

INSPECTION REPORT

Three A's Pertemps Training Limited

15 June 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learn**direct provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Three A's Pertemps Training Limited (Three A's) is a private company, formed in 1983 to provide training for young people with learning difficulties in rural North Warwickshire. The company operates from Nuneaton and Coventry and provides preparation for life and work programmes and work-based learning in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and business administration and law. It contracts with Coventry and Warwickshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

2. The managing director has overall responsibility for all aspects of the company's performance. He is supported by the area operations director, who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the training provision. The company employs 19 full-time staff, two part-time staff and an external specialist who provides support for training in construction. In 2005, Three A's was bought out by Pertemps People Development Group (PPDG), a national training provider. Three A's receives support from PPDG's administration, information and communications technology (ICT) and business support staff.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** More specifically, training in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and business administration and law is satisfactory. Provision in preparation for life and work is good. Leadership and management, quality improvement and equality of opportunity are satisfactory.

4. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is critical and inclusive. Good use is made of learners' and employers' feedback to judge the quality of provision. The company identified many of the key strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. However, some strengths, particularly in equality of opportunity and quality improvement, were overstated and others were no more than normal practice. The quality improvement plan is comprehensive and provides clear timescales and responsibilities for improving the provision. Inspectors gave the same grades as the self-assessment report for all aspects of the provision, except business administration and law. Inspectors gave that area of learning a lower grade.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** It has made considerable improvements in its provision for Entry to Employment (E2E) learners. Most of the weaknesses identified during the reinspection in 2004 have been successfully resolved. The standard of teaching and learning has improved and is now very good. However, provision in business administration and law has deteriorated and received a lower grade than at the reinspection. Success rates for apprentices are good, but for advanced apprentices they are only satisfactory. Too few apprentices and advanced apprentices complete their programme within the planned period. The company has not taken effective actions to improve the provision in work-based learning.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THREE A'S PERTEMPS TRAINING LIMITED:

- maintain and monitor the effectiveness of strategies for continuous improvement
- clearly define the company's expected quality standards
- improve target-setting for all learners
- make better use of the good relationships with employers to develop structured work-based learning
- ensure that timely initial assessment identifies and meets learners' needs

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		3
Quality improvement		3

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Manufacturing technologies		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	11	3	

Preparation for life and work			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Employability training		2	
Entry to Employment	62	2	

Business administration and law			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Accounting and finance			
Apprenticeships for young people	5	3	
Administration			
Apprenticeships for young people	5	3	
Business management			
Apprenticeships for young people	2	3	
Customer service			
Apprenticeships for young people	15	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Inspectors reported on and graded Three A's preparation for life and work programmes, and work-based learning in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and business administration and law. All the provision was inspected in the same week and judgements were also made about leadership and management, including equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Training in construction, ICT and retail and commercial enterprise was not inspected, as there were too few learners on these programmes.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	72
Number of staff interviewed	50
Number of employers interviewed	14
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	11
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **In manufacturing, the standard of learners' work is good.** All apprentices work in manufacturing companies where advanced production machinery determines the pace of operations. They perform the same tasks to the same high standards expected of experienced operators. At one company, two apprentices have been promoted to key operators because they are capable of applying the correct machine settings and operating the machinery to a good standard. They are highly regarded by their employer for the quality of their work.

8. **Success rates for business administration apprentices are good** and have remained above national averages for two years. Framework success rates have remained close to national vocational qualification (NVQ) rates and increased in line with the national trend. Timely success rates for apprentices exceed the national average. Success rates for advanced apprentices are satisfactory.

9. **Manufacturing apprentices are making slow progress towards framework achievement.** In the six months the programme have been running, no learners has yet achieved an NVQ unit. There is insufficient assessment of the learners' competence on the units related to operating machines, although most learners demonstrate good machine-operating skills. Three learners are employed in more responsible roles, but their competence has not yet been formally assessed.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Preparation for life and work	2	7	0	0	9
Total	2	7	0	0	9

10. Teaching for learners on preparation for life and work programmes is very good.

All the nine sessions observed during the inspection were good or outstanding. Learning sessions are well planned and sustain learners' interest. In most sessions, learners are encouraged to participate in interesting and enjoyable practical activities. In all sessions they receive individual coaching and support, and work on tasks that are appropriate to their varying skill levels. Tutors offer praise and encouragement to motivate learners. Learners also help and support each other during sessions. Teachers are well qualified and experienced in the teaching of disadvantaged learners. Differentiation is used effectively to allow increased support for those who need it and for more experienced and confident learners to achieve additional learning outcomes. **E2E learners also receive very good pastoral support.**

11. Manufacturing and business administration learners benefit from Three A's good links with employers.

Three A's has developed very close partnerships with the two large employers where most of the manufacturing apprentices are based. Both employers have a very high regard for the provider's staff and for the service they receive from them. Business administration learners benefit from the co-operative relationship between assessors and their employer. Assessors work well with employers to ensure that evidence of work performance is carefully prepared. Employers and learners speak highly of the support provided by assessors, who visit every month to carry out progress reviews. Employers are actively encouraged to contribute to progress reviews and quarterly performance reviews.

12. **A wide range of activities** is used to motivate preparation for life and work learners and involve them in their programme. The curriculum covers personal and social development, vocational skills development and sessions to improve literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Enrichment activities include vocational tasters and visits to well-known employers and local museums. Team-building days also take place, including outdoor activities events in Malvern and the Lake District.

13. **Most of the targets and learning objectives set for learners are poor.** Medium-term target-setting for manufacturing learners is weak. Learners are given clear progress milestones for unit achievement, but the dates for most of these are in the last three months of the programme. There is an opportunity to monitor learners' cumulative progress on the review document, but the targets set at quarterly reviews are inadequate. There are insufficiently clear objectives for preparation for life and work learners. There are short-term targets in learners' review documents but there are inconsistencies in the detail of these targets and staff do not always break down objectives into specific, measurable actions with realistic timescales.

14. **Target-setting for business administration learners is weak, and they do not receive enough structured training.** Learners starting in the autumn of 2005 have only

completed a health and safety and an equal opportunity assignment. There has been no assessment of NVQ achievement in this time, although some learners have evidence to support their claims for competence.

Leadership and management

15. Three A's has **good links with employers**. Learners benefit from the company's good reputation with a wide range of engineering and commercial employers. Employers value the help and support the staff provide. They have a good understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship framework and provide effective support for learners to gain the experience that they need for their NVQ. Many learners have been promoted by their employer or are given enhanced roles, which they value.

16. Three A's has taken **good action to resolve the weaknesses in its E2E programme identified during the previous inspection** and reinspection. It has comprehensive action plans which managers monitor regularly. The company acted swiftly to improve the poor teaching on the E2E programme by arranging support from specialist literacy and numeracy staff and implementing an effective lesson observation scheme. Trainers use well-structured session plans for all training sessions and managers set them targets to improve their teaching. Inspectors found very good teaching on the E2E programme. Since March 2005, attendance at E2E training sessions has significantly improved from 56 per cent to 93 per cent. Retention and achievement rates on the E2E programme are currently satisfactory and improving.

17. **Internal communications are good**. The company has a system of regular meetings that involve all employers. The management style is open and transparent, and staff are encouraged to be critical and reflective.

18. The management of learning support is satisfactory. Apprentices receive an initial assessment during their induction. Three A's produces an individual action plan for each learner, with appropriate targets and shares with learners and tutors. Monitoring of literacy and numeracy targets is good. Learners who need specific additional support receive help in the workplace from the provider's skills for life team. Skills for life is the government's strategy in training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Initial assessment for learners on the E2E programme is thorough and takes place during the first four weeks of the programme.

19. **Some aspects of strategic management are weak**. Three A's has focused much of its activities on improving its E2E programme, which was judged to be very weak during the reinspection in 2004. Considerable improvements have been made and many areas of weakness have been successfully tackled. Some are now judged to be strengths. However, the company did not focus sufficiently on the weaknesses identified in work-based learning. For example, learners in engineering and in business administration continue to make slow progress.

20. **Quality assurance arrangements are incomplete**. They focus on compliance with procedures rather than on continuous improvement. The company has a comprehensive set of work instructions which cover all aspects of its work, but it does not clearly identify the standard it expects for each of the key training processes. There are no quality improvement policies to support the procedures. Three A's has not identified sufficient key performance indicators. It cannot effectively evaluate the success of its procedures to

ensure that learners' experience on the training programmes meets the standard it expects.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good links with employers
- good internal communications
- good action to resolve weaknesses in the E2E programme

Weaknesses

- weak aspects of strategic management
- insufficiently clear quality standards

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Strengths

- good standard of learners' work
- very effective working relationships with employers to enhance learning
- good advice and guidance

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework achievement
- insufficient initial assessment of literacy and numeracy
- weak medium-term target-setting

Preparation for life and work

Strengths

- very good teaching and learning
- wide range of activities to engage and motivate learners
- very good pastoral support

Weaknesses

- insufficiently clear objectives for learners

Business administration and law

Strengths

- good success rates for apprentices
- good employer engagement

Weaknesses

- insufficient structured training support
- weak target-setting for learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT THREE A'S PERTEMPS TRAINING LIMITED:

- the opportunity to get a qualification
- the number of activities to choose from
- learning a lot about health and safety and equality of opportunity
- 'makes me more marketable'
- 'very supportive assessor, really nice and approachable'
- 'always know that there is someone who will do their best to help you'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK THREE A'S PERTEMPS TRAINING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the slow pace of some of the training
- the space available for interviews/assessment - there is no dedicated room
- the amount of practical work

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good links with employers
- good internal communications
- good action to resolve weaknesses in the E2E programme

Weaknesses

- weak aspects of strategic management
- insufficiently clear quality standards

21. Three A's has developed good links with employers. Learners benefit from the company's good reputation with a wide range of engineering and commercial employers. Employers value the help and support provided by the provider's staff. They have a good understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship framework and provide effective support for learners to gain the experience that they need for their NVQ. Many learners have been promoted by their employer or given enhanced roles, which they value. Staff from Three A's regularly meet employers to update them about the progress their learners are making.

22. Internal communications are good. The company has effective staff 'communication' meetings, which are held every week and involve all employees. The meetings have a formal agenda, the minutes are well recorded and circulated to all staff, and actions are detailed and effectively followed up. Informal communication is strong, and staff demonstrate a good team spirit. The management style of the company is open and transparent. Staff are encouraged to be critical and reflective. Senior managers are accessible and staff feel well supported.

23. Staff training and development are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. Most hold a recognised teaching qualification or are working towards one. Staff have attended recent professional updating events and courses in health and safety. Attendance at training and development events is satisfactory. Appraisals are tied in with the company's business plan and learners' needs. New staff are well supported.

24. The managing director provides clear strategic direction. Staff at all levels have a good understanding of the strategic direction of the company. The company has a clear three-year business plan, which identifies a range of strengths, weaknesses and threats to the business. The plan is closely tied in with the company's key objectives and with the priorities set by the LSC.

25. Three A's produces accurate and reliable data on learners' recruitment, retention and success rates. This is used during the weekly staff meetings to monitor the company's performance and the progress of individual learners. Managers make appropriate use of the data to support judgements in the self-assessment report. Wall displays depict the progress of each learner against their individual learning plan. Learners and staff know

how much progress they have made and what they need to do in order to achieve.

26. The management of learning support is satisfactory. Apprentices receive an initial assessment during their induction. An individual action plan with appropriate targets is produced and shared with learners and tutors. Monitoring of literacy and numeracy targets is good. Those learners who need specific additional support receive help in the workplace from the provider's skills for life team. Initial assessment for learners on the E2E programme is thorough and takes place during the first four weeks of the programme.

27. Aspects of the provider's strategic management are weak. The company has focused much of its activities on improving its E2E programme, which was judged to be very weak during the reinspection in 2004. Considerable improvements have been made and many areas of weakness have been tackled successfully. Some are now judged to be strengths. However, Thee A's has not focused sufficiently on the identified weaknesses in work-based learning. For example, learners in engineering and in business administration continue to make slow progress. Following poor framework achievements in hospitality and catering, managers decided to close the provision. At the time of the inspection, seven learners were still on this programme.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

28. Three A's has a satisfactory strategy for ensuring equality of opportunity. The learning support officer acts as the provider's equal opportunities representative and named contact for learners. The company has adopted PPDG's equal opportunities policies, including a disability equality scheme. The equality policy is reviewed and updated annually to reflect the latest legislation.

29. Most staff have attended training in equal opportunities, although the most recent training sessions were in 2004. The company effectively uses its staff meetings and learners' newsletter to inform staff and learners about amendments to legislation. Information is prominently displayed in the training rooms and trainers are encouraged to make use of teaching sessions to broaden learners' understanding of equality and diversity. Teachers have focused on eliminating offensive language in the training rooms and have successfully introduced initiatives to help learners become aware of the language they use and its effect on other people.

30. Learners' awareness of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. All work-based learners receive equal opportunities information during their induction, and E2E learners are given an equal opportunities booklet. However, the language used in the booklet is too complicated for most E2E learners. All work-based learners complete an equal opportunities assignment to encourage them to find out about their employer's arrangements for promoting equality. Three A's uses the assignment well to monitor the effectiveness of the employer's arrangements, and promptly follows up any concerns with the learner and employer. E2E learners complete a disability audit of their employer's premises to raise awareness of the difficulties which might face visitors or employees with restricted mobility.

31. Three A's markets its training satisfactorily to groups who are under-represented on its training programmes, although its promotional material is not routinely produced in languages other than English. The company participates actively in events at local schools and with Connexions, and has successfully encouraged women to take up training

opportunities in manufacturing.

32. Data on equality of opportunity is monitored regularly. However, it is mainly analysed to compare the overall proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities with the proportion of people in the local population. Current data for 2005-06 shows that the proportion of learners with disabilities is 13 per cent above the proportion of workers with disabilities in the local population. The company has been less successful in attracting learners from minority ethnic groups. For 2005-06 so far, the proportion of new learners from minority ethnic groups is 2.5 per cent compared with 8 per cent in the local population.

33. A disability access audit has recently been carried out on the provider's premises and actions for improvement have been identified. Although some training rooms are inaccessible to learners with restricted mobility, the company has appropriate arrangements for relocating training to ground floor rooms, if necessary.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

34. Three A's has taken good action to resolve the weaknesses in its E2E programme identified during the previous inspection and reinspection. It has comprehensive action plans which managers monitor regularly. The provider acted swiftly to improve the poor teaching on the E2E programme, appointing an external consultant to manage this process. PPDG provided support from its specialist literacy and numeracy staff, and an effective lesson observation scheme was implemented. Inspectors found very good teaching on the E2E programme. Trainers use well-structured session plans for all training sessions, and managers set them targets to improve their teaching. Since March 2005, attendance at E2E training sessions has improved from 56 per cent to 93 per cent. Retention and achievement rates on the E2E programme are currently satisfactory and improving.

35. The collection and use of feedback from learners and employers is satisfactory. Targets are set to improve learners' and employers' satisfaction. Three A's regularly gathers feedback from learners. Staff analyse the data, present it at staff meetings and use it to set targets for improvement. Staff follow up negative responses quickly and take effective action where appropriate. Three A's encourages feedback and the contribution of new ideas and improvements, from staff.

36. Internal verification is satisfactory. It is effective, well planned and recorded, with clear guidelines for assessors and internal verifiers. Standardisation meetings are held every three months and cover all areas of the assessors' work.

37. The provider's quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. This weakness was identified during the reinspection, but Three A's has not taken effective action to resolve it. Quality assurance arrangements focus on compliance with procedures rather than on continuous improvement. The company has a comprehensive set of work instructions which cover all aspects of its work, but it does not clearly identify the standard it expects for each of the key training processes. For example, an audit of progress reviews or of work-based assessments is regularly carried out to confirm that they are being done, but not whether they are done well and meet learners' needs. The company does not clearly state what it expects from a good progress review or from good assessment practice. Three A's has not identified sufficient key performance indicators. It cannot effectively

evaluate the success of its procedures to ensure that learners' experience on the training programmes meets the standard it expects. There is a comprehensive and effective audit system to check compliance but the auditor relies on his own experience and knowledge rather than on the company's quality standards to make judgements on quality.

38. Self-assessment is well established at Three A's. Two self-assessments were carried out in 2005-06 to capture changes following re-structuring of the company. Three A's uses the views of all staff, learners and employers to contribute to the self-assessment process. It includes data in the report and makes broadly accurate judgements about achievement and retention. The latest report is reasonably critical and most of the strengths and weaknesses identified have a significant effect on learners. However, the report overstated the strengths in the E2E programmes and failed to identify the key weakness found by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with most of the weaknesses identified in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and business administration and law but found additional weaknesses and different strengths. Inspectors gave the same grades for all aspects of the provision except for business administration and law, which they gave a lower grade.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Manufacturing technologies Apprenticeships for young people	11	3 3

39. The training programme for apprentices in manufacturing has only been running for six months. Learners work towards an NVQ at level 2 in performing manufacturing operations, and key skills in communications and application of number at level 1. They are expected to complete the training programme in 13 months.

40. At the time of the inspection, there were 11 apprentices on the programme, of whom nine are men and none is from a minority ethnic group. Ten apprentices are working at two large local employers, operating machines or working on production lines.

41. Training is carried out by employers in the workplace. Staff from Three A's provide assessment and support for learners in the workplace. The programme is co-ordinated by an assessor, a skills for life co-ordinator and an internal verifier. Learners are recruited through employers, which invite their employees to study for the apprenticeship. The assessor carries out progress reviews with each learner every 12 weeks.

Strengths

- good standard of learners' work
- very effective working relationships with employers to enhance learning
- good advice and guidance

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards framework achievement
- insufficient initial assessment of literacy and numeracy
- weak medium-term target-setting

Achievement and standards

42. The standard of learners' work is good. All apprentices work in manufacturing companies where advanced production machinery determines the pace of operations. They perform the same tasks to the same high standards expected of experienced operators. At one company, two apprentices have been promoted to key operators because they are capable of applying the correct machine settings and operating the machinery to a good standard. They are highly regarded by their employer for the quality of their work. At another factory, the employer has assessed four of the five apprentices working there as among the most skilled operators. One has been promoted to the position of 'improver' because of the good quality of his work.

43. Learners make slow progress in achieving units of their qualification. This weakness is identified in the self-assessment report. No learner has yet achieved an NVQ unit. There is insufficient assessment of the units relating to operating machines where most learners demonstrate a good level of competence. Three learners are employed in enhanced roles, but their competence has not yet been formally assessed. Three A's has decided to focus on assessing elements of the health and safety unit instead of tackling the vocationally specific units. The assessor and internal verifier have begun to implement strategies to tackle this weakness but these strategies have not yet had an effect.

The quality of provision

44. Three A's has very effective working relationships with employers to enhance learning. Managers have developed very close partnerships with the two large employers where most of the apprentices are based. Both employers have a very high regard for Three A's, its staff and service they receive from them. The staff work very closely with senior personnel managers at these companies to support their human resources strategy. For example, one company identified internal problems with high staff turnover and poor motivation. The company worked with Three A's to tackle these problems by developing a structured training programme for all employees leading to accredited qualifications. Training and development now has a high profile at the company, and employees, particularly apprentices, have benefited from this. Employers' support for learners is good. Learners are given time off from very busy production lines to work towards their qualification. Both of these companies took effective steps to prepare themselves to support the apprenticeship programme. They supported line supervisors to achieve a level 2 NVQ in team leading. The team leaders are now familiar with NVQs and better able to help learners. One employer has made a specially adapted computer available to help apprentices who have reading and writing difficulties.

45. The assessor from Three A's spent two weeks working on the line to familiarise herself with the production process. She now has a better understanding of the learners' job role. Three A's has produced a compact disc of the NVQ background knowledge questions so that learners can study at home and reduce the amount of time needed away from the production lines. Learners receive frequent workplace visits from the assessor, including regular visits during the night shift, when necessary.

46. Learners receive good advice and guidance. All the learners were employed when they started the programme. They were invited to decide for themselves whether they wished to take the qualification or not. Three A's and the employers gave clear, co-ordinated presentations to employees about the benefits and challenges of studying for an apprenticeship. These were enhanced by a significant amount of advice given by Three A's to individual learners. Employees are made well aware of the opportunities for further progression after they achieve the apprenticeship. They are also made aware of the improved opportunities for career progression. Learners who decide to take the course but subsequently decline, are carefully counselled before they leave the programme. Three A's gives good advice and guidance to learners and employers to help them to select the most appropriate optional units of the NVQ.

47. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Training is given by experienced staff from the employer. A company training officer is responsible for training learners at one employer. The two large companies have training plans which are used by the

trainers. However, they are not comprehensive and not sufficiently cross-referenced to NVQ units. Three A's does not carry out observations of the training given by employers. The provider has plans to develop a comprehensive learning plan, cross-referenced to the NVQ, to support employers, but this has not yet been implemented.

48. There is not enough initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Learners with general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) at grades A* to C are not given a literacy and numeracy test unless the assessor believes that support might be needed, in which case a test is arranged in the first month of the programme. The provider has been slow to request evidence of learners' GCSE attainment. Literacy and numeracy support needs have only just been identified for learners who have already been on programme for three months. This is too late in a 13-month programme. Some learners' initial assessment results are not clearly identified in their individual learning plan.

49. Medium-term target-setting is weak. Progress milestones for unit achievement are clear, but the dates set for most of these are in the last three months of the programme. There is an opportunity to monitor learners' cumulative progress on the progress review document, but the targets set at the quarterly reviews are inadequate. They are too vague and do not give clear guidance to the learners about what they need to do next. The targets are not rigorously monitored at the subsequent review. There is insufficient information to allow the employer to know what their apprentices should be doing.

Leadership and management

50. The staff meet every month with the operations director to discuss all aspects of the provision. They also attend regular meetings with the regional support manager from PPDG's Midlands regional team. This meeting allows good practice to be shared between staff from Three A's and its parent company.

51. Three A's promotes health and safety, and equality of opportunity well. Both topics are covered satisfactorily during induction and reinforced through assignments in which learners are required to identify their employers' health and safety, and equality of opportunity arrangements. The health and safety assignment is part of the NVQ and the equality of opportunity assignment is separately certificated. Learners' equality of opportunity assignment is followed up by a personal letter to the learner and any identified concerns are passed to the assessor for action.

52. Internal verification is thorough and works to comprehensive sampling plans. Internal verifiers give useful and constructive feedback to assessors. Standardisation takes place regularly at the Midlands regional meeting. This covers assessment practices and new processes and procedures.

53. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process. Three A's identified most of the same strengths and weaknesses as the inspectors. The self-assessment grade matched the grade given by inspectors.

Preparation for life and work**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability training</i>		2
Entry to Employment	62	2

54. Three A's provides an E2E programme for 62 learners. They can join the programme at any time during the year, and most complete it in 22 weeks. Learners are referred by Connexions and the Youth Offending Team. Three A's holds open mornings once a week for new referrals, followed by an introductory interview with the centre managers. Learners receive an induction and an initial assessment, which is carried out in stages over the first four weeks of the programme. During this period, learners' individual needs and key objectives are identified and recorded on their individual learning plan. There is a centre manager at both sites supported by key workers and learner support staff. All learners are working towards an accredited qualification.

Strengths

- very good teaching and learning
- wide range of activities to engage and motivate learners
- very good pastoral support

Weaknesses

- insufficiently clear objectives for learners

Achievement and standards

55. Learners achieve a wide range of qualifications from pre-entry to level 2. All learners are offered a choice of qualifications that is appropriate for them and that will develop their employability skills. Learners develop satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills during their time on the programme. Many learners have a history of low attainment in formal education and a history of non-attendance. Some are referred from the local Youth Offending Team. Others have a range of complex needs and they gain confidence and develop the skills to participate in learning activities and social situations.

56. Progression rates into work-based learning, further education or employment are satisfactory. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, the proportion of learners who progressed was 35 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively. In 2005-06, 29 per cent have progressed so far, and a further 46 per cent are still in learning.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Entry to Employment	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	120		207	100	308	100										
Progression ¹	35		44	21	109	35										
Achieved objectives ²	21		49	24	3	1										
Still in learning	55		6	3	1	0										

1. Measured in terms of learners' movement to further training, education or employment, during or after their training

2. These being the key objectives identified for each learner while on E2E

The quality of provision

57. Teaching and learning are very good. All the nine sessions observed during the inspection were good or outstanding. Learning sessions are well planned and sustain learners' interest. In most sessions, learners are encouraged to participate in interesting and enjoyable practical activities. In all sessions learners receive individual coaching and support, and work on tasks that are appropriate to their skill levels. Tutors offer praise and encouragement to motivate learners. Learners also help and support each other during sessions. Teachers are well qualified and experienced in teaching disadvantaged learners. Differentiation is used effectively to allow increased support for those who need it and additional learning for more experienced and confident learners. Tutors create a friendly and supportive atmosphere and learners enjoy their courses.

58. There is a wide range of activities to involve and motivate learners. E2E learners have a wide range of programme options and can choose from accredited qualifications in health and safety, job-seeking skills, preparation for employment, first aid, ICT and lift truck driving. The curriculum covers personal and social development, vocational skills development and sessions to improve literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Enrichment activities include vocational tasters, and visits to local employers and local museums. Team building days also take place, including outdoor activities in Malvern and the Lake District. Some learners have benefited from an opportunity to join the 'tall ships' project. This improves skills in working as a team, improving communication skills and gaining self-confidence. Learners' success is celebrated across the organisation. Photographs of learners and details of their achievements are displayed in training rooms. Certificates for achievement recognise individual successes.

59. Pastoral support is very good. Three A's employs a qualified counsellor to help learners cope with personal difficulties and to succeed on their programme. There is also a dedicated Connexions adviser working directly with Three A's on a project funded by the European Social Fund. The support is effective and case conferences on individual learners are held frequently. These involve learners, key workers, the counsellor and the learner's parents, if appropriate. E2E learners who are living independently or have family problems are taken shopping and helped with financial matters. Learners who are required to attend sessions with a substance misuse counsellor are accompanied by a member of staff to ensure their attendance. Staff make good use of the 'cause for concern form,' which identifies problems and support mechanisms to help learners continue with their qualification. Business development managers attend interviews and

support learners on the first day of their work placement until they are confident enough to cope on their own. Three A's keeps a store of clothes at both sites for learners who are having financial problems or who are homeless.

60. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. All learners are booked in to see their counsellor at six, 10 and 22 weeks. Guidance is given about their preferred choice of occupation and they are also made aware of other options available to them.

61. Initial assessment is carried out during the first four weeks of the programme and is satisfactory. Initial assessment summaries are completed, but the information is not all used when devising the learner's objectives.

62. The objectives given to learners are insufficiently clear. There are short-term targets in learners' review records, but staff do not always break down the objectives into specific, measurable actions with realistic timescales. Learners' activity plans contain detailed information about their personal and social skills development, but there is no reference to this in the learners' E2E passport.

Leadership and management

63. Three A's staff have a good understanding of the client group and a clear sense of direction. Staff members work together effectively and communication is good. A comprehensive range of effective and productive staff meetings is held to support staff and identify actions that will help vulnerable learners. Learners participate in focus groups to make improvements to their learning programmes. Staff and learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity.

64. Resources are satisfactory. Three A's provides appropriate equipment and training rooms in its training centres. There are sufficient modern computers for learners to develop skills in ICT and to produce some of their written work for portfolios. However, these are not always fully used. The standard of furniture, fixtures and fittings is good. However some training rooms are too small for practical activities and are cramped when used by large groups.

65. The self-assessment report identified the strengths found by inspectors, but not the weaknesses. Some judgements were overly descriptive rather than judgemental. Inspectors gave the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

Business administration and law**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Accounting and finance Apprenticeships for young people	5	3
Administration Apprenticeships for young people	5	3
Business management Apprenticeships for young people	2	3
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	15	3

66. Three A's provides apprenticeship and NVQ training in accounting and finance, administration, business management and customer service. Programmes are offered at levels 2, 3 and 4. Learners on level 2 programmes are expected to complete the qualification in 12 months and those on levels 3 and 4 normally take two years. Learners are employed or on work placements with large and medium-sized companies in the Coventry and Warwickshire area. At the time of the inspection, there were 12 advanced apprentices, 12 apprentices and three learners on an NVQ-only programme.

67. Learners can join the programme at any time during the year. Assessors visit the workplace every month to plan and carry out assessments, provide guidance and support, and observe learners performing work activities.

Strengths

- good success rates for apprentices
- good employer engagement

Weaknesses

- insufficient structured training support
- weak target-setting for learners

Achievement and standards

68. Success rates for apprentices are good and have remained above national averages for two years. Framework success rates have remained close to NVQ rates and have increased in line with the national trend, while timely success rates exceed national averages. Success rates for advanced apprentices are satisfactory. An improvement in framework success rates in 2004-05 has lifted rates to above the national average. In 2004-05, the achievement rate for NVQs and frameworks for apprentices in administration and customer service was good.

69. The quality of work produced by apprentices and advanced apprentices is good. Many learners are employed in a major local insurance company and are able to provide a good standard of written and computer-based evidence for their portfolios.

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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	14	21	48	7	28
		timely	14	7	30	7	18
	2004-05	overall	13	38	47	38	31
		timely	12	17	35	17	23
	2005-06	overall	0	0	0	0	0
		timely	0	0	0	0	0
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	37	68	31	62	37
		timely	22	23	25	23	18
	2004-05	overall	33	64	56	64	45
		timely	33	39	35	39	28
	2005-06	overall	0	0	0	0	0
		timely	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ training for young	2003-04	overall	11	73	48	0	0
		timely	5	40	35	0	0
	2004-05	overall	8	88	57	0	0
		timely	8	88	43	0	0

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

The quality of provision

70. There is good employer engagement. Relations between assessors and employers are supportive and well established, and learners benefit from this. Assessors work well with employers to ensure that evidence of work performance is prepared carefully. Employers and learners speak highly of the support provided by assessors, who visit every month to carry out progress reviews. Employers are actively encouraged to contribute to progress reviews and quarterly performance reviews. Assessors meet employers during the monthly progress reviews and provide clear information on learners' progress and on the short-term targets agreed for completion by the next visit. During the quarterly reviews, employers provide good evaluation of learners' performance and agree future supportive actions. Assessors work hard to ensure that all learners on current programmes continue to make progress, and use the learning facilities available at their workplace. One major local insurance company has cooperated effectively with Three A's to incorporate business administration, and customer service NVQs into the training and development plans of a significant number of their eligible employees. All learners work in fully developed roles for their employers and demonstrate good standards of workplace performance. A number of learners have moved into supervisory roles during their training programme with Three A's.

71. Initial assessment of additional learning needs is satisfactory as is the extra support provided to those identified as needing it. The information, advice and guidance offered to learners by assessors and by specialist support staff is generally satisfactory. However, the training programme offers insufficient challenge for some learners. Some advanced

apprentices have level 3 qualifications such as advanced level GCSE and advanced general national vocational qualifications. All started learning with Three A's on a level 2 apprenticeship programme. Some of these learners have not been sufficiently challenged at this level, although a number have progressed to level 3. Learners are offered satisfactory pastoral support by Three A's, and the arrangements for supporting learners in the workplace are also satisfactory. Assessment methods, principles and practice are satisfactory.

72. Three A's does not provide enough structured training. Assessment of performance evidence is thorough and well planned. However, learners' background knowledge is often assessed only as a part of performance evidence. Learners assimilate much of their learning through their assessor's commentary on their evidence. Three A's does not provide formal structured training either to business administration or customer service learners. Learners often gain essential information in an unstructured way through discussion with colleagues about the performance evidence they have submitted. Three A's does not provide supporting materials. One major local employer with a number of business administration, and customer service apprentices has a well-structured performance management system that provides training which is useful to framework achievement. Although some learners use this information informally, Three A's does not effectively link the training and achievements they gain through their employer in a structured way to the aims of the NVQ. Much of the learning happens through a discovery approach, based on discussion with colleagues and supervisors or by individual research.

73. Target-setting during reviews is weak. Learners starting in the autumn of 2005 had only completed a health and safety and an equal opportunity assignment by the end of the academic year. There has been no assessment of NVQ achievement during this time, although some learners have completed evidence to support their claims for competence. There is only an informal evaluation of progress against the targets agreed in framework planning or monthly review documents. Learners' portfolios contain a diagrammatic representation of the constituent parts of frameworks and NVQs, but there is no clear and ready information to highlight rates of progress through the framework. Learners making slower progress are not sufficiently monitored or challenged by this system.

Leadership and management

74. Recent organisational changes have increased the support available for the assessor, although the actual number of assessors decreased in the months immediately before the inspection. At the time of the inspection there was one assessor, an internal verifier and a skills for life co-ordinator, all of whom had additional responsibilities unrelated to business administration. There is good support from the operations director through a regular series of 'communications meetings' and through careful attention to the introduction of new group policies and procedures. There is also a good focus on sharing good practice and introducing new approaches to the delivery of the provision. However, in recent months, staff have concentrated too much on the new procedures and not enough on the quality of the provision. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They are generally well qualified and there is a well-established staff development system in place.

75. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory and the topic is taught to learners by means of an extended assignment at the beginning of the programme. Three A's works closely with employers to ensure that all eligible employees are given a fair

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opportunity to join training programmes. Learners' understanding of their rights and responsibilities is satisfactorily checked at each review and comments are appropriately recorded.

76. There is thorough and well-planned internal verification, which fully meets awarding body requirements. Staff are aware of the recent changes made to the company's quality improvements procedures and have contributed well to the production of the latest self-assessment report.

