

INSPECTION REPORT

Nortec Training Ltd

25 April 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

Nortec Training Ltd

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Nortec Training Ltd (Nortec) is a private company, limited by guarantee. It was established in 1984 and is based in the centre of Banbury. It offers work-based learning in driving goods vehicles, which is part of a logistics centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) with Milton Keynes College. It also offers training in retailing, customer service, business administration and management, as part of another CoVE in supervisory management. It has two contracts, one of which is directly with Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for apprenticeships, and the other is co-financed through the European Social Fund (ESF). There are two directors, an operations manager, six departmental managers, 15 full-time staff and seven part-time staff, plus some subcontracted trainers and consultants. Most assessment and verification is carried out in-house, and seven driving schools are used to train drivers across the country. Nortec has been accredited with the Investor in People standard since 1997. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. Nortec was first inspected in October 2002 when all areas of learning were satisfactory or better.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Leadership and management are satisfactory, as are the arrangements for quality improvement. Equality of opportunity is good. The training in business administration and law is good. Provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies is satisfactory.

3. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is inclusive and takes into account the views of all stakeholders. The quality improvement group assembles the report from information drawn from investors in people meetings and from anonymous questionnaires. Learners and employers complete regular evaluations which are thoroughly analysed and used to improve the programmes. Although the self-assessment report is thorough and detailed, some key weaknesses have not been recognised. Some of the strengths are no more than normal practice.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Actions to accelerate and increase achievement have been very effective. Tighter monitoring of progress has significantly reduced the amount of early leavers and the average period of overstay for learners who are past their funding date has shortened by three quarters. Success rates have radically improved on all programmes in the current year. Intelligent use of data and consultant support has increased the capacity to detect risk and to deal with it early.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTEC TRAINING LTD:

- develop and implement further strategies to improve performance

- complete quality assurance arrangements
- ensure staffing improvements are completed and maintained
- introduce more formal training support for apprentices
- improve employer guidance and engagement

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Transportation		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	67	3	

Business administration and law			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Business management		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	10	4	
Other government-funded provision	24	1	
Customer service		4	
Apprenticeships for young people	24	4	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. The inspection took place over five days in March and April 2006. All inspectors interviewed learners and employers either in the centre or at their work. Business administration and retail were not inspected as there were very few learners, but some of the learners were interviewed. Success rates in business administration were also considered in the overall grade for business administration and law.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	29
Number of staff interviewed	16
Number of employers interviewed	18
Number of subcontractors interviewed	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	22
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

6. **Achievement rates on the CoVE management courses are very high.** More than 90 per cent of the 156 leavers in the past two years have achieved their main objectives and many are extending their learning. Success rates on the transportation programmes are satisfactory and increasing. Pass rates on the driving tests are between 59 per cent and 70 per cent. However, success rates are low for advanced apprentices in management and customer service, and for apprentices in customer service.

7. **Learners develop good practical skills.** Transportation apprentices achieve good commercial driving skills, especially those on the young drivers' scheme. Management learners are developing good practical skills. Workshops allow learners to try modern management theories. Learners are encouraged to reflect on management styles and develop good problem-solving skills. Learners apply their learning well at work. Customer service learners are developing new skills, and many have increased their self-confidence.

8. **Management portfolios include a good range of evidence** which is cross-referenced to the performance criteria of the qualification. Portfolios for transportation and customer service are satisfactory. Customer service portfolios contain well-presented assignments, observation records and witness testimonies. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Customer service learners are progressing well towards achieving the key skills.

9. **Progress is slow for learners in transportation and their targets are undemanding.** Delays in assessor visits or learners' unavailability sometimes slows progress further.

Learners' prior attainment is not given sufficient credit when planning their programme.

The quality of provision

10. **Transportation learners receive good coaching** from knowledgeable assessors, employers and subcontractors. Flexibly delivered individual sessions meet learners' needs. Management learners attend well-presented training at the centre and complete relevant assignments at work. However, customer service learners have insufficient training in background knowledge. Learners are entered for examinations with little formal support from Nortec's assessors. Nortec has piloted customer service training for in-house learners, but this has not yet been extended for other apprentices.

11. **A good range of innovative training resources have been developed for transportation and management.** Transportation learners make good use of manuals, handouts and videos and photographs which have been produced by the provider. Good physical resources are well used. Subcontractors use a good variety of modern vehicles to give comprehensive initial training in suitable environments before extensive driving instruction on public roads. All training locations have well-equipped training accommodation.

12. **Resources for management learners are outstanding.** Nortec's bespoke technical certificate includes a full range of challenging multimedia materials and assignments which learners study at monthly workshops. Customer service staff are drawing on these to pilot some innovative techniques to improve assessment practice. Staff are well qualified with recent industrial experience. The attractive, flexible and well-furnished management suite has excellent audiovisual facilities. Open access computers provide internet access and laptop computers allow learners to develop key skills at work.

13. **Most employers support their learners enthusiastically.** Some well-known transportation employers have their own training staff and have extensive programmes to develop learners' job skills. The management CoVE has been very effective in engaging employers in micro and small businesses. Employers provide a wide range of good work experience. Many extend the learners' range of tasks to broaden their expertise, and willingly rearrange work schedules to ensure sufficient time for instruction, assessment and tests. However, Nortec does not give clear guidance to customer service employers. Employers are not given copies of the national standards or frameworks. They are not sufficiently included to make the training process effective.

14. **Support for learners is good in management and in customer service.** Assessors arrange additional individual sessions with learners either to fasttrack the learner or to compensate for gaps in the assessment process from job changes. The training liaison officer gives good advice and additional support through visits or extra learning sessions. Support is satisfactory for transportation learners.

15. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. Initial vocational advice and guidance is adequate and covers the national vocational qualification (NVQ) standards and assessment issues well. Key skills are effectively integrated with the vocational programme wherever possible. Learners who need additional support with literacy and numeracy have additional visits from specialist staff or are periodically invited to the centre for intensive instruction.

16. Reviews for management learners are satisfactory. Nortec carries out formal reviews at learners' workplaces every four months or every 13 weeks for apprentices. The reviewer keeps employers fully informed of learners' progress. The progress of customer service learners is reviewed every 13 weeks and covers all elements of the qualification. Employers are invited to comment verbally and on the review document. However, progress reviews for transportation learners are infrequent, do not increase the learners' attainment, and do not adequately cover equal opportunities. Employers do not routinely attend and have little understanding of the review process. They do not always receive a copy of the review paperwork.

17. **The progress of learners in customer service is effectively monitored**, especially for those who are developing independent learning skills through e-learning. Assessors make prompt, productive and efficient use of e-mail facilities to give immediate assessment decisions. The system effectively involves employers in planning learners' progress. Customer service assessors support all learners well and frequently monitor short-term targets. They provide good subject support, and advice and guidance on the choice of optional units. A good range of assessment methods match learners' preferred styles. Targets and resulting actions are well recorded in portfolios. Most of the employers are insufficiently involved in target-setting.

18. **There is some inappropriate assessment for advanced apprentices in management.** Learners have a wide variety of experience and it is not clear how much prior learning is accredited. Portfolios contain well-referenced evidence and written statements, but there is insufficient observation and guided discussion. Two of the learners were without an assessor for two months, and there is currently no full-time management assessor.

Leadership and management

19. **Well-implemented strategies have improved performance.** Nortec has a new structure with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Staff targets are based on well-defined performance indicators which are agreed collaboratively. Intelligent use of management information has identified problem areas and has enabled Nortec to plan remedial action. This has been successful in raising timely achievement and reducing the amount of early leavers. Consultants and well-defined projects have been effectively used to increase staff skills and capacity.

20. **Actions to accelerate and increase achievement have been very effective.** The well-established quality improvement group meets monthly. The training manager's fortnightly individual assessor meetings systematically identify risks and plan appropriate interventions. Administrators rigorously audit records and files to ensure that they are complete and consistent. Actions from these audits are pursued well. Timely success rates on all programmes have radically improved. New assessment methods have simplified evidence collection. Regular standardisation meetings include subcontracted staff and providers. They share good practice inclusively and actions are clearly recorded.

21. **Nortec manages a wide range of innovative projects to widen participation in under-represented sectors.** Funds from a variety of sources support hard-to-reach learners. Many transportation programmes to promote inclusion were not in scope for inspection. The successful driving to work programme for 100 jobseekers in 2005 developed the

means to seek employment in a rural area. A number of travellers working in fairgrounds are supported very flexibly. ESF project beneficiaries include women and people from ethnic minorities who work in logistics. The management CoVE promotes the participation of non-traditional sectors in management training through active engagement with awarding bodies, and local and regional networks.

22. Arrangements to meet learners' needs are well planned. Thorough initial assessment is well used to plan individual support. Support for learners' personal difficulties is good. Arrangements for learners with disabilities are satisfactory.

23. Quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. The self-assessment report omits some key weaknesses such as the low achievement rates and ineffective reviews. Few targets in the resulting plan are quantitative. Many are insufficiently precise or measurable. Subcontractor training is not formally observed. Some employers and subcontractor staff do not clearly understand their responsibilities towards learners on the programme. Although employer evaluations are analysed, there is little independent discussion of their opinions.

24. Learners at work have insufficient reinforcement of their understanding of equality of opportunity. Although they complete a workbook at the beginning of their programmes, equality is not sufficiently reinforced afterwards. During progress reviews, assessors question learners on their personal situation, but they do not record clear responses, nor do they discuss the wider aspects of equality and diversity. The internal verifier systematically checks equality and health and safety when observing reviews, but does not discuss the outcomes with employers or learners.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- well-implemented strategies to improve performance
- effective actions to accelerate and increase achievement
- wide range of innovative projects to widen participation of non-traditional learners
- well-planned arrangements to meet learners' needs

Weaknesses

- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity in the workplace

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Transportation

Strengths

- strong employer support for learners
- good standard of coaching on the job
- good use of physical resources

- innovative training and assessment
- very effective recruitment from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- slow progress by learners
- ineffective progress reviews
- insufficient staff resources

Business administration and law

Business management

Strengths

- very high achievement rates on CoVE courses
- good development of practical skills
- outstanding resources
- good support for learners
- good promotion of learning by CoVE in under-represented business sectors
- effective actions to improve the management of the programmes

Weaknesses

- low success rates for advanced apprentices
- some inappropriate assessment practice for advanced apprentices

Customer service

Strengths

- effective monitoring of learners' progress
- good programme support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor success rates
- insufficient clarity in promoting employers' roles
- insufficient training in background knowledge

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTEC TRAINING LTD:

- the opportunity to get a qualification
- the chance to drive trucks at a young age
- mixed activities in workshops for managers
- good facilities and equipment
- always getting hold of someone when you need help
- greeted as soon as you walk in the door and taken to contact immediately
- Nortec is 'on the ball' and do things when they say they will
- their flexible and responsive approach

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NORTEC TRAINING LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- more formal training and information about the qualification
- more observations and assessments
- clearer information about roles and responsibilities
- fewer changes of assessor
- more information about careers

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- well-implemented strategies to improve performance
- effective actions to accelerate and increase achievement
- wide range of innovative projects to widen participation of non-traditional learners
- well-planned arrangements to meet learners' needs

Weaknesses

- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity in the workplace

25. Effective strategies have been well implemented to improve performance. Following a very difficult year in 2003, Nortec reorganised and restructured its staff to focus on its core business. Several staff left the company during the subsequent period. This was an extremely challenging time and the team have worked very hard to recover stability, particularly since September 2005. The new structure clearly defines job roles and responsibilities. All staff have targets based on well-defined performance indicators which were agreed collaboratively. Intelligent use of the fuller features of the management information system have identified areas of difficulty, and enabled Nortec to plan remedial action. This has been successful in raising timely achievement and reducing the amount of early leavers. A research project funded by the LSC focused on the causes of poor retention and has been very effective in developing learner-centred strategies to deal with it. Consultants have been effectively used to increase staff skills, particularly in the management of learners' records. For instance, administration staff now clearly understand the reasoning behind their regular audits and are able to evaluate the quality of the information recorded.

26. Internal and external communication is good. Nortec takes a leading role in its CoVE partnerships and has co-ordinated its development effectively. Staff attend many local and regional meetings within the learning and development sector. Innovative work within CoVEs is developing capacity through new resources and materials, information sharing, and marketing. The training centre has been redesigned to offer a welcoming and flexible space which can be used for many purposes. Internal meetings are regular, focused and frequent, and minutes are concise and show clear actions. Staff have an annual appraisal and a six-monthly review to measure progress and to set objectives. Their targets are monitored when they meet their managers every fortnight. They have good access to staff development, through internal meetings and formal learning programmes. Staff are well qualified and receive regular vocational updating. Access to training is inclusive and includes staff who are on contract as well as permanent staff. Induction for staff has recently been revised and is thorough. All new staff have a mentor and carry out work shadowing.

27. The strategy to support literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Learners take a test to

identify their needs before they start a programme. If they need extra support, this is planned early in collaboration with the learner, the assessor and the training liaison officer. However, Nortec does not provide specialist support for learners who have dyslexia or for those who speak English as an additional language, although it does signpost them to alternative sources of assistance. Advice and guidance arrangements are satisfactory. Nortec has developed clear guidance to management career progression and qualifications and this has been promoted widely as part of the CoVE, but there is little career progression advice for other areas of learning.

28. Arrangements for health and safety are satisfactory, with audits regularly carried out by experienced staff. Nearly all staff have completed brief health and safety training, and two have more specific advanced qualifications. Employers' liability insurance is regularly checked and copies of certificates are kept. When problems are identified, an action plan is drawn up and followed through. Arrangements for the recording of accidents and for first aid are satisfactory.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

29. Nortec manages a wide range of innovative projects to widen participation in under-represented sectors. It has successfully secured funds from a variety of sources to encourage and support hard-to-reach learners. As a lead partner in the logistics CoVE, Nortec offers many other programmes as well as the apprenticeship inspected. Earlier in the year two 'Driving to Work' programmes involving 100 jobless young people equipped many with the means to seek work in a rural area. Nortec also reaches excluded groups such as travellers who are participating enthusiastically in the young drivers programme. They are supported very flexibly so that they can acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy competences to achieve a full framework. The ESF supports the promotion of learning to other minority groups such as women and people from minority ethnic groups in logistics. Nortec engages with awarding bodies, chambers of commerce and other local and regional networks to encourage the participation of non-traditional learners in management training through its other CoVE partnership. Much innovative and well-thought-out material has been developed and shared with partners within the organisation and externally. Nortec promotes its programmes in local schools and liaises well with its partner colleges to share recruitment opportunities. Young people from local businesses are well supported on a good range of short courses. Those on apprenticeships have a wide choice of enhancements to their core programmes.

30. Arrangements to meet learners' needs are well planned. A thorough initial assessment includes measurement of learning styles, which are well used to plan individual support for literacy and numeracy. Creative multimedia resources to match learning styles have recently been developed for logistics and are being adapted for use in other areas. Support for learners' personal difficulties is good. There are good links with external advice and guidance agencies. When employed learners experience problems at work, they receive sensitive help. Nortec's staff are good advocates for learners and intervene with employers if necessary. Arrangements are in place to make adaptations for learners with disabilities.

31. Nortec's policy and procedure for equality of opportunity is clearly expressed and covers relevant legislation. Nearly all staff have recently completed accredited courses in equality and diversity, and the remainder are working towards accreditation. Regular analysis of learner data includes demographic factors and is used in management meetings.

Marketing materials are carefully screened to ensure that they take diversity into account, and many are available in other languages. Learners who speak English as an additional language are signposted to relevant providers and are given extra language support by Nortec. Nortec also analyses the diversity of staff recruitment.

32. Learners at work have insufficient reinforcement of their understanding of the wider aspects of equality of opportunity. Before learners start on a programme, the officer for trainee liaison visits employers to check that they have an equality policy, and discusses concerns with employers. Learners go through Nortec's policies and procedures at induction and show a good understanding of topics such as bullying and harassment. They gradually complete their 'Employee Rights and Responsibilities' workbook at the beginning of the programmes, but this information is not reinforced. During reviews, assessors question learners on equality and diversity, but they do not record clear responses, nor do they deal with the wider aspects. The internal verifier systematically checks for equality and health and safety questions when observing reviews, but does not discuss the outcomes with employers or learners. When problems arise, they are promptly and sensitively dealt with.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

33. Actions to accelerate and increase achievement have been very effective. The well-established quality improvement group is led by the managing director and meets monthly to develop policies and plan improvements. This includes all senior managers, the CoVE co-ordinator and the senior internal verifier. The training services manager meets every fortnight with each assessor to monitor the learners' progress. They identify and note risks and obstacles, and plan appropriate interventions. The administration manager and his staff audit records and files regularly and rigorously to ensure that they are complete and consistent. Actions from these audits are followed up with the training manager and the assessors. A useful pilot project which was supported by the LSC analysed the causes of poor retention in a limited group of learners. Nortec has now appointed a training liaison officer who has progressed from analysis of risk to proactive early intervention when recognised factors are present. The number of early leavers has reduced significantly and the average period of overstay for learners who are out of funding has shortened by three-quarters. Success rates on all programmes have radically improved in the current year. Prompt introduction of key skills at the start of the programme has encouraged learners to complete the framework earlier. New developments in assessment have reduced the difficulty of assembling and collating evidence. Internal verification is thorough. Sampling is planned when learners start their programme. Regular standardisation meetings include subcontracted staff and providers. They share good practice and this is clearly recorded.

34. Policies and procedures are clearly recorded, are regularly updated and stored centrally, and disseminated to all staff. Flow charts and accompanying work instructions are clear and concise. The administration manager organises a systematic document review schedule and maintains a record of changes. When audits reveal discrepancies between procedure and practice, staff discuss them methodically and modifications are approved by senior managers before producing a new version. However, not all documents show clear version information.

35. The self-assessment process is inclusive and takes into account the views of all stakeholders. The quality improvement group assembles the report using the views of staff

from investors in people meetings and from anonymous questionnaires. Learners and employers complete regular evaluations which are thoroughly analysed and used to improve the programmes.

36. Quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. Although the self-assessment report is thorough and detailed, some key weaknesses have not been recognised, and some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. For instance, the report does not identify the low achievement rates in management and customer service. Many of the targets are not precise or measurable. Progress reviews are not always effective or clearly recorded and employers are not always aware of the results. Subcontractors are audited and their staff attend standardisation meetings, but their training is not observed and they are confused about Nortec's requirement of them. Some employers and subcontractor staff do not clearly understand their responsibilities towards learners on the programme. Information to employers about the frameworks is inconsistent and fragmented. Although employers' views are sought and analysed through questionnaires, there is little independent discussion on their opinions.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Transportation		3
Apprenticeships for young people	67	3

37. Nortec offers training programmes in driving goods vehicles at levels 2 and 3 NVQ. This sector was not included in the previous inspection as there were few learners. There are now 52 apprentices and 15 advanced apprentices, of whom 48 apprentices and 13 advanced apprentices are participants in the young drivers' scheme. All learners are appropriately employed when they are recruited to the programme. Employers are based throughout southern England and the Midlands. Most learners work in garages, delivery firms and haulage companies. Some are employed in truck maintenance and have successfully progressed from apprenticeships in vehicle maintenance on to driver training. This enables them to road test trucks they are working on. Learners attend an induction, after which they are set tasks and receive instruction on the job, supplemented by training materials and coaching. Key skills training and additional support for literacy and numeracy is provided by specialist staff. Initial NVQ assessments are carried out by a Nortec assessor in the workplace. During the programme, learners have a medical examination and Nortec arranges for them to attend one of the seven subcontracted driving schools for practical instruction and subsequent testing. Once they have passed their test, the subcontracted driving school carries out four further NVQ assessments to complete the programme. Internal verification is carried out by a separate subcontractor. Nortec also runs a number of other driving programmes which are funded by the ESF, but these are not in the scope of the inspection.

Transportation

Strengths

- strong employer support for learners
- good standard of coaching on the job
- good use of physical resources
- innovative training and assessment
- very effective recruitment from under-represented groups

Weaknesses

- slow progress by learners
- ineffective progress reviews
- insufficient staff resources

Achievement and standards

38. Success rates are satisfactory. The overall apprenticeship framework success rate was

marginally below the national average in 2003-04 and it improved considerably in 2004-05. Pass rates on the driving tests were between 59 and 70 per cent and compare favourably with national averages.

39. Learners achieve good commercial driver skills, especially those in the young drivers scheme. The standard of portfolio work is satisfactory, but the rate of progress is slow and is determined by undemanding targets which are set on a month-by-month assessment plan. Delays in monthly assessor visits or learners' unavailability tend to slow progress still further. Many learners have significant prior attainment with their employers, but this is not given sufficient credit when planning their programme.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	7	29	48	14	32
		timely	14	14	22	7	13
	2004-05	overall	31	45	52	39	41
		timely	30	17	27	13	19

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

40. Coaching provided by assessors, employers and subcontractors is good. Individual sessions are effectively adapted to meet learners' needs. Instruction is clear and concise. Instructors and assessors know their subjects well and give good workplace examples. They make good use of a variety of training aids including multimedia techniques.

41. Many innovative training and assessment resources have been developed by Nortec's staff and by subcontractors. For example, in one session the assessor used a computer-based multi-question aid to good effect to develop the learners' roadcraft skills in preparation for the LGV theory test. Good manuals and handouts are used during instructional sessions, and videos and photographs which are produced by the provider are used to good effect.

42. Good physical resources are well used. Subcontractors who provide good driving instruction use a wide range of modern vehicles. These include large goods vehicles, articulated trucks, class two vehicles and vans, coaches, minibuses, and horse boxes. Comprehensive instruction takes place in yards, disused airfields, on purpose-built training areas and on other private land before extensive driving instruction is given on the public roads. All training locations have well-equipped training accommodation.

43. Nortec effectively selects and contracts with well-known employers who are firmly committed to training. Many of these companies employ experienced training staff and have their own extensive programmes for the induction and development of employees. Employers provide a wide range of good work experience and support. This enables learners to meet the NVQ and framework requirements. Employers are well prepared for

learners to extend their range of jobs to widen their experience. Learners are given sufficient time for the development of their portfolios. Employers willingly rearrange work schedules to ensure that the learners are available for instruction, assessment and tests. Employers have well-qualified and experienced supervisors who oversee the learners' work.

44. Overall induction arrangements are satisfactory. Initial vocational advice and guidance is adequate and covers the NVQ standards and assessment well. However, equality issues are only briefly covered during induction. Key skills are effectively integrated with the vocational programme wherever possible. Learners who need additional help with literacy and numeracy are visited by specialist staff or are periodically invited to the centre for well-planned intensive instruction. The quality of assessments is satisfactory with a good range of assessment methods used. However, some assessments have been delayed by insufficient qualified assessors. Internal verification arrangements are adequate and meet awarding body requirements.

45. Programmes fully meet the requirements of employers and the needs of the learners, although delays in the programme affect the rate of progress of many learners. Information, advice and guidance is adequate and available in written form. Support from Nortec is satisfactory and is provided on the periodic visits.

46. Reviews of progress are carried out infrequently, do not increase the learners' attainment, and do not adequately cover equal opportunities. Employers are not routinely present and have little understanding of the review process. They do not always receive a copy of the review paperwork.

Leadership and management

47. The programme is managed by a qualified and experienced assessor who liaises well with other staff from Nortec. Staff meetings are regular, relevant and suitably recorded. Nortec promotes equal opportunities in its recruitment. Learners' files are kept up to date. Their progress is discussed at meetings and effective action is taken if learners are likely to leave the programme early.

48. Nortec recruits learners from under-represented groups in logistics very effectively. Women are recruited to professional lorry driving programmes and learners with disabilities are also encouraged. Learners are also recruited from disadvantaged groups such as travellers. The provider responds to the learners' needs and employer requirements very well. Flexible support arrangements and innovative materials encourage non-traditional learners to increase their confidence. The young drivers' programme enables learners to achieve their goods vehicle licence and become useful employees at an exceptionally young age.

49. Staff resources for transportation are insufficient. Currently the provider has only one fully qualified assessor who has other responsibilities, such as chairing subcontractor standardisation meetings and assessing or internal verifying learners in other occupational areas. With over 70 learners to train, assess, countersign, or internally verify over a large area, it is difficult to maintain or improve the frequency of visits to learners. Nortec has now recruited new staff who have a good range of experience. A recently recruited assessor is experienced but has not yet updated his assessor qualification.

50. The self-assessment report gave a general description of the transportation training, but

NORTEC TRAINING LTD

it was not sufficiently critical. Some strengths and weaknesses were identified, but inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses.

Business administration and law**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Business management</i>		2
Apprenticeships for young people	10	4
Other government-funded provision	24	1
<i>Customer service</i>		4
Apprenticeships for young people	24	4

51. Nortec offers a range of provision for management learners. Nortec is the lead private provider in a co-financed and co-partnered CoVE in supervisory management. This is designed to increase participation in management learning in micro and small businesses. Ten of the learners are working towards an advanced apprenticeship in management, and two are working towards an apprenticeship in team leading. Nortec provides a range of short courses such as the six-week introductory certificate in management, and one- and two-day courses in aspects of management. This year, 107 learners have enrolled on these courses so far. Twenty-four learners have chosen to extend their learning from a short course comprising three units of the management qualification, to a full level 3 NVQ in management. There is one full-time internal verifier and a part-time management trainer, but there is no full-time assessor. Advanced apprentices have the opportunity to attend off-the-job training in monthly workshops. Key skills training takes place in the workplace with additional workshops at Nortec's premises.

52. There are 24 learners in customer service, of whom 15 are apprentices and nine are advanced apprentices. The framework is normally completed within nine to 12 months for apprentices and within 12 months for advanced apprentices. Customer service learners attend the main centre in Banbury to take technical certificate tests. Assessment and internal verification for customer service is carried out entirely by Nortec's staff.

53. Nortec also offers apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in business administration, but these were not inspected as there were too few learners.

54. All learners are employed in a range of companies. Their suitability is assessed by interview and if appropriate, a test of their literacy and numeracy skills. Most of the apprentices have some form of exemption from key skills tests. Individual inductions take place either at work or at Nortec's premises. Assessors visit apprentices each month at work to mark assignments, to carry out observations and to agree short-term targets for the next visit. Reviews are carried out every 13 weeks.

Business management***Strengths***

- very high achievement rates on CoVE courses
- good development of practical skills
- outstanding resources
- good support for learners

- good promotion of learning by CoVE in under-represented business sectors
- effective actions to improve the management of the programmes

Weaknesses

- low success rates for advanced apprentices
- some inappropriate assessment practice for advanced apprentices

Achievement and standards

55. Achievement rates on the CoVE courses are very high. All learners on short courses achieved their targets and received a certificate. Nearly all learners on six-week courses have completed their qualifications. Twenty of the 24 learners on the 'young managers scheme' have either achieved or are near to completing the three units required and 15 of those are close to completing two extra units to gain the full NVQ.

56. Management learners are developing good practical skills. Workshops include modern management theories which learners then put into practice. For example, learners in one session enhanced their interview techniques by developing a personnel specification and interviewed previously prepared candidates. Learners are encouraged to reflect on management styles and develop good problem-solving skills. Learners and supervisors comment on their increased ability to identify problems and a range of solutions. They put their improved analytical skills in evaluating the solutions into practice. The development of improved skills is reflected in the way learners respond to colleagues and circumstances and in the high standards evident in their portfolios. Portfolios include a good range of evidence which is well explained and carefully cross-referenced to the performance criteria. Learners can identify the skills they are developing and how they relate to their job.

57. Achievement rates for advanced apprentices are low. This was a weakness at the previous inspection.

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	13	46	33	23	22
		timely	11	27	14	18	8
	2004-05	overall	9	11	36	0	25
		timely	11	9	17	0	13
	2005-06	overall	16	31	0	19	0
		timely	18	25	0	11	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).

Other government funded																	
Other government-funded provision	2005-06		2004-05														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	107		74	100													
Retained*	83		67	91													
Successfully completed	82		66	89													
Still in training	24		0	0													

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

The quality of provision

58. Resources are outstanding for business management learners. CoVE financing has been used to provide a dedicated management suite which is well furnished and has excellent audiovisual facilities. This attractive and flexible space is furnished to meet the needs of management learners. Nortec has developed an innovative bespoke technical certificate, and a full range of assignments and background material. Open access computers are provided so that learners can use the internet. Additional laptop computers have been purchased to enhance the development of key skills in the workplace. Well-planned monthly workshops offer learners a range of relevant and challenging materials to work with. Staff are well qualified and have recent industrial experience.

59. There is good promotion of learning to under-represented groups. The CoVE has been very effective in engaging employers in micro and small businesses in training and meeting local shortages in management. Nortec managers have met with sector skills councils to promote management training to non-traditional sectors such as construction and logistics. Nortec has not fully met the CoVE apprenticeship targets, but it continues to attract a large number of local learners on to a very wide range of short courses. Learners attend the centre on one day per week for six weeks, and complete additional assignments in the workplace. Learners value the workshops highly and some travel more than 60 miles to attend. A wide variety of well-resourced short courses are available in subjects such as small business essentials, interviewing skills and health and safety. These are also offered as enhancements to apprentices.

60. Support for learners is good. This strength has been maintained since the previous inspection. Employers are fully engaged in monitoring learners' progress and identifying evidence opportunities. Several employers had either re-arranged, or specially arranged events such as interviews to give their learners experience. Some managers ensure that they are available when Nortec's assessor visits, in order to be kept fully informed of the learners' progress. Assessors arrange additional individual sessions with learners either to fasttrack them or to compensate for gaps in the assessment process from job changes. For example, one learner who was transferred to a different branch and then transferred back, regained lost time and maintained progress with fortnightly appointments at Nortec which were arranged to fit in with the learner's work. Nortec has appointed an officer for trainee liaison who visits learners either alone or jointly with the assessor to offer additional support for those who are at risk of leaving early.

61. Induction is satisfactory. All elements of the framework are explained to learners in individual sessions either at work or in the centre.

62. Reviews are now satisfactory and are carried out at regular intervals. The reviewer keeps employers fully informed of learners' progress.

63. Provision for learners' literacy and numeracy and language needs is satisfactory. None of the management learners have additional learning needs and most are exempt from key skills. However, if additional support is required, it is offered either by extra visits to the workplace or through key skills workshops.

64. There is some inappropriate assessment for advanced apprentices. Management learners have a wide variety of experience and it is not clear how much prior learning is accredited. Learners' portfolios contain copious evidence and written statements to demonstrate background knowledge, but insufficient use is made of observation and guided discussion. Two of the learners were without an assessor for two months, and there is currently no full-time management assessor in place. However, workplace evidence is well presented in portfolios and thoroughly cross-referenced to the qualification criteria. Learners always have short-term targets so that they are fully aware of what they need to complete before the next assessor visit.

Leadership and management

65. Actions to improve the management of the apprenticeship programme are effective. Until October 2005 there was an unsupervised unqualified assessor, two learners were left without an assessor for two months and monitoring of learners' progress was poor. Since then, the training manager has discussed the learners' progress with assessors individually every fortnight. Retention rates have improved and more learners are achieving in a timely way. Common themes are shared at monthly assessor meetings. Data is used effectively to monitor the regularity of assessment and reviews. The very small team has daily informal contact and monthly formal meetings.

66. Staff development is linked to appraisal and all staff are required to keep a continuous professional development record. Staff are encouraged to attend externally hosted programmes, particularly to update them on new standards. New staff serve a probationary period of three months and have access to a mentor. Internal verification is satisfactory, with planned, regular days for verification. Assessors are monitored in the workplace twice a year and are required to attend standardisation events. Equality and diversity are not promoted fully at reviews, but they form a constituent part of the qualification and learners' understanding is regularly tested. Progress is recorded on the management information system and staff are beginning to use reports. Staff were able to comment on the self-assessment report but had little input. The self-assessment report recognised the strengths identified by inspectors, but was insufficiently realistic in recognising weaknesses.

Customer service

Strengths

- effective monitoring of learners' progress
- good programme support for learners

Weaknesses

- poor success rates
- insufficient clarity in promoting employers’ roles
- insufficient training in background knowledge

Achievement and standards

67. Customer service learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Work in portfolios is at a satisfactory level and meets the standards required for the NVQ. Learners are developing new skills and many have increased their self-confidence.

68. Current learners are progressing well towards achieving the key skills. Many have exemptions from key skills examinations through general certificates of secondary education success. Some are completing portfolio evidence for key skills alongside the NVQ evidence.

69. Framework success rates are poor for apprentices and advanced apprentices, but are improving slowly. In 2003-04, only three of 10 advanced apprentices completed the framework and none of the nine learners completed the framework in 2004-05. Of the 14 advanced apprentices who are due to complete in the current year, four have completed the framework and most of the six who remain are on target to complete in a timely fashion. Half of the 20 apprentices who planned to complete in the current year have left without achieving. However four of those who remain in learning are awaiting certification and most of the others are on target to complete.

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	10	30	39	13	25
		timely	8	13	23	13	14
	2004-05	overall	8	0	41	0	31
		timely	9	0	27	0	19
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	22	41	37	32	18
		timely	19	21	19	16	18
	2004-05	overall	24	25	56	25	3
		timely	29	10	44	10	30

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

70. Learners receive good support from assessors. Assessors use their occupational and professional skills well to guide and support learners. They provide a clear and early explanation of what is expected. Assessors provide good individual support for performance and knowledge competences, and advice and guidance on the choice of

optional units. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods to enable learners to demonstrate competence in using their preferred style. They use their knowledge well to support and advise learners on how best to present their evidence. Portfolios contain well-presented assignments, observation records and witness testimonies. Although some level 2 apprentices are helped to complete their performance charts by assessors, others develop good independent learning skills by claiming competence personally, with strong support and encouragement from their assessors. Assessors set clear and appropriate short-term targets at each visit, in discussion with learners. Targets and resulting actions are well recorded in portfolios. This was a weakness in the previous report. However, most employers have had little involvement in setting the targets and many do not have their own copy for reference. Assessor feedback to learners is clear, but is written only on a formative assessment record. This requires an awkward translation process to cross-reference to documents in the portfolio.

71. There is an effective system to monitor learners' progress. Six learners in customer service are developing independent learning skills through an e-learning approach to gaining their qualification. Monitoring of progress is very good for these learners. Assessors make productive and efficient use of the e-mail facilities in the system to agree short-term targets and to give immediate responses with assessment decisions. The system effectively engages employers by ensuring a continuous and active role for managers or supervisors in learners' claims for competence. For learners who are not using this system, progress monitoring is less immediate and responsive, but Nortec's staff have made good progress in improving the information available about each learner's achievements.

72. Staff are piloting some innovative techniques to improve assessment practice. Nortec has recently acquired a number of MP3 players to record discussions, and assessors intend to make full use of digital photography.

73. Longer-term target-setting is satisfactory for customer service apprenticeships. At the start of the programme, assessors agree NVQ target dates with learners, although targets for key skills and examination dates for technical certificates are not always as clearly defined. The programme focuses significantly on achievement of the NVQ and there is much informal support for the key skills.

74. The system to review progress in customer service is satisfactory. At each monthly visit, an assessment and review takes place, but employers are not always invited to contribute. However, they are verbally advised of the results. Employers are included and invited to comment in the formal review of progress. The review document includes space to accommodate learners' and employers' comments.

75. Arrangements to support literacy and numeracy needs are satisfactory. Learners are assessed initially at the start of their programme for literacy, numeracy and learning styles by a specialist member of staff. If additional needs are identified, appropriate measures are available to provide support. None of the learners in customer service who were interviewed by inspectors needed support for literacy and numeracy.

76. Nortec relies heavily on employer involvement to deliver the qualifications and frameworks, but does not give clear guidance in promoting their role. Employers do not receive copies of the national standards or frameworks and are unaware of their detail. Employers are unaware of the requirements and are not sufficiently included by Nortec's

assessors in ensuring an effective training process for their employees. Some local employers are fully committed to supporting their learners but have little formal training or competence to ensure that they meet national standards. Other employers do not fully understand the need to take an interest in their learners' progress. Nortec has not yet successfully engaged all employers in providing a consistent standard of support for their employees.

77. Learners receive insufficient training in background knowledge. Although Nortec's assessors provide personal support to learners, there is no formal structure to ensure that learners acquire the knowledge and understanding required for the NVQ and the technical certificate. Learners are entered for the examinations with little formal support from Nortec's assessors. Knowledge gained towards the technical certificate tends to be drawn more from experience in the workplace and substantially less through guided tuition from assessors. Although learners receive a large amount of information during induction, including workbooks for health and safety and for employment rights and responsibilities, much of it is not retained by learners and little is known about it by employers. Significant parts of the qualification are studied independently by the learner with unstructured support from employers. Observations of performance are descriptive and do not contain sufficient evaluative comment. Nortec has piloted customer service training sessions for in-house learners, but this has not yet been extended into training programmes for other apprentices.

Leadership and management

78. In the recent past there has been a significant gap in the continuity of support for some learners through high turnover of assessors. However, all learners are now receiving good support. The remaining assessor has worked hard to eradicate a backlog and maintain a good level of frequency of visits to learners, while an additional assessor has been recruited. Nortec has implemented effective measures to support the assessor. Fortnightly individual meetings with the training manager identify challenges and risks, and additional support for learners is flexibly planned. This can include input from other specialist staff. Achievement rates are rising and there are fewer learners out of funding.

79. Internal verification is satisfactory, with regular, planned sampling and effective standardisation meetings to identify and share good practice. The organisation maintains up-to-date knowledge of legislation and training standards.

80. However, there is little evidence of how Nortec monitors the learners' understanding of equality and diversity or health and safety after the initial induction session. There is no space on the monthly visit document to include comments on learners' understanding of equality.

