

31. Staff training and development are good. Personnel management is effective in supporting staff to improve the company's performance. All staff, including part-time staff, have an annual appraisal. Staff are encouraged to update and expand their skills to fulfil their job roles. Inductions, coaching and work shadowing help staff settle quickly into new roles. There is a good range of development opportunities available to staff to meet the needs of the company as well as the individual. For example, staff have attended courses on the use of spreadsheets, and this has meant that data is better organised and presented to trainer/assessors to use with learners. Staff negotiate their caseloads and duties according to their strengths and preferences, and work alongside more experienced staff if coaching is required.

32. The use of management information is satisfactory. The provider monitors learners' progress effectively. It collects a wide range of information for the purposes of monitoring, trend analysis, planning and target-setting, which it uses effectively to monitor the quality of provision and to make decisions about improvements. ITS is working towards identifying how to make further improvements, such as analysing the achievements of learners who are receiving support and judging whether the support provided is sufficient, particularly for the seven learners identified as having a specific learning disability.

33. Arrangements for health and safety are satisfactory. Policies have been implemented to raise the standards of employers' premises, making them safer and healthier places to work. Checks on salons are managed well. Good training has ensured that trainer assessors can identify and deal with potential hazards at learners' workplaces.

34. Arrangements for the provision of literacy and numeracy support are satisfactory. Initial assessment is effective, and each trainer provides individual support in the workplace. Learners are clear where their strengths and weaknesses lie, and are supported through many training activities. Resources for teaching and learning are satisfactory, and there are laptop computers available for learners to use.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

35. Equality of opportunity and diversity are promoted effectively. Managers are highly committed to equality and diversity, and staff have frequent and effective training on the topic. There is a clear focus on diversity as an extension of equality practices. An external consultant provides training two or three times a year. Staff and learners are made well aware of the importance of equality and diversity by their induction programme. All

learners take part in a particularly well-written and thought-provoking equality of opportunity project at the start of their programme. Learners recall its content and understand its messages. Learners have a good knowledge of equality and diversity issues and can explain how they deal with clients with different needs. They are confident that they will be treated fairly and that discriminatory practices will not be tolerated. Learners know who to complain to, and any complaints are logged and information is passed to all appropriate parties. Immediate action is taken when issues arise, but this is a rare occurrence as support and reviews flag up concerns effectively. Equality of opportunity is reinforced throughout the programme and learners' understanding is checked in a specific review of induction. Learners' progress review documents include a section for equality of opportunity. Where issues arise, staff take prompt and appropriate action to support learners.

36. ITS has an informative website with good representation of learners from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The company's monthly newsletter includes regular features on equality of opportunity and diversity. A larger font and additional spacing is used in response to learners' feedback. Most employers are enthusiastic about ITS's arrangements. However, with a few employers that do not have their own equal opportunities policies, promotion is less effective. ITS shares its policies and procedures with these employers or gives them help and information to enable them to produce their own. Some employers are enthusiastic, but others have insufficient awareness of the value and importance of equality and diversity for their staff.

37. ITS has clear, comprehensive and regularly updated policies for all aspects of equality of opportunity, supported by appropriate procedures. Copies of the policies are given to all learners during their induction, and employers receive copies when the policies are updated. All learners are employed, and if they are made redundant, ITS makes every effort to find them alternative employment. ITS provides training for non-LSC funded learners by negotiation with individual employers. ITS values its staff and learners highly. It makes arrangements for flexible attendance of staff when personal and health issues arise. Staff visit learners more frequently where a need is expressed, and learners have the telephone numbers of their trainer/assessors and can contact them when they wish to.

38. Arrangements to provide support for learners are good. Trainer/assessors record the details of their visits to learners in a log, to ensure all staff are aware of learners' needs. A new 'traffic light' system is used similarly to flag up any concerns with employers. Key skills results have improved now that learners are receiving effective support. Online testing is effective and learners appreciate it. The provider funded the hire costs of a test centre for one learner with severe confidence issues. The training of 14 to 16 year old learners on the increased flexibility programme, though outside the scope of this inspection, is an effective method of attracting and supporting the progression of young people into apprenticeships.

39. The monitoring of equality of opportunity is sufficiently systematic and is satisfactory. Equality of opportunities data is used effectively to monitor recruitment trends, learners' profiles and achievement for different intakes of learners. Comparisons of data are used to identify trends and plan improvements. Learners' progress is monitored closely and trainer/assessors now know clearly whether a learner is making sufficient progress. Staff awareness is high, maintained by detailed reports produced for monthly meetings and clear leadership from senior managers.

40. ITS's response to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is satisfactory. Assessments are made on first visits and are followed up in progress reviews. All facilities are accessible to people with restricted mobility.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

41. ITS has comprehensive quality assurance arrangements. Its policies and procedures are clearly written, regularly reviewed and updated, and cover all key components of training and assessment. Managers and staff meet regularly to review the standard of training and assessment. The company's development plans include good strategies to improve the quality of provision. Staff actively seek feedback from learners and employers, both formally and informally. Learners know who to complain to. A complaints log is kept and prompt action is taken to support learners if problems arise. Clearly written questionnaires are used to gather the views of learners and employers. The responses are analysed and used effectively to devise actions for improvement. One effective strategy is the salon grading system, under which risk is assessed, and ITS withdraws from partnership if the required improvements are not made.

42. ITS has reviewed and improved the initial assessment and induction processes to increase retention rates. Learners' success rates have improved following the decision to increase the frequency of reviews for learners who are making poor progress, and to increase learner support. Trainer/assessors now visit learners more frequently. Learners and staff are encouraged to evaluate all aspects of their training. The company's documents, including individual learning plans and review forms, have been improved and standardised. However, some quality improvement arrangements have not been in place long enough to judge their effectiveness.

43. ITS has been slow to implement improvements to its key weaknesses. Until 2005, it did not give sufficient priority to dealing with the poor achievement of frameworks and key skills awards. For new learners, key skills training begins earlier in the programme and all learners complete the awards within their first year. All learners are now aware of the target completion date for their awards but many have still made slow progress. For example, two learners who gained awards for their practical skill in national competitions have taken over two years to complete their qualification. Privately funded learners often complete their qualification in less than a year. Until recently, ITS has not sufficiently analysed the effect of employers' involvement on success rates. For example, salon assessors do not always attend assessors' meetings, even though attendance at least once a year is a contractual requirement. Meeting minutes and agenda items are now distributed in newsletters for information. The focus on closer working of trainer/assessors and learning support mentors has now improved, with visit logs exchanged and included in learners' files. However, employers are not formally involved in this process. Some employers remain insufficiently involved in the learners' progress reviews, and a few provide little training between trainers/assessors visits to the salon.

44. Internal verification is satisfactory. ITS has developed new systems and has appointed and trained new verifiers. It now has more balanced caseloads for internal verifiers. The systems are new, and some work-based assessors are only now being internally verified. For example, one assessor has been assessing for 18 months and has only recently been observed in practice. This was identified in the external verifiers' report.

45. The self-assessment and action-planning process is comprehensive. ITS uses a range of information to help identify its strengths and weaknesses, including feedback from learners and employers, and staff then attend meetings to discuss a draft version of the self-assessment report. The report is generally accurate, identifying most of the strengths and weaknesses found during inspection. It does not focus on the major weakness in framework achievement. However, the quality improvement plan concentrates clearly on actions to improve learners' retention and success rates. The plan is sound and is used satisfactorily as a management tool by staff responsible for the provision.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retail and commercial enterprise

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Hairdressing</i> Apprenticeships for young people	119	3 3

46. ITS provides hairdressing training for young people on apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes. Learners work towards NVQs in hairdressing at levels 2 and 3, and key skills qualifications. All off-the-job training is carried out by staff from ITS with individual learners at their employers' salons. Trainer/assessors visit learners every three weeks. Learners also receive on-the-job training in their salons from salon trainers. Assessment is carried out by the trainer/assessors and 30 workplace assessors. Learners' take key skills tests online through a partnership arrangement with another local training provider. There are 119 learners, two of whom are advanced apprentices and 117 are apprentices. All apprentices are employed. Currently, 11 per cent of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds, 8 per cent are men, and 6 per cent have a sensory or physical disability. Seven have a specific learning disability. A large proportion of learners have support for health and personal reasons. Additional support is provided for learners with particular needs, and a large proportion are assessed as needing support in literacy and numeracy.

Hairdressing

Strengths

- good standard of practical hairdressing
- good-quality workplaces
- effective individual coaching

Weaknesses

- slow progress for some learners
- insufficient involvement of some employers

Achievement and standards

47. Learners demonstrate very good practical hairdressing skills, attaining high standards early in their training programmes. One learner who is still near the beginning of the training programme, applied foil highlights to a high standard. In-salon training encourages learners to be creative and experimental. They compete in national competitions, and two have reached finals in 2005-06. Learners enjoy their programmes and gain in personal skills such as confidence. They can explain how they learn best, and in which skills they require further training. They are involved in setting their own targets at each visit, and are proud of the skills they gain. Learners' portfolios are well organised and their written work is generally good.

48. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. On the apprenticeship programme, 48 per cent of learners achieved their framework in 2003-04 and 31 per cent in 2004-05. ITS took effective action to improve the provision, including early introduction of key skills training, improved support arrangements and close monitoring of unit completion. All the learners who started application of number and communication key skills in 2005 achieved within their first year. Framework achievement rates for the first half of 2005-06 already stand at an average of 51 per cent. All indications are that these improvements will continue. Attendance is satisfactory.

49. A significant number of learners make slow progress and do not finish their qualification until after the planned completion date. In 2003-04 only 37 per cent of apprentices completed within the planned period. This declined to 9 per cent in 2004-05 and has only risen slightly to 11 per cent in 2005-06. On the advanced apprenticeship programme, framework achievement was only 14 per cent in 2003-04 and 20 per cent in 2004-05. This slow progress is particularly notable in the key skills element of the framework.

50. Retention on the apprenticeship programme declined over the past three years from 47 per cent to 31 per cent. The provider ceased offering the advanced apprenticeship, as it could not offer all the components of the qualification. The advanced apprenticeship was reinstated when the standard setting body for the industry removed the technical certificate from the framework. A number of learners did not wish to continue with ITS or transferred to other providers when ITS implemented its plan to cease using salons that could not meet the required standard. Improvements to the present apprenticeship programme are effective and the retention rate is now good.

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	26	38	43	14	32
		timely	19	28	27	11	20
	2004-05	overall	31	41	41	21	29
		timely	31	30	28	17	20
	2005-06	overall	*	*	*	*	*
		timely	*	*	*	*	*
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	53	56	62	48	49
		timely	49	41	38	37	31
	2004-05	overall	65	40	49	31	41
		timely	58	19	32	9	28
	2005-06	overall	*	*	*	*	*
		timely	31	19	0	11	0
NVQ training for young	2003-04	overall	2	50	46	0	0
		timely	2	50	31	0	0

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).

* indicates unreliable data.

The quality of provision

51. Salons provide good-quality workplaces in prime locations with modern equipment and décor. Some are part of prestigious national chains. Learners use good-quality products during both training and assessment. They have access to a good variety of clients for training and assessment purposes, and work alongside well-qualified and experienced stylists who share their skills and experience effectively. All the learning sessions observed were satisfactory or better. Learners receive effective, well-structured individual coaching in the workplace from ITS's trainer/assessors. There is a detailed plan for each session, with clear objectives, which are shared with the learner. In the best sessions, tutors ask probing questions to check that learners' background knowledge reflects their practical performance. One learner carrying out the neutralising process was asked to explain why the neutralising solution needed to be foamed before use. The learner demonstrated a thorough knowledge of the neutralising procedure and explained clearly of why such specific action is required. On-the-job training is good, with employers offering well-structured additional training to support the learning experience. Learners use work packs to reinforce their background knowledge training. In most salons, training is given a high priority, and many employers arrange a full day of training each week. Some employers closely integrate NVQ and in-salon training. Many of the salons offer supported salon training over and above the requirements of the NVQ and some provide good enrichment activity. One employer took learners to the science museum to help them gain a more thorough scientific knowledge of the hair and skin and to take part in interactive activities. ITS has effective policies and procedures for all key components of training, and maintains appropriate hygiene and health and safety practices. The provider runs an annual hairdressing competition at a good-quality venue. Employers encourage their learners as they work towards and compete in this. Some individual salons offer opportunities to attend manufacturers' courses. Enrichment activities are satisfactory overall as some learners based in smaller salons have fewer opportunities.

52. Learners are supported effectively. Their literacy and numeracy skills are identified during initial assessment and learners are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Learning support mentors administer the tests for literacy, numeracy and key skills and ensure that learners receive the appropriate type and range of support to meet their needs. Learners receive both short- and long-term support depending on their needs, and this additional support is good. The learning support mentors are qualified and experienced specialists and they provide learners with up to two hours of individual support a month, covering literacy, numeracy and key skills. Learning support sessions are highly effective and meet the individual needs of learners. The objectives are clear and sessions are well structured, well paced and challenging. Key skills results have improved and learners' portfolios are generally of a good standard. One learner received 12 months' literacy and numeracy support and eventually went on to successfully complete the key skills qualification. ITS analyses the effect of learning support on retention and success rates.

53. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Trainers and salon assessors correctly complete assessment records. Progress review action plans, visit logs, and trainers' feedback on written work are not detailed enough to help learners improve. Individual learning plans are regularly updated to reflect learners' progress and achievement. Learners find this useful in monitoring their own development. Assessment issues are dealt with at the

assessors' monthly meeting.

54. Induction is satisfactory. The individual learning plan is discussed and agreed during the induction phase of the programme. Learners are set targets for unit completion and these are used as milestones in the review process. Learners' targets are reviewed every three weeks when their trainer visits them, and at the quarterly review meeting. Learners, employers and training advisers retain a copy of the targets. Learners receive a company unit of achievement each time they complete an NVQ unit, and this maintains their enthusiasm.

Leadership and management

55. The team of trainer/assessors is managed well and works to annual targets. New systems to assure quality are sound and have been developed by the staff who implement them. Many of the improvement actions are recent and some have not been in place long enough to judge their effectiveness. The self-assessment process is increasingly inclusive of the views of learners, staff and employers. Inspectors found the self-assessment report to be largely accurate. Some of the strengths were overstated and a number were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice.

56. Some employers are insufficiently involved in their learners' training programme. They do not offer sufficiently regular or sufficiently structured training sessions, and some do not take part in their learners' review meetings. Some of the workplace assessors do not attend the assessors' meetings even though ITS stipulates that they must attend at least one assessor meeting annually. ITS's newsletter for employers includes information from assessors' meetings and items promoting understanding of equality and diversity, but there is no formal system to check that these items are read. However, communication with employers and assessors has improved and is particularly good with the better employers. The 'traffic light' system of identifying learners at risk of failure and giving them extra support is having a positive effect. ITS has recently introduced a policy of ceasing to work with employers that do not reach the standard required.

