

REINSPECTION REPORT

North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry Reinspection

28 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
- **learndirect** 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.

Grading

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

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

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REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The North East Chamber of Commerce, Trade and Industry (NECC) is a company limited by guarantee and is owned by its members. It is one of the largest Chambers of Commerce in the country. North East Chamber of Commerce (Training) Ltd (NECC Training) is a wholly owned subsidiary of NECC. It has headquarters in Durham and 10 training centres in the main cities and towns throughout the Northeast. NECC holds contracts with the region's Learning and Skills Councils of Tees Valley, North Yorkshire, Durham, Tyne and Wear, and Northumberland, and with Jobcentre Plus in Sunderland.

2. The director of training and skills development heads NECC Training. This post is supported by the heads of training operations, employer engagement and training contracts and performance management. Operational management of the training centres is the responsibility of training centre managers who report to the head of training operations. A performance manager and a team of internal verifiers have responsibility for the verification process.

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Mechanical engineering Apprenticeships for young people	123	3	
Electrical engineering Apprenticeships for young people	42	3	
Manufacturing Apprenticeships for young people	30	3	
Other government-funded provision	5	3	
Employer training pilot	3	3	
Other contributory areas Apprenticeships for young people	126	3	

Business administration, management & professional			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Business administration</i>		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	318	3	
NVQ training for young people	4	3	
<i>Accounting and economics</i>		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	175	2	
NVQ training for young people	58	2	

Information & communications technology			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Developing IT systems</i>			
Apprenticeships for young people	73	3	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	91	3	
Employer training pilot	1	3	

Retailing, customer service & transportation			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Retailing</i>		4	
Apprenticeships for young people	34	4	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	10	4	
<i>Customer service</i>		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	145	3	
Employer training pilot	12	3	
NVQ training for young people	2	3	
<i>Warehousing and distribution</i>		4	
Apprenticeships for young people	43	4	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	14	3	
Employer training pilot	8	None	

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Hospitality and catering</i>			
Apprenticeships for young people	90	3	

Health, social care & public services			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
<i>Dental</i>		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	149	2	

Foundation programmes		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Literacy Entry to Employment	66	3

Grades awarded at reinspection

Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing		3
Apprenticeships for young people	38	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	7	3
Customer service		3
Apprenticeships for young people	113	3
Train to Gain	32	3
Warehousing and distribution		3
Apprenticeships for young people	32	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	12	3

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

3. This reinspection was of the area of learning, retailing, customer service and transportation, which was judged to be inadequate at the previous inspection. At reinspection, an overall grade for the area of learning and three contributory grades for retailing, customer service and warehousing and distribution were given. However, due to the low number of learners, no contributory grades in customer service for national vocational qualification (NVQ) training for young people and Train to Gain, which was previously employer training pilot, for warehousing and distribution were given. The reinspection took place in one visit of three consecutive days by three inspectors. The quality of the provision in retailing, customer service and transportation is now satisfactory. The overall effectiveness of the provision remains satisfactory.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	9
Number of learners interviewed	20
Number of staff interviewed	14
Number of employers interviewed	14
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	16
Number of visits	1

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing		3
Apprenticeships for young people	38	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	7	3
Customer service		3
Apprenticeships for young people	113	3
Train to Gain	32	3
Warehousing and distribution		3
Apprenticeships for young people	32	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	12	3

4. There are 234 learners in retailing, customer service, and warehousing. Of these, 114 are apprentices, 69 are advanced apprentices, 19 are adult participants on Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes which include an intensive activity period, and 32 are Train to Gain learners.

5. In retailing, 12 learners are advanced apprentices and 26 are apprentices. Seven adult participants are following Jobcentre Plus-funded programmes and two learners are on a Train to Gain programme that was not inspected. In customer service, 57 learners are advanced apprentices, 56 are apprentices and 32 are Train to Gain learners working towards a customer service NVQ. Sixty-two learners are following warehousing qualifications, of whom 32 are apprentices and 12 are participants on Jobcentre Plus-funded provision. The remaining 18 adult learners in warehousing participate in Train to Gain programmes that were not subject to inspection.

6. Learners are employed or placed with employers in the Sunderland, Hexham, South Tyneside, Newcastle, Middlesbrough, Redcar, Durham, Northallerton and Darlington areas. Most customer service learners are employed or on placements in office or retail environments. Non-employed learners attend off-the-job training at NECC's centres, while employed learners generally receive their training in the workplace. Retailing and warehousing training takes place on the job with some additional courses, such as basic health and safety, made available off the job in NECC's training centres.

7. Training advisers visit the learners to carry out assessment and progress reviews in the workplace. Progress reviews are completed every 12 weeks. Training for Jobcentre Plus-funded participants takes place mainly in the Sunderland training centre, where the participants improve their skills before entering employment.

Retailing

Strengths

- good development of workplace, personal and employability skills

- good short-term target-setting

Weaknesses

- insufficient literacy and numeracy support
- insufficient promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity and diversity

Achievement and standards

8. Learners develop good personal, workplace and employability skills. They gain a wide range of useful skills including receiving goods, preparing orders, merchandising, displays and use of sales points. Some go on to supervise other staff or become responsible for banking. Learners effectively develop their customer service skills and product knowledge throughout the programme. They also grow in confidence and are well motivated. For many learners, the programme helps them to develop a broader knowledge of the sector. This improves their work and gives them greater confidence. Adult learners attend well-structured jobsearch training which helps them to develop good interview skills and to produce updated curriculum vitae.

9. Action to ensure improvements in achievement and retention rates on retailing programmes for young people has been effective. The proportion of learners who are on programme after their planned end date has significantly declined. At the previous inspection, many learners were making slow progress. Learners are now making satisfactory or better progress. Since the previous inspection, advanced apprenticeship achievement rates have improved. Of the four learners who started in 2002-03 one learner has subsequently achieved their qualification. Two of the three learners who commenced in 2003-04 were retained and have now completed their framework. One of the four learners who started in 2004-05 has achieved and two are still in learning. All 10 learners who started in the current year are still in learning.

10. As noted at the previous inspection, achievement rates for retailing apprenticeship programmes are poor. For 2003-04, 22 per cent of learners completed their framework. Of the 36 learners who started in 2003-04, only 25 per cent achieved and two are still in learning. However, there have been recent improvements, with learners in the current year making at least satisfactory progress. One of the 29 learners has already achieved their qualification and 83 per cent of learners are still in training.

11. Achievement and retention rates for participants on New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults programmes are satisfactory. In the period 2002-05, the achievement and retention rate averaged around 60 per cent. Currently, approximately one-third of participants have achieved, a third have left the programme and the remainder are still on programme.

The quality of provision

12. Short-term target-setting is good. NECC Training's staff visit learners frequently and, at each visit, negotiate clear, specific and timebound interim targets with the learner and employer. Learners and employers fully understand what they need to do before the next visit to maintain progress. Learners are often asked to carry out research to develop their knowledge and understanding of retail procedures and legal requirements. Training advisers also set suitable targets for workplace training provided by the employer, and

arrange off-the-job training as required. In situations where learners' job roles change, targets are sufficiently flexible to recognise and make use of the different skills developed. At the previous inspection, target-setting in progress reviews was identified as poor. Since then, NECC Training has improved the review process and the quality of the target-setting. Employers' views are included in every review, even where, due to work pressures, the employer cannot attend the review. However, long-term targets for some learners are insufficiently demanding. Although all learners undergo a detailed initial assessment on entry to the programme, the results of this are not always used to match the planned length of the programme to the learners' skills and abilities.

13. Assessment meets the awarding body's requirements. Learners' portfolios contain a satisfactory range of diverse evidence including detailed observation reports, questions and answers and professional discussion. Appropriate use is made of new technology, such as MP3 players, to record some questions and answers and professional discussions. Some assessors have begun to use this for recording observations and witness testimony. In some cases, insufficient distinction is made between learning and assessment. For example, coursework used to develop skills is often used as evidence within NVQ and key skills qualification portfolios.

14. A range of satisfactory learning resources is available. The use of resources varies in effectiveness. In one case, an interview skills video was shown to learners on a small television making it difficult for some learners to see clearly.

15. NECC Training's staff respond satisfactorily to learners' personal support needs. They respond particularly well to learners' requests for support. For example, staff obtained appropriate work shoes and trousers for a learner going onto a retail placement. NECC Training's staff also visit learners more frequently when they require additional support. However, support mechanisms are not widely publicised and learners are not aware of the full range of support that is available. Learners receive adequate information about their course during the induction.

16. Since the previous inspection, there has been a considerable improvement in key skills qualification achievements. Most learners now complete these early in their programme. All learners undergo an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. However, support to meet learners' literacy and numeracy needs is insufficient. NECC Training has recognised this weakness within its most recent self-assessment report and has begun to restructure the staff team by allocating specific staff to provide support. Insufficient specialist literacy and numeracy provision is available for some learners. Most learners are required to develop their literacy and numeracy skills by completing workbooks and practice tests. The resources do not fully support the preferred learning styles identified in the initial assessment. Learners' work is not always appropriately checked and corrected for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. A few assessors also make grammatical errors in review documents. Some learners are not adequately prepared for external assessments of key skills. The provider currently has no written literacy and numeracy strategy, although one is being developed.

Leadership and management

17. NECC Training has introduced target achievement group meetings to monitor and review the progress of learners. These meetings have improved the communication between assessors, internal verifiers and training centre managers. Learners' progress is

appropriately recorded on wall charts and is updated weekly. The achievements of learners are regularly updated on a database each month. A range of reports is available to assessors and managers to monitor progress.

18. Internal verification is satisfactory. The role of the internal verifier has been broadened to include responsibility for monitoring the quality of learning and auditing the key processes for learners. A detailed monitoring schedule has been established but it is too early to judge the full effect of this initiative. Monthly cross-centre standardisation meetings take place. Internal verifiers regularly visit assessors and learners in the workplace to monitor progress and the quality of assessment. All staff are appropriately experienced and qualified. In the previous inspection, it was noted that the reports of internal verifiers tended to be too positive and did not identify weak practice. This has improved, as internal verifiers now give assessors suitably detailed improvement actions which are satisfactorily dealt with. NECC Training analyses the results of internal verification and shares findings at the team meetings to improve quality.

19. The previous inspection report identified poor awareness of health and safety. Since then, NECC Training has expanded the information provided to learners during induction and has trained staff in the monitoring of health and safety in the workplace. Health and safety practice is now satisfactory.

20. Learners are familiar with the appeals procedure and know what to do if they have any problems at work. However, the current approach used by NECC Training does not effectively promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. Although equality of opportunity is discussed at review, the questions asked are often superficial and used to check for compliance purposes. Questioning is not routinely related to the workplace or to wider contexts. In some instances, the questions are asked insensitively and in the presence of the employer.

Customer service

Strengths

- good development of workplace, personal and employability skills
- good short-term target-setting

Weaknesses

- insufficient literacy and numeracy support
- insufficient promotion and reinforcement of equal opportunities and diversity

Achievement and standards

21. Learners develop good personal, workplace and employability skills. Learners are employed in a wide range of different types of organisation where they develop good customer service skills and product knowledge. They also gain a range of complementary awards in information and communications technology, food hygiene and health and safety. One advanced apprentice has become particularly good at handling complaints and the employer places a high value and level of reliance on her skill. Learners also grow in confidence and are well motivated. For many learners, the programme helps them to develop a broader knowledge of the customer service requirements over and above that

required by their employers. This improves their work and gives them greater confidence. Several learners progress to higher-level qualifications.

22. Since the previous inspection, achievement and retention rates on customer service advanced apprenticeships have improved. The proportion of learners who are on programme after their planned end date has significantly declined. All learners in the current year are making satisfactory or better progress. For 2002-03, the advanced apprenticeship achievement rate was 24 per cent. In 2003-04 it was 43 per cent with five of the 42 learners still in learning. In 2004-05, 10 per cent of the 39 learners who started have achieved and 56 per cent are still in learning. Ninety-four per cent of the 32 learners who started in 2005-06 are still in learning.

23. Achievement rates for customer service apprenticeships have risen from 48 per cent in 2003-04 to 51 per cent in 2004-05, with nine apprentices still in learning. Currently, 11 per cent of the 75 apprentices who started in 2005-06 have achieved and 68 per cent are still in learning. All learners in the current year are making satisfactory or better progress.

24. Train to Gain achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. For example, the achievement and retention rate in 2003-04 was 75 per cent and in 2004-05 it was 73 per cent. In the current year, 91 per cent of the 35 learners who started are still in learning.

The quality of provision

25. Short-term target-setting is good. NECC Training's staff visit learners frequently and, at each visit, negotiate clear, specific and timebound interim targets with the learner and employer. Learners and employers have a good understanding of what they need to do to maintain progress. Learners are often asked to complete research to develop their knowledge and understanding of company procedures and legal requirements. Training advisers also set targets for workplace training provided by the employer and arrange training as required. One learner who had a difficulty in dealing with customers on the telephone greatly improved in competence after attending specific telephone techniques training. The employer valued this support and saw a significant improvement in the learner's performance. Since the previous inspection, NECC Training has improved the quality of the progress review process. However, there is sometimes little distinction between the formal review and the regular assessment and monitoring visits. Long-term targets for some learners are insufficiently challenging. Although all learners undergo a detailed initial assessment on entry to the programme, the results of this are not always used to match the planned length of the programme to the learners' skills and abilities.

26. Assessment meets the awarding body's requirements. Learners' portfolios contain a satisfactory range of diverse evidence. Appropriate use is made of new technology to record some questions and answers and professional discussions. Some assessors have begun to use this technology for recording observations and witness testimony. In some cases, there is insufficient distinction between learning and assessment. For example, coursework used to develop skills is often used as evidence within NVQ and key skills qualification portfolios. A range of satisfactory learning resources is available.

27. NECC Training's staff respond satisfactorily to learners' personal support needs. They respond in a timely manner to learners' requests for support. For example, appropriate clothes were provided for learners to attend interviews and work. NECC Training's staff

also visit learners more frequently when they require additional support. However, support mechanisms are not widely publicised and learners are not aware of the full range of support that is available. Learners receive adequate information about their course during the induction.

28. Since the previous inspection, there has been a considerable improvement in key skills qualification achievement. Most learners now complete these early in their programme. All learners undergo an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy. However, support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs is insufficient. NECC Training has recognised this weakness within its most recent self-assessment report and has begun to restructure the staff team by allocating specific staff to provide support. Insufficient specialist literacy and numeracy provision is available for some learners. Most learners are required to develop their literacy and numeracy skills by completing workbooks and practice tests. The resources do not support the preferred learning styles identified in the initial assessment. Learners' work is not always appropriately checked and corrected for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. A few assessors also make grammatical errors in review documents. Some learners are not adequately prepared for external assessments of key skills. There is currently no written literacy and numeracy strategy, although one is currently being developed.

Leadership and management

29. Initiatives to improve quality have been effective. NECC Training has introduced target achievement group meetings to monitor and review the progress of learners. These meetings have improved the communication between assessors, internal verifiers and training centre managers. Learners' progress is appropriately recorded on wall charts and is updated weekly. The achievements of learners are regularly updated on a database each month. A range of reports is available to assessors and managers to monitor progress.

30. As noted at the previous inspection, internal verification is satisfactory. The role of the internal verifier has been broadened to include responsibility for monitoring the quality of learning and auditing the key processes for learners. A detailed monitoring schedule has been established but it is too early fully to judge the effect of this initiative. Monthly cross-centre standardisation meetings take place. Internal verifiers regularly visit assessors and learners in the workplace to monitor progress and the quality of assessment. All staff are appropriately experienced and qualified. Internal verifiers give suitably detailed improvement actions to assessors and these are satisfactorily dealt with. NECC Training analyses the results of internal verification and shares findings at the team meetings to improve quality.

31. Learners are familiar with the appeals procedure and know what to do if they have any problems at work. However, the current approach used by NECC Training does not effectively promote and reinforce learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. Although equality of opportunity is discussed at review, the questions asked are often superficial and used to check for compliance purposes. Questioning is not routinely related to the workplace or wider contexts. In some instances, the questions are asked insensitively and in the presence of the employer. This weakness was noted at the previous inspection.

Warehousing and distribution

Strengths

- good development of workplace, personal and employability skills
- good short-term target-setting

Weaknesses

- insufficient literacy and numeracy support
- insufficient promotion and reinforcement of equality of opportunity and diversity

Achievement and standards

32. Learners develop good personal, workplace and employability skills. They gain a wide range of practical skills including loading and unloading, receiving goods and preparing orders. NECC Training provides specialist courses for learners including lift truck certificates and qualifications in health and safety. Some learners gain good customer service skills as their roles develop. They also grow in confidence and are well motivated. For many learners, the programme helps them to develop a broader knowledge of the sector and this improves their work and gives them greater confidence. Adult learners attend well-structured jobsearch training which helps them to develop interview skills and to produce updated curriculum vitae.

33. Unlike at the previous inspection, all learners are making satisfactory or better progress. The proportion of learners who are on programme after their planned end date has significantly declined. Both achievement and retention rates on warehouse apprenticeship programmes for young people show an improving trend since the previous inspection. For 2003-04, 16 per cent of learners were retained and achieved their qualifications. This improved to 32 per cent in 2004-05, with 18 per cent of learners still in learning. In the current year, 74 per cent of the learners are still in learning. One of the 34 learners who started this year has completed their framework.

34. Achievement and retention rates for participants on New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults programmes are satisfactory. In the period 2002 to 2005, the achievement and retention rates averaged around 64 per cent. In the currently year, seven participants have completed. Satisfactory progress is being made by the 12 participants who remain in learning.

The quality of provision

35. Since the previous inspection, the review process and the quality of the target-setting have improved. Short-term target-setting is now good. NECC Training's staff visit learners frequently and, at each visit, negotiate clear, specific and timebound interim targets with the learner and employer. Learners and employers have a good understanding of what they need to do before the next visit to maintain progress. Learners are often asked to carry out research to develop their knowledge and understanding of warehouse procedures and legal requirements. Training advisers also set clear targets for workplace training provided by the employer. Targets are sufficiently flexible to recognise and make use of the different skills developed in situations where learners' job roles change. Employers contribute fully to each review. However, long-term targets for some learners

are insufficiently demanding. Although all learners undergo a detailed initial assessment on entry to the programme, the results of this are not always used effectively to match the planned length of the programme to the learners' skills and abilities.

36. Assessment meets the awarding body's requirements. Learners' portfolios contain a satisfactory range of diverse evidence including detailed observation reports, questions and answers and professional discussion. Appropriate use is made of new technology, such as MP3 players, to record some questions and answers and professional discussions. Some assessors have begun to use this for recording observations and witness testimony. In some cases, insufficient distinction is made between learning and assessment. For example, coursework used to develop skills is often used as evidence within NVQ and key skills qualification portfolios. Training that was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection is now satisfactory. An appropriate range of learning resources is available.

37. NECC Training's staff respond satisfactorily to learners' personal support needs. They respond effectively to learners' requests for support. For example, two learners who had difficulty getting to work by public transport were referred to a moped loan scheme which provided both of them with a scooter. NECC Training's staff also visit learners more frequently when they require additional support. However, support mechanisms are not widely publicised and learners are not aware of the full range of support that is available. Learners receive adequate information about their course during the induction.

38. Since the previous inspection there has been a good improvement in key skills qualifications achievement. Most learners now complete these early in their programme. All learners undergo an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy. However, support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs is insufficient. NECC Training has recognised this weakness within its most recent self-assessment report and has begun to restructure the staff team by allocating specific staff to provide support. Insufficient specialist literacy and numeracy provision is available for some learners. Most learners are required to develop their literacy and numeracy skills by completing workbooks and practice tests. The resources do not support the preferred learning styles identified in the initial assessment. Learners' work is not always appropriately checked and corrected for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. A few assessors also make grammatical errors in review documents. Some learners are not adequately prepared for external assessments of key skills. The provider currently has no written literacy and numeracy strategy, although one is currently being developed.

Leadership and management

39. NECC Training has introduced target achievement group meetings to monitor and review the progress of learners. These meetings have improved the communication between assessors, internal verifiers and training centre managers. Learners' progress is appropriately recorded on wall charts and is updated weekly. The achievements of learners are regularly updated on a database each month. A range of reports is available to assessors and managers to monitor progress.

40. Internal verification is satisfactory. The role of the internal verifier has been broadened to include responsibility for monitoring the quality of learning and auditing the key processes for learners. A detailed monitoring schedule has been established but it is too early fully to judge the effect of this initiative. Monthly cross-centre standardisation meetings take place. Internal verifiers regularly visit assessors and learners in the

workplace to monitor progress and the quality of assessment. All staff are appropriately experienced and qualified. Weaknesses in internal verification noted at the previous inspection have been rectified. Internal verifiers now give suitably detailed improvement actions to assessors and these are satisfactorily dealt with. NECC Training analyses the results of internal verification and shares findings at the team meetings to improve quality.

41. The previous inspection report identified poor awareness of health and safety. Since then, NECC Training has expanded the information provided to learners during induction and has trained staff in the monitoring of health and safety in the workplace. Health and safety practice is now satisfactory.

42. Learners are familiar with the appeals procedure and know what to do if they have any problems at work. However, the current approach used by NECC Training does not effectively promote and reinforce their understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. Although equality of opportunity is discussed at review, the questions asked are often superficial and used to check for compliance purposes. Questioning is not routinely related to the workplace or wider contexts. In some instances, the questions are asked insensitively and in the presence of the employer.

