

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Zodiac Training Limited**

**30 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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## **Zodiac Training Limited**

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Zodiac Training Limited (Zodiac) is a private training provider, established in October 1996. It has six sites across the Northeast and Yorkshire regions, supported by a head office in Team Valley, Gateshead. Zodiac's mission is to 'grow people to grow business', which is underpinned by a set of seven values. The organisation now contracts with Tyne and Wear, Durham, Northumberland, Tees Valley, and West Yorkshire Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). Zodiac also works in partnership with Business Link to secure funding for adult learners.

2. The company is owned by two individuals. They both share joint responsibility for a board of Directors, who in turn are responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the business. Directors have all taken responsibility for departments such as marketing, human resources, training and development, data/communications, programmes and finance. In addition to this, Zodiac is building the commercial, schools and learndirect arms of the business. There are 75 staff, of whom 26 are programmes delivery staff, 25 are support services staff and 24 work in different programme areas such as learndirect and corporate. The programmes delivery team includes two programme managers who are occupationally competent.

3. Unemployment in the Tyne and Wear area in May 2006 was 3.5 per cent compared with 2.6 per cent nationally. Just under a third of those unemployed are under 25 years of age. The proportion of school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in 2005 was 52.3 per cent in Newcastle upon Tyne, compared with 57.1 per cent nationally. The proportion of 16 years olds in work-based learning in Tyne and Wear is almost twice the national average.

4. The proportion of school leavers in Durham gaining five or more GCSEs at grade C or above in 2005 was 51.3 per cent, compared with 57.1 per cent nationally. County Durham has a low participation rate for young people in post-16 learning.

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 3**

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** More specifically, Zodiac's leadership and management are good. Arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Provision is satisfactory in retail and commercial enterprise, and in business administration and law.

6. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Inspectors judged the self-assessment report to be not critical enough and too reliant on judgements given at the previous inspection. However, the inspection team recognised that the process used was fully inclusive of all staff and took on board feedback from all the main stakeholders.

7. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** This is supported by Zodiac's recent changes to the management structure and its

increased focus on areas of learning rather than geographical location. In all areas of learning, inspectors noted an improvement in success rates for the current year.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR ZODIAC TRAINING LIMITED:

- improve the rigour of judgements in self-assessment
- maintain and further improve the current success rates
- standardise assessment practice in all areas
- update staff knowledge of equality of opportunity
- fully implement all quality monitoring processes

## GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

<b>Leadership and management</b>		<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

<b>Retail and commercial enterprise</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Retailing and wholesaling</i></b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	47	3	
Train to Gain	35	3	
<b><i>Hairdressing</i></b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	7	3	

<b>Business administration and law</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b><i>Administration</i></b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	128	3	
Train to Gain	48	2	
<b><i>Customer service</i></b>		<b>3</b>	
Apprenticeships for young people	169	3	
Train to Gain	40	2	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. At the time of the inspection Zodiac's provision included some remaining hospitality learners, but these are no longer funded by the LSC and so were not inspected. Inspectors did not inspect the engineering and manufacturing technologies and

information and communications technology (ICT) areas of learning, which had 24 and three learners respectively. Most of the provision is work-based learning for young people but some work-based learning for adults and an increasing Train To Gain provision also exists. The largest areas of provision are administration and customer services.

Number of inspectors	8
Number of inspection days	38
Number of learners interviewed	55
Number of staff interviewed	39
Number of employers interviewed	26
Number of subcontractors interviewed	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	33
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

9. **Hairdressing learners make good progress towards completing their frameworks.** Of the current intake of learners, 60 per cent have recently completed full apprenticeship frameworks on target, or ahead of target by up to seven months.

10. **The development of hairdressing skills is good.** A high ratio of trainers to learners provides detailed individual support during practical off-the-job training. A range of suitable clients is available, providing learners with assessment opportunities for their national vocational qualification (NVQ). Skills and techniques demonstrated are at a good commercial skills level and are focused on clients' satisfaction.

11. **The success rates for retail frameworks in the year 2004-05 are low** at 30 per cent for apprentices and 13 per cent for advanced apprentices. However, the framework success rate for the year 2005-06 so far has increased to 44 per cent for apprentices and 34 per cent for advanced apprentices.

12. In warehousing and distribution the qualification success rate for apprenticeships is low for the year 2004-05 at 12 per cent. However, the rates for the year 2005-06 have increased to 44 per cent so far.

13. **Overall framework success rates for advanced apprentices in administration in 2004-05 were poor** and well below national averages for framework achievement. In 2004-05 there had been a decline in framework success rates from the previous year. Data available for the year to date in 2005-06 shows that current learners are making satisfactory progress towards completing their frameworks. NVQ success rates for the year 2004-05 were significantly higher than framework success and higher than national NVQ rates.

14. Overall framework success rates for apprentices in administration in 2004-05 are

better than for advanced apprentices, but remained below national averages as did NVQ success rates. As is the case with advanced apprentices, data available for the year to date in 2005-06 indicates a significant rise in success rates.

**15. Achievement rates by Train to Gain learners in customer services are good and improving.** Train to Gain learners make good progress with their NVQ and enjoy the opportunity to gain qualifications. Some Train to Gain learners have been out of education for a considerable time and are motivated to continue their learning after their current programme.

**16. Zodiac's apprentice and advanced apprentice qualification success rates in customer services declined in 2004-05, and are poor,** a weakness recognised in self-assessment. On both of these programmes, the framework and NVQ success rates in 2004-05 are lower than the national rate. Zodiac's qualification success rates for advanced apprentices are significantly below the national rates in 2003-04 and 2004-05.

17. Zodiac's own data shows an improvement in qualification success rates for 2005-06, which are satisfactory. Learners are now encouraged to complete their programmes early, and 36 learners who were anticipated to complete in 2006-07 have already achieved all aspects of their framework.

### The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Retail and commercial enterprise	0	0	3	0	3
Business administration and law	0	2	9	1	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>

**18. Zodiac's assessors make good use of resources to support learners' needs in retailing and business administration.** Training assessors use digital voice recorders to record discussions between learners and assessors. This method of evidence collection is very effective at linking the recorded images of the learner carrying out the activity, the verbal discussion between learner and assessor and the paper-based product evidence.

**19. Training advisers have developed a wide range of training resources for learners and employers in customer services.** Resources are very specific to the customer service context and are linked well into workplace scenarios. During group off-the-job training sessions, training advisers use a variety of learning resources effectively.

**20. Learners receive very regular visits from their training advisers in customer services and in administration,** often every two or three weeks. Most learners are making good progress. The short-term target-setting and reviewing is very effective. Training advisers' visits are very flexible, with a suitable mix of training, assessment and support to meet learners' needs.

**21. Some assessment practice among retail training assessors is weak,** including poor planning of the assessment activities. Briefings on what activities will be assessed are not clear or detailed enough.



**22. In hairdressing training, staff do not take some opportunities to develop learners' knowledge.** Observed lessons were satisfactory, although some had insufficient direction, with limited instructions to the learners. For example, training advisers were observed starting and stopping a video without giving learners clear instructions on what tasks were to follow. Training advisers do not systematically check on learners' knowledge and understanding, and insufficient confirmation of learning takes place.

**23. Some health and safety practices in hairdressing are poor.** In background knowledge sessions where new learners were testing a product's effect on cuttings of hair, training advisers did not fully explain the potential hazards of using bleach, such as inhalation and spillages. Sterilisation and hygiene procedures were not fully enforced in some salon activities, with combs being dropped on the floor and re-used on a client's hair.

**24. The results of initial assessment in customer services are not always used sufficiently** when planning learners' NVQ or technical certificate training. Training advisers don't always apply Zodiac's policies for initial assessment consistently. Where learners are receiving support from the training advisers, this is not always recorded formally. Some apprentices are on too low a level of qualification for their prior experience, qualifications or job role. Several learners have already completed an apprenticeship before they start their customer service apprenticeship.

**25. Although learners' progress reviews are very frequent in customer services, too much focus is placed on the achievement of qualifications rather than learners' overall progress and development.** The various aspects of the learners' programme, including development at work, and literacy and numeracy support, are not reviewed as a whole through a formal process.

### **Leadership and management**

**26. Equality of opportunity is reinforced well on hairdressing programmes.** During a training session a 'racism in football' video was used well to explore these issues with the learners, and the training adviser made effective links to recent events in a local school about bullying. Learners complete questionnaires regarding sexual harassment and provide knowledgeable answers to scenarios regarding the integration into their salons of clients from Asian backgrounds or those with restricted mobility.

**27. Many aspects of the management of customer service programmes are good,** and have improved through the restructuring of the organisation to be more focused on areas of learning. Communication has improved and is effective. Zodiac has good support mechanisms for staff, particularly when staff take learning and development qualifications or have an identified development need.

**28. Zodiac focuses strongly on improving learners' achievement.** It has recently transferred to new premises which provide a positive learning environment. Alterations to management structure have placed more emphasis on the areas of learning. Zodiac is working closely with the LSC to develop its approach to supporting learners with additional needs. Those learners with identified needs are supported by training advisers or staff members with specialist qualifications.

**29. Zodiac's management of performance is particularly effective.** Staff are set key

performance indicators which the programme managers monitored closely at monthly individual meetings and monthly team meetings. These meetings focus very clearly on the learners' progress, staff workloads and issues.

**30. The strategic direction within Zodiac is good and focuses clearly on the learner.**

National, regional and local priorities guide the organisation's planning and identified growth areas. For example, the organisation is meeting a local need by managing and supporting a subcontractor to deliver training in hairdressing. Through effective networking and collaborative initiatives with partners and external organisations, senior management are kept very well informed about developments and challenges in the sector.

**31. The organisation's strategies to improve quality are good.** Recent trends show increasing success and achievement rates across all areas of learning. The emphasis within the organisation has shifted clearly from quality assurance to quality improvement.

**32. Zodiac has developed good strategies and activities to recruit from identified under-represented groups.** It carries out detailed and effective analysis of data to identify participation of learners by gender, ethnicity and ability. This information supports the setting of targets for annual and long-term development planning.

**33. Zodiac takes very effective actions to support the learning agenda for local 14 to 19 year olds.** Innovative residential courses are good at supporting and re-engaging with young people who have been identified by schools. These programmes focus on meeting the needs of young people still in school but who are not wholly engaged in education. Some attendees have successfully progressed to work-based learning programmes.

**34. The co-ordination of hairdressing learners' individual programmes is weak.** Learners' data and information are inconsistent and not fully updated. Some records of learners who have left the programme are still on file. Of the five new starters in the later part of 2004-05, three have already left. Some learners' start and end dates vary on different documents.

**35. The organisation's approach to self-assessment is insufficiently critical.** The most recent self-assessment report is not critical and is too reliant on the judgements made in a report from an inspection carried out more than a year before the self-assessment. The self-assessment report does not identify many of the findings highlighted by the inspectors.

**36. The monitoring of some quality improvement initiatives is ineffective.** For example, some inconsistencies are evident regarding assessment practices and progress reviews. Insufficient focus is placed on observations of teaching and learning, and on identifying areas for development. Zodiac relies too much on internal verifiers to ensure follow-up to actions.

**37. The ongoing promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity is not sufficient** to ensure that learners' and staff members' knowledge and understanding are maintained. Training advisers do not always take the opportunity at reviews to test learners' understanding and application of equality and diversity issues as they affect their working practices. No plans are in place for formal staff training.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- strong management focus on improving achievement
- good strategic direction
- particularly effective management of performance
- good strategies to improve quality
- good strategies to recruit from under-represented groups
- very effective involvement in the local 14 to 19 agenda

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficiently critical self-assessment
- ineffective monitoring of some quality improvement initiatives
- insufficient ongoing promotion of equality and diversity

## **Retail and commercial enterprise**

### ***Retailing and wholesaling***

#### *Strengths*

- good development of skills
- good use of resources to support learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- low success rates for 2004-05
- some weak assessment practice

### ***Hairdressing***

#### *Strengths*

- good progress towards framework achievement
- good skills development
- good reinforcement of equality of opportunity

#### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient knowledge development in some sessions
- weak co-ordination of learners' individual programmes
- some poor health and safety practices

## **Business administration and law**

### ***Administration***

#### *Strengths*

- frequent and supportive visits from training advisers
- good resources to support learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor framework success rates for 2004-05

### ***Customer service***

#### *Strengths*

- good achievement by Train to Gain learners
- very regular and effective support from training advisers
- good-quality resources
- good aspects of management

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor success rates in 2004-05
- some ineffective initial assessment
- insufficient focus on learners' overall development in progress reviews

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ZODIAC TRAINING LIMITED:**

- 'gaining a qualification that helps me progress with my job'
- the very accommodating training assessors
- 'my confidence has improved'
- 'the support I receive'
- the help with training and with numeracy
- the frequency of visits
- 'the way my assessor explains things so I understand them'
- not being rushed with training
- the individual support and help
- the small groups for training sessions
- that the training advisers make learning fun

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK ZODIAC TRAINING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:**

- the amount of paperwork
- the amount of repetition in training - there's too much
- the clarity of the background knowledge questions

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 2**

#### Strengths

- strong management focus on improving achievement
- good strategic direction
- particularly effective management of performance
- good strategies to improve quality
- good strategies to recruit from under-represented groups
- very effective involvement in the local 14 to 19 agenda

#### Weaknesses

- insufficiently critical self-assessment
- ineffective monitoring of some quality improvement initiatives
- insufficient ongoing promotion of equality and diversity

38. Zodiac demonstrates a strong focus on improving learners' achievement. The organisation has recently transferred to new premises which are more conducive to creating a positive working environment for both staff and learners. Facilities include a good learning and training room as well as a specialist information technology (IT) suite. Rooms for interviews and individual reviews are available, as well as a relaxation and refreshment area. All these rooms are on the ground floor and so are accessible to all learners. The management structure of Zodiac has been altered to place much greater emphasis on the areas of learning rather than geographical location of learners. Programme managers with occupational experience and qualifications now manage areas across the whole of Zodiac's provision. These changes are having a positive effect on learners' rates of retention and achievement in the current year.

39. The strategic direction within Zodiac is good and focuses clearly on the learner. National, regional and local priorities guide the organisation's planning and identified growth areas. For example, Zodiac is meeting a local need by deciding to manage and support a subcontractor to deliver training in hairdressing. Through effective networking and collaborative initiatives with partners and external organisations, senior management are kept very well informed about developments and challenges in the sector. Zodiac has good working relationships with schools, and engages positively with some large employers to deliver bespoke training and relevant qualifications. All directors are involved in setting the company's strategic direction. A three-year strategic development plan effectively summarises the business objectives and targets. The stable and well-established staff team is motivated, committed and well informed about the organisation's direction and objectives. All the staff are currently engaged in a project, funded by the LSC, to become a learning organisation. Succession planning is part of the organisation's strategic approach to ensuring consistency and continuity.

40. The management of performance is particularly effective. Staff are set key

performance indicators which are closely monitored by the programme managers at monthly individual meetings and monthly team meetings. The focus of these meetings is very clearly on the learners' progress, staff workloads and issues. Reports from the management information system enable managers to evaluate effectively staff performance. Staff having difficulty in meeting their targets receive additional training and support from programme managers, internal verifiers, the skills for life delivery staff and/or staff from the training and development department. Skills for life is the government's strategy on training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. The support can include coaching, shadowing and observation of practice. Observations of key learning processes help to identify future training needs. Each member of staff has an individual development plan, which ensures that they develop the appropriate professional and personal skills to fulfil their job role. Zodiac has invested extensively in staff development and training. Staff are very well qualified and most staff are currently engaged in some form of further personal development.

41. The management information system is responsive and timely, accurate and accessible, and provides meaningful information to review different aspects of performance. Staff in a variety of job roles at Zodiac are able to access and receive reports from the management information system to support them in their role. These reports support decision-making, action-planning and sharing information. Training advisers and programme managers use reports to monitor a range of activities, such as the number of visits to learners, the percentage of the qualification that learners have completed, and who requires additional support.

42. Communication is effective within the organisation. Staff are well informed about developments and changes taking place. The structure of the organisation is effective and enables the dissemination of strategic planning information, as well as the sharing of information about operational issues. Zodiac has invested well in IT to support the management information system and the staff operating in their different roles. The organisation's website is currently undergoing major developments including the introduction of a 'customer relationship management' package. Learners are able to submit application forms online, and employers will be able to access learners' progress reports. Staff are issued with electronic communication devices. These help significantly with the transfer of relevant information to and from the management information system to ensure staff remain up to date about the learners' progress.

43. Value for money is satisfactory. Zodiac has invested extensively in resources to support learning, in its management information and communication system, and in the way it uses staff to visit learners regularly in the workplace.

44. Zodiac is working closely with the LSC to develop its approach to supporting learners with additional needs. A skills for life strategy and action plan is in place. All learners who do not have a GCSE at grade C or above take a basic skills assessment to determine whether they have a literacy and/or numeracy skills support need. Learners with additional needs are either supported by training advisers or by a member of staff with more relevant and specialist qualifications and experience. Staff have received in-house training in supporting learners. All staff have completed a level 2 literacy qualification, and most have completed a level 2 numeracy qualification. The quality of support provided by staff is evaluated by monitoring the success of learners completing workbooks and/or achieving a certificate in literacy or numeracy.

## Equality of opportunity

## Contributory grade 3

45. Equality of opportunity at Zodiac is satisfactory. Zodiac has developed good strategies and activities to recruit from identified under-represented groups. It carries out detailed and effective analysis of learners' data to identify participation by gender, ethnicity and ability. This information guides the setting of targets for annual and long-term development planning. Zodiac identifies and develops systems and processes to support specific groups of learners. For example, it provides grants for learners from low socio-economic backgrounds to buy shoes and clothes to attend interviews. Zodiac maintains good arrangements with a range of organisations which support learners from identified target groups, such as learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, particular genders, minority ethnic groups and the disabled. These arrangements include good co-operation with community groups to target specific communities not traditionally involved in education.

46. Zodiac actively promotes programmes in English for speakers of other languages in communities with high minority ethnic representation across all regions. It also targets the communities with different social and cultural backgrounds to promote access to a wide range of training opportunities. The organisation uses a poster and leaflet campaign in some areas instead of workshops and presentations, particularly to target young men through distribution at venues such as skateboard parks.

47. Zodiac is involved in a number of European Social Fund bids, some in conjunction with other organisations, particularly aimed at development programmes for women. These programmes include ICT skills and skills for life provision as well as work tasters in non-traditional areas such as tiling, manufacturing and warehousing. Zodiac also links with Sure Start programmes in the area. The three-year development plan includes overall targets to reduce gender gaps in participation in learning, and to increase representation by those from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities.

48. Zodiac takes very effective actions to support the 14 to 19 agenda. Its innovative residential courses are good at supporting and re-engaging with young people identified by schools. These programmes focus on meeting the needs of young people still in school but not wholly engaged in learning. The two-day residential course includes specific training in leadership, assertiveness, negotiation, communication, time management, stress management and other topics. Some attendees have since progressed onto work-based learning programmes with Zodiac.

49. Zodiac also offers a range of training programmes to parents in topics including skills for life, IT, business and management and specialist IT. It is also possible for parents to access NVQs and apprenticeships. Training programmes offered to teachers in schools include team building, leadership and management, and analysis and feedback.

50. Vetting procedures for potential employers are satisfactory. A training adviser vets all potential employers. This process includes a detailed section relating to equality of opportunity. Zodiac requires employers to agree to adopt its policy if the employer does not have one of their own. Companies and organisations nominate a designated member of staff to be responsible for equality, complaints and harassment issues. Advisers also cover the processes to manage complaints and grievances. All recorded factors contribute to the completion of an employers' risk assessment. Zodiac has identified employers with which it will not engage because of unacceptable practices.



51. The ongoing promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity is not sufficient to ensure that learners and staff maintain their knowledge and understanding. Training advisers do not always take the opportunity at reviews to test learners' understanding and application of equality and diversity issues as they affect their working practices. The questions used in reviews can be brief and closed in structure, allowing learners to respond without demonstrating detailed knowledge or understanding of the topics covered.

52. Not all new staff automatically receive training at their induction. A 'skillscan' identifies individual needs. No planned programme is in place for ongoing training to maintain staff members' knowledge and understanding, particularly of recent changes to legislation. Too much reliance is placed on informal processes to update staff. For example, staff training might take place by way of update sessions as part of team meetings, but no records of these sessions are kept in team meeting minutes.

53. A range of staff and managers' meetings include equality and diversity as a main agenda item, but minutes of these meetings indicate little or no discussion of the topic at the meetings. Minutes contain no evidence of any discussion or review of actual performance against targets. Board meeting minutes similarly contain no record of discussion or reference to equality or diversity issues.

54. Some recent staff training regarding access to a website on gender, equality, race and inclusion, and resources aimed at challenging stereotyping has taken place. This project provides good resources to support the delivery of training to challenge gender and race issues.

### **Quality improvement**

### **Contributory grade 3**

55. Zodiac's strategies to improve quality are good. Recent trends show increasing success and achievement rates across all areas of learning. The emphasis within the organisation has shifted clearly from quality assurance to quality improvement. Zodiac has made significant changes and improvements to the programmes it offers. These improvements have included a clear focus on the learner, increased resources to support learning, investment in IT, good performance management, good support for staff through effective training and development and focused team meetings, and the use of feedback to improve quality. The quality improvement strategy, improvement plan and monitoring plan show comprehensively how the organisation is approaching the task of enhancing quality. Very good policies, procedures and systems covering all aspects of the learning process are in place and are effective tools to implement the quality improvement systems. The process for gathering feedback from learners and employers is extensive and supports the self-assessment process. The reasons why learners leave their programme early are analysed and appropriate actions are taken. An annual staff survey allows the organisation to collect, summarise and act on the opinions of staff.

56. Thorough arrangements are in place to observe a range of key learning processes. Some of these observations have taken place using the new arrangements, with processes covered including assessment and achievement, induction and initial assessment, the planning of individual learning, and progress reviews. Staff development activities link well to identified actions for improvement.

57. Effective arrangements are in place to manage and monitor the performance of the subcontractor. Zodiac ensures that the subcontractor adopts effective and rigorous policies and procedures. It has regular contact and communication with the subcontractor, and monthly meetings take place to monitor the learners' progress. An external consultant evaluates the content of the programme and observes some key learning processes. Success rates have increased significantly.

58. The arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. Sampling of assessment and assessors' activity is systematic. Regular standardisation meetings allow staff effectively to review and discuss practices and standards and are also effective at sharing good practice.

59. The approach to self-assessment is insufficiently critical. The most recent self-assessment report is not critical and is too reliant on the judgements made in a previous inspection report produced more than a year before the self-assessment. The self-assessment report does not identify many of the findings highlighted by the inspectors. However, the self-assessment process is well established, well managed and involves all staff. Most staff are knowledgeable about the current action plan and how this is designed to rectify identified weaknesses. The action plan is kept up to date and records the progress made on actions so far by Zodiac.

60. The monitoring of some quality improvement initiatives is ineffective. For example, some inconsistencies are evident regarding assessment practices and progress reviews. Too little focus is placed on observations of teaching and learning, and on identifying areas for development. Too much reliance is placed on internal verifiers to ensure follow-up to actions.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Retail and commercial enterprise

### Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b><i>Retailing and wholesaling</i></b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	47	3
Train to Gain	35	3
<b><i>Hairdressing</i></b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	7	3

61. In the retail and commercial enterprise area of learning, Zodiac has 22 apprentices in retailing and wholesaling and 18 apprentices in warehousing and distribution. In addition, it has one advanced apprentice in retailing and wholesaling and six advanced apprentices in warehousing and distribution. There are also 35 adult learners on a Train to Gain programme. Of these, three adult learners are following a level 2 NVQ in retail operations and 32 adult learners are following a level 2 NVQ in warehousing and distribution. Systems, processes and staff are identical in both retailing and warehousing operation so the inspection outcome of these areas is identical and is reported under retailing and wholesaling.

62. Apprentices are usually recruited through Connexions and by employers, although some join Zodiac independently. All learners are employed and they receive most of their training while in their place of work. Eleven members of staff are assessors in retail and there is a further assessor who supports learners on a subcontracted basis. A programme manager co-ordinates this area of learning, supported by two internal verifiers.

63. Zodiac provides hairdressing apprenticeships through a subcontractor, based in Morpeth, Northumberland. Salons employ 10 apprentices across the Northumberland area, seven of whom were in the scope of the inspection. The subcontractor and salons recruit learners directly. Learners complete an induction that includes initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs and provides information on health and safety and equality of opportunity.

64. Training advisers review learners' progress every six weeks through salon visits. These visits include target-setting, assessments if required and feedback to the employer. Off-the-job practical and background knowledge training takes place weekly at the subcontractor's hair academy, as does key skills training. Salons provide on-the-job training mostly through individual support on skills development. Ninety per cent of learners are women.

### ***Retailing and wholesaling***

#### *Strengths*

- good development of skills
- good use of resources to support learners

### *Weaknesses*

- low success rates for 2004-05
- some weak assessment practice

### **Achievement and standards**

65. Learners develop good personal and vocational skills while completing their qualification. They have opportunities to reflect on how they carry out their jobs and create ideas to improve workplace operations. Learners recognise that their confidence has increased since starting their programme. They feel more able to do their job and they interact better with supervisors and managers. Employers notice that learners are more responsible in their roles and are using their own initiative more frequently. Improved teamworking in a warehousing environment contributes to increased productivity. Some adult learners discovered that they had additional learning needs while completing the qualification. They have received support in literacy and numeracy as part of their training programme and have now gained confidence in their own personal abilities outside the workplace.

66. The achievement rate for the Train to Gain programme in warehousing and distribution for the year 2004-05 is satisfactory at 62 per cent. In the current year so far, a satisfactory 74 per cent of learners have achieved their qualification. Achievement rates are improving each year.

67. Within retailing and wholesaling, although the number of learners on the Train to Gain programme is small, achievement over the past three years has ranged from 95 per cent to 100 per cent.

68. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is satisfactory. The well-presented evidence in learners' portfolios includes photographs as well as conversations taped during assessment.

69. Success rates for apprentices in the year 2004-05 have been low. The qualification success rates for 2004-05 for the retailing apprenticeships and the advanced apprenticeships are 30 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. However, the framework success rate for the year 2005-06 so far has increased to 34 per cent for the retailing advanced apprenticeships, and 44 per cent for the apprenticeships. This represents an improvement in learners' success rates for this year.

70. In warehousing and distribution, the qualification success rate for apprenticeships is low for 2004-05 at 12 per cent. However, the rates for the year 2005-06 so far have increased to 44 per cent. All programmes in this area of learning show a clear improvement in their success rates during 2005-06. Current learners are progressing well.

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	6	0	21	0	13
		timely	6	0	10	0	5
	2004-05	overall	8	13	21	13	15
		timely	8	13	13	13	9
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	46	48	37	26	27
		timely	44	36	18	16	14
	2004-05	overall	70	53	43	30	32
		timely	74	35	26	14	19
NVQ training for young	2003-04	overall	8	50	47	0	0
		timely	8	50	33	0	0
	2004-05	overall	2	50	52	0	0
		timely	2	50	38	0	0
Adult training (long courses)	2003-04	overall	18	89		0	
		timely	12	67		0	
	2004-05	overall	5	100		0	
		timely	5	100		0	
	2005-06	overall	1	100		0	
		timely	1	100		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](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

## The quality of provision

71. Zodiac's assessors make good use of resources to support learners' needs. Training assessors use digital voice recorders to record discussions between learners and assessors. This is particularly useful for those learners with identified learning needs and those less confident at writing. This method of evidence collection is very effective at linking the recorded images of the learner carrying out the activity, the verbal discussion between learner and assessor and the paper-based product evidence. Learners can review their evidence with the assessor by watching it on a laptop computer. These evidence recordings are clearly indexed and internal verifiers can easily access them from their computers. This method is particularly effective in busy environments such as warehousing and distribution, and retailing. Learners also have access to online testing facilities allowing speedier completion of their test certificates. They access this testing through the assessor's laptop computer and can complete their practice tests in the workplace.

72. Some assessment practice among training assessors is weak, including poor planning of assessment activities. Briefings on what activities will be assessed are not clear or detailed enough. In some instances, assessors forgot to include some key knowledge questions from the NVQ unit's performance criteria. Assessors recognised that they would have to revisit units to include the missed points. Some learners have too many

incomplete units requiring only small pieces of evidence to complete. Some assessors do not respond quickly enough to changes in the workplace by adapting their assessment methods. Assessors often do not take opportunities to reinforce equality of opportunity and to link to background knowledge during the assessment process. Written work by learners and some assessors contains spelling mistakes. The management of the assessment process is too varied. Some of the assessments are too assessor-led while others involve the learners effectively. During inspection, some assessors gathered incorrect information in learners' testimonial assessments. Zodiac has already identified this weakness through internal verification and observation.

73. Employers have insufficient involvement in learners' reviews. Very often, employers' comments are missing from the learners' progress review forms and sometimes assessors fill in the comments on behalf of the employer. Most employer's comments are not meaningful and do not specifically refer to the progress the learner is making. Employers are supportive of the learner's training, but some are not fully aware of the qualification that the learner is taking or whether the learner has any recognised additional learning needs. Where an employer is involved in the progress reviews, learners feel motivated and reassured by their managers' comments. In those instances where employers are effectively involved in the progress reviews, employers provide information about future projects where the learners' involvement would be appropriate. Those employers who contribute towards learners' progress reviews are also able to identify, with the assessor and the learner, opportunities for further training and skills development.

74. The range of courses is satisfactory. Learners receive advice and guidance when they first join the programme. Individual learning plans reflect the learners' overall aims for career development and their preferred qualification. The choice of options within the framework reflects the needs of employers as well as the work of the learners. Many learners work in companies that offer appropriate resources well suited to the requirements of the NVQs.

75. Learners receive adequate literacy and numeracy skills support. They receive an initial assessment during induction to identify their literacy, numeracy and language support needs. All adult learners access online support through learndirect, while apprentices receive literacy and numeracy support from a qualified training adviser. Zodiac does not provide language support, but learners with identified needs are pointed toward the appropriate specialist support.

### **Leadership and management**

76. The area of learning is managed satisfactorily. There are monthly meetings with the management team to monitor learners' progression, and with internal verifiers to identify issues affecting learners' progress. The programme manager also meets with each training adviser every month. The internal verifiers also act as staff coaches and are involved in individual meetings if performance issues are identified. The programme manager monitors staff performance by analysing data and compares each individual against the performance of the overall team.

77. Internal communications are satisfactory. Staff have access to mobile communications devices such as personal hand-held e-mailers and laptop computers, as well as other up-to-date technology that helps timely communication. Training assessors use the communication tools effectively to update the central office with the latest

information on learners' progress.

78. The self-assessment report for retailing and wholesaling, and warehousing and distribution broadly identifies the strengths of the provision but it overstates some areas of strength. The staff involvement in the self-assessment process is adequate. However, some training assessors have a very basic knowledge of the weaknesses highlighted in the report for their own areas of learning. Some training advisers are unsure about the grade they have awarded their own areas.

79. The internal verification process is satisfactory. The schedule of internal verification ensures verification of the whole qualification at different stages. Learners' portfolios are initially verified three times during their programme, at induction, interim and exit. Feedback to the training assessors and any identified development needs are reviewed with the programme manager. The internal verifiers support staff development through coaching. They review the progress made by staff and check that improvement has taken place. Standardisation meetings take place after the team meetings, discussing changes in standards or sharing best practice on evidence gathering. However, during inspection the standards of assessment performance were inconsistent between assessors.

80. Insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity takes place in meetings with learners. Learners' knowledge of equality of opportunity is sometimes very poor and focuses mostly on the customer service experience. Some learners near to completion of their programme were unable to describe terms such as discrimination. Equality of opportunity is not reinforced at every progress review or visit. Assessors ask the learner to provide a brief answer to a broad issue. In one instance, the same topic was planned for three consecutive visits with no record of any progress made over the weeks. Inspectors identified instances when equality of opportunity was not reinforced during the assessors' observations and progress reviews. Assessors do not have a consistent approach to how they reinforce equality of opportunity with the learners. No established support materials exist for the purpose of reinforcing equality and diversity with the learners. One assessor has used their own initiative to produce a set of relevant questions to use during the learners' reviews.

## ***Hairdressing***

### *Strengths*

- good progress towards framework achievement
- good skills development
- good reinforcement of equality of opportunity

### *Weaknesses*

- insufficient knowledge development in some sessions
- weak co-ordination of learners' individual programmes
- some poor health and safety practices

## **Achievement and standards**

81. Learners make good progress towards framework achievement. Of the current intake of learners, 60 per cent have recently completed full apprenticeship frameworks on or



ahead of target by up to seven months.

82. The development of learners' hairdressing skills is good. A high ratio of trainers to learners provides detailed individual support during practical off-the-job training. A range of suitable clients is available, providing learners with assessment opportunities for their NVQ. Learners demonstrate good commercial skills and techniques that focus well on client satisfaction. Following a demonstration of a new technique by the training adviser, one learner, produced a good blow-dried style on her client.

83. External salon owners are occasionally used to demonstrate specific skills, such as finger-waving. Most learners receive effective individual training support in their salons, with some salons providing a practical training evening. Learners complete written work on a regular basis and marked work is returned to them the week following submission. Weekly attendance at the off-the-job training is good, with most learners attending as required, although learners' involvement in a broader range of activities to develop personal and life skills is more limited.

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	1	0	43	0	32
		timely	1	0	27	0	20
	2004-05	overall	2	0	40	0	29
		timely	2	0	28	0	20
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	1	0	62	0	49
		timely	1	0	38	0	30
	2004-05	overall	7	43	48	29	41
		timely	7	0	32	0	28
NVQ training for young	2003-04	overall	2	0	46	0	0
		timely	2	0	31	0	0
	2004-05	overall	1	0	47	0	0
		timely	1	0	28	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](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

### The quality of provision

84. Off-the-job training for practical hairdressing, background knowledge and key skills qualifications takes place in the subcontractor's academy every week. Background knowledge sessions engage all learners by using a variety of activities and appropriate, relevant resources in a spacious work environment. Newer learners receive some additional time and the introduction of practical tasks maintains the interest levels of all learners.

85. Training advisers carry out regular, satisfactory assessment at the academy or during visits to the salons. Assessors accurately record the well-planned assessment process.



Learners produce well-structured portfolios containing relevant evidence. Insufficient use is made of witness testimonies as additional evidence from the workplace.

86. All learners have a basic literacy and numeracy skills screening as part of their induction. A newly established monitoring system records the learners' additional needs. Individual feedback sheets for each learner record the tasks completed and actions that need to be taken.

87. Six-weekly reviews by training advisers are effective and productive. These reviews involve the employer, who is able to comments on learners' progress. Learners' targets are set and reviewed, and include detail of specific assessment or aspects of the units they need to achieve.

88. The subcontractor works closely with Connexions to attract learners onto the programme. Local salons subsequently employ the learners. The subcontractor's academy's commercial salon employs those learners without salons to support the continuation of their apprenticeship.

89. Training staff do not always take opportunities to develop learners' knowledge. Observed learning sessions were satisfactory, although some had insufficient direction, with limited instructions to the learners. For example, training advisers were observed starting and stopping a video without giving clear instructions on what tasks were to follow. Learners' knowledge and understanding are not systematically checked, and limited confirmation of learning takes place. Practical off-the-job training takes place in a commercial-style salon, with a suitable range of products available, although coverage of the theory of some practical processes was ineffective. The self-assessment report does not recognise this weakness.

90. Some health and safety practices are poor. In background knowledge sessions where new learners were testing a product's effect on cuttings of hair, the potential hazards of using bleach, such as inhalation and spillages, were not fully explained. Sterilisation and hygiene procedures were not fully enforced in some salon activities, with combs being dropped on the floor and re-used on a client's hair. Some items of smaller equipment are damaged or worn. Access to some sections of the training salon is restricted due to limited space and a raised platform area. The subcontractor does not recognise this weakness in its self-assessment report.

### **Leadership and management**

91. Reinforcement of equality of opportunity is good. During a training session, a 'racism in football' video was used well to explore these issues with the learners, and the training adviser made effective links to recent events about bullying in a local school. Learners complete questionnaires regarding sexual harassment and give knowledgeable answers to scenarios regarding integration of clients with restricted mobility or Asian clients into their salons. Good use is made of positive role models by employing staff from both genders as trainers in the salon.

92. Monthly meetings between the subcontractor and Zodiac focus on learners' progress and the implementation of quality systems. Examples include establishing visual progress monitoring boards that provide a unit-by-unit progress summary of the learners. Zodiac has provided an external hairdressing consultant as part of the quality 'health checks' that

are carried out. The organisation has recently established training session observations to support the quality improvements in the provision.

93. The subcontractor's staff participate in standardisation meetings which provide support and updating for them. Annual professional development occurs through manufacturers' workshops and seminars. Internal verification is satisfactory. Scheduled verification visits include regular observations of the assessor with useful feedback reports being produced. The internal verifier provides good support for the assessors and countersigns assessments by the candidate assessor.

94. Co-ordination of learners' individual programmes is weak. Learners' data and information are inconsistent and not fully updated. Some records of learners who have left the programme are still on file. Of the five new starters in the later part of the previous year, three have already left. Some learners' start and end dates vary on different documents. Integration of new learners into sessions is effective. Some receive an individual induction which is not memorable. Employers were not fully aware of the off-the-job learning plan, and some are unsure of the NVQ unit content. Learners have a list of targets for achievements of assessments during their programme, but are only informed on a weekly basis of background knowledge topics that they will be covering in the off-the-job training. The self-assessment report partly recognises this weakness.

**Business administration and law****Grade 3**

<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>
<b>Administration</b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	128	3
Train to Gain	48	2
<b>Customer service</b>		<b>3</b>
Apprenticeships for young people	169	3
Train to Gain	40	2

95. Zodiac delivers programmes in administration at levels 2 and 3. Learners taking apprenticeships are scheduled to complete in 11 months, while learners on advanced apprenticeships are scheduled to complete in two years. Learners are employed in large and medium companies in Tyneside, Wearside, Northumberland and Durham. At the time of the inspection, Zodiac had 52 advanced apprentices and 49 apprentices. In addition, there were eight adult learners on Train to Gain programmes.

96. Zodiac also delivers programmes in business management covering levels 2 and 3. Learners taking apprenticeship programmes in team leading are scheduled to complete in 10 months while learners on advanced apprenticeships in management programmes are scheduled to complete in 18 months. At the time of the inspection, Zodiac had nine advanced apprentices and 18 apprentices in business management. In addition, there were 40 adult learners on Train to Gain programmes.

97. Because of the smaller numbers of management learners and the fact that both programmes are managed by the same staff using the same systems and procedures, inspection of both areas is reported under the administration area.

98. Zodiac has 209 customer service learners. There are 54 advanced apprentices and 115 apprentices. Forty learners are on the Train to Gain programme working towards NVQs in customer service at level 2 or 3. Learners are located in the areas of Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Tees Valley and West Yorkshire. Most learners are recruited by training advisers directly through employers. A small number of learners were recruited through Connexions or learndirect and referred to Zodiac.

99. Learners work in a range of organisations, including retail, leisure, hospitality, call centre and office environments. They either attend their local learning centre or receive individual tuition in the workplace for technical certificate and key skills training and testing. Training advisers visit learners in the workplace every two to four weeks, for individual training, assessment and progress reviews. Two programme managers, based in Sunderland and Seaham and one programme co-ordinator based in West Yorkshire, manage the customer service provision. Most of Zodiac's assessors and all of its internal verifiers are involved in the customer service programme.

## **Administration**

### *Strengths*

- frequent and supportive visits from training advisers
- good resources to support learners

### *Weaknesses*

- poor framework success rates for 2004-05

## **Achievement and standards**

100. Overall framework success rates for advanced apprentices in administration in 2004-05 were poor and well below national averages for framework achievement. In 2004-05 there had been a decline in framework success rates from the previous year. Timely success rates were lower than those for overall success, reflecting a similar trend in national rates. Data available for 2005-06 so far shows that learners are making satisfactory progress towards completing their framework. NVQ success rates for the year 2004-05 were significantly higher than framework success and were higher than national NVQ rates.

101. Overall framework success rates for apprentices in administration in 2004-05 are better than for advanced apprentices but remained below national averages, as did NVQ success rates. Timely success rates for administration apprentices were significantly below national averages and poor overall. As is the case with advanced apprentices, data available for the year to date in 2005-06 indicates that learners are now making satisfactory progress.

102. No advanced apprentice completed their framework in business management in 2004-05. In 2003-04, framework success rates had been close to national averages. Data available for 2005-06 to date shows that the trend for success rates is not one of significant improvement, with overall rates continuing to be unsatisfactory. NVQ success rates for the year 2004-05 were appreciably higher than framework success rates but remained lower than national NVQ rates.

103. Zodiac has recognised this significant weakness and has taken steps to rectify it. Learners are now able to attend classes at a local college of further education to support their acquisition of an externally accredited qualification in leadership and management, linked to the framework for the advanced apprenticeship.

104. Zodiac has introduced a level 2 NVQ in team leading for the first time in the 2005-06 contract year. Fifty adult learners under Train to Gain funding have commenced learning on this programme. Data available for the year to date shows a trend of around three-quarters of current learners achieving their qualification.

105. The quality of work now being produced by learners on apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships, or working towards Train to Gain qualifications, is good. Many learners are employed in major local companies and are able to provide a good standard of written and computer-based evidence for their portfolios. Some apprentices are making good progress and are likely to achieve their qualifications some time ahead of

their scheduled dates.

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	44	52	49	34	28
		timely	41	32	30	22	16
	2004-05	overall	37	68	51	22	34
		timely	39	51	34	18	22
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	108	52	54	36	41
		timely	102	9	24	5	18
	2004-05	overall	145	55	57	43	48
		timely	158	22	33	19	28
NVQ training for young	2003-04	overall	17	47	40	0	0
		timely	15	47	29	0	0
	2004-05	overall	1	100	52	0	0
		timely	3	67	41	0	0
Adult training (long courses)	2003-04	overall	6	50		0	
		timely	13	0		0	
	2004-05	overall	8	87		0	
		timely	1	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](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

### The quality of provision

106. Learners benefit from frequent and supportive visits from their training advisers. A range of individual training sessions and assessments takes place approximately every two to three weeks, with the option to increase the frequency if necessary. Progress reviews take place at every visit with actions agreed for the learner to achieve, helping to keep the learner focused. Training advisers have very good knowledge and understanding of the individual workplaces which enables them to respond quickly if problems arise. Learners and their employers express appreciation for the accessibility of their training advisers, who can be contacted by e-mail and mobile telephone.

107. Training advisers have access to a good range of resources to support learners in the workplace. Zodiac's staff have developed a diverse range of materials to support learning sessions which are usually delivered on an individual basis. Key skills support is offered using a wide variety of training materials linked to the training needs identified by initial assessment. Good use is made of the internet to access materials to assist in preparation for both the NVQ and the technical certificate test. For example, learners searched for current legislation with regard to the Sale of Goods Act 1979 so that they could answer questions in a mock test. In an enjoyable individual session based on organisational structure, an interactive game was used to illustrate how organisations are formed into different departments and divisions. Training advisers often identify and deliver additional

training in the workplace. For example, an employer was able to request additional telephone training for an apprentice. Another training adviser arranged appraisal training for a team-leading learner to meet immediate company needs. Carefully negotiated project work ensures that there is a benefit for both the learner and the employer.

108. Zodiac has provided digital voice recorders and integrated cameras for training advisers to use as an assessment aid and to improve the time management of assessment visits. For example, professional discussion can be recorded and stored on file, and observation evidence can be dictated rather than hand-written. Staff have been given electronic communication aids to enable them to update learners' files remotely from the workplace.

109. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Assessors use a diverse range of methods, including direct observation, product evidence, professional discussion and personal statements. There is effective use of witness statements to provide evidence that competence has been demonstrated in the workplace. Portfolios are organised and presented well.

110. Employers' engagement is satisfactory. Many employers have been active in seeking the services of Zodiac to offer a programme of training and development to staff. Training advisers take effective steps to ensure that employers are kept informed of learners' progress, and most employers are involved in the review process. Most employers meet the training adviser at the end of the session to sign the review document and are invited to add comment.

### **Leadership and management**

111. Management of this part of the area of learning is satisfactory. Staff share best practice at the regular team meetings. Internal verifiers meet with assessors on a monthly basis and hold regular standardisation meetings. The internal verification system has been adapted well to offer a network of support to training advisers through regular accompanied visits to the workplace. The effective use of electronic communication aids for all training staff has provided an improved means of communication, giving them access to e-mail without the need to travel to one of the main offices.

112. The self-assessment report reflects the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. However, the report regards as strengths a number of areas that were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Staff have been involved in the development of the self-assessment report. As a result of the strengths and weaknesses and improvements identified in the self-assessment, the structure of the organisation was changed to focus more on the area of learning.

### **Customer service**

#### *Strengths*

- good achievement by Train to Gain learners
- very regular and effective support from training advisers
- good-quality resources
- good aspects of management

### *Weaknesses*

- poor success rates in 2004-05
- some ineffective initial assessment
- insufficient focus on learners' overall development in progress reviews

### **Achievement and standards**

113. Achievement rates by Train to Gain learners are good and improving. Train to Gain learners make good progress with their NVQ and enjoy the opportunity to gain qualifications. Some Train to Gain learners have been out of education for a considerable time and are motivated to continue their learning after their current programme.

114. Zodiac's apprentice and advanced apprentice qualification success rates declined in 2004-05, and are poor, a weakness recognised in self-assessment. On both of these programmes, the framework success rates and NVQ achievement rates in 2004-05 are lower than the national rate. Zodiac's qualification success rates for advanced apprentices are significantly below the national rates in 2003-04 and 2004-05. There is too large a gap between the achievement of NVQs and the full framework, which worsened on the advanced apprenticeship in 2004-05. For some learners, aspects of the framework, like the employment rights and responsibilities induction checklist and technical certificate, are completed at the end of their programme. Zodiac's own data shows an improvement in qualification success rates for 2005-06, which are satisfactory. Learners are now encouraged to complete their programmes early, and 36 learners who were anticipated to complete in 2006-07 have already completed all aspects of their framework.

115. Some of the level 3 learners' work is of a very good standard. These learners are producing work and proposing improvements that are highly relevant to the workplace. Level 2 learners' work is satisfactory, and many learners complete the NVQ very quickly and with ease. Learners develop a better understanding of the principles of customer service and their own organisations' policies and procedures through their learning programme. Learners' portfolios are generally satisfactory, although there is an over reliance on written work and statements.



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	56	46	41	29	23
		timely	51	35	27	25	14
	2004-05	overall	74	31	40	10	18
		timely	81	30	30	41	32
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	160	58	46	41	32
		timely	164	29	24	16	16
	2004-05	overall	222	50	54	32	41
		timely	221	40	36	27	27
NVQ training for young	2003-04	overall	18	39	55	0	0
		timely	17	29	44	0	0
	2004-05	overall	2	50	59	0	0
		timely	2	0	48	0	0
Adult training (long courses)	2003-04	overall	44	55		0	
		timely	133	26		0	
	2004-05	overall	105	89		0	
		timely	18	61		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](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

### The quality of provision

116. Learners are visited regularly by their training advisers, often every two or three weeks. Most learners are making good progress. The quality of short-term target-setting and reviewing is very effective. Training advisers' visits are very flexible, with a suitable mix of training, assessment and support to meet learners' needs. Learners receive good practical support from their training advisers. Training advisers are very knowledgeable about the workplace and have a good understanding of the work setting, enabling appropriate identification of assessment opportunities. One training adviser received individual training from an employer to increase the quality and relevance of the support for the learner.

117. Training advisers have developed a wide range of training resources for learners and employers. Resources are very specific to the customer service context and are well linked into workplace scenarios. During group off-the-job training sessions, training advisers use a variety of learning resources effectively. Training advisers make good use of technology in assessment, including the use of digital voice recorders to gather assessment evidence more easily. Twenty-four learners are benefiting from using an electronic NVQ system, speeding up the process of submitting evidence and receiving feedback. Improved electronic communication between training advisers and the head office has made the data held about each learner more up to date.

118. The quality of individual and group off-the-job training is satisfactory. In the best sessions, the training advisers make good use of their knowledge of both the company



and the learner to contextualise the NVQ. Learners are fully involved in the learning sessions. Knowledge is checked frequently. In many individual learning sessions, training is insufficiently well planned. Some of the training delivery is confused, with learners struggling to understand concepts. Insufficient adaptation is made to resources used in the customer service off-the-job training sessions to meet the learners' identified individual needs, such as dyslexia. Attendance at some group off-the-job technical certificate training is very poor.

119. Zodiac has inconsistent approaches to linking on- and off-the-job training. In some workplaces, the links are very well made and recorded. Good use is made in the NVQ of evidence from in-house company training. However, in a few organisations that provide very good training, there is no link between that training and the NVQ. Managers are rarely involved in assessment planning to ensure on- and off-the-job training opportunities are discussed at an early stage in the programme.

120. Most assessment is planned well with an appropriate range of assessment methods. Learners are fully involved in the assessment process. They enjoy the opportunities they have for submitting evidence of observation, professional discussion and answers to pre-set questions using the digital voice recorders. Some training advisers duplicate written assessments when using digital voice recorders, adding little value to the existing paper-based evidence in the learners' portfolio. Portfolios have sufficient evidence to meet the requirements of the qualification. Some witness testimonies are poorly written and give insufficient detail about what the learner has achieved.

121. Arrangements for information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. During initial advice and guidance sessions, training advisers hold a thorough discussion with the learner and manager to ensure the qualification subject meets their needs. Learners' induction is spread over several weeks and is adequate. For some learners, induction isn't particularly memorable. Learners are generally well prepared to start their programme.

122. Literacy, numeracy and language support is effective for learners with identified needs. Once a learner has an identified support need, they sit a recognised diagnostic assessment. Learners at entry levels 1 and 2 receive additional learning support from a qualified skills for life training adviser. Training advisers give satisfactory individual training for key skills support needs.

123. A high proportion of learners have GCSEs at grade C or above or equivalent qualifications, and are not initially assessed for their literacy, numeracy or language skills. Where learners have been initially assessed, the results are not always communicated to training advisers or learners. Within the past four months, where training advisers have been carrying out their own initial assessment, this initial assessment has improved.

124. The results of initial assessment are not always used sufficiently when planning the learners' NVQ or technical certificate training. Training advisers don't always apply Zodiac's policies for initial assessment consistently. Where learners are receiving support from the training advisers, this is not always recorded formally.

125. Some apprentices are on too low a level of qualification for their prior experience, qualifications or job role. Several learners have already completed an apprenticeship before they start their customer service apprenticeship. Learners complete an assessment

of their competence in the workplace before enrolment, but usually this is only at level 2. Most learners are fully competent in all or most of the requirements of the level 2 NVQ at this stage, but are still enrolled on the programme. Some of these learners achieve very quickly. These learners have too little challenge and insufficient development opportunities through their programme.

126. Although learners' progress reviews are very frequent, there is too much focus on the achievement of qualifications rather than the learners' overall progress and development. The various aspects of the learners' programme, including development at work and literacy and numeracy support, are not reviewed as a whole through a formal process. Learners have insufficient long-term or medium-term action plans. Some learners are unclear about when key skills assessment and technical certificate exams will take place. Progress reviews are not always a three-way discussion between the learner, manager and training adviser.

### **Leadership and management**

127. Many aspects of the management of customer service programmes are good, and have improved through the restructuring of the organisation to be more focused on areas of learning. Communication has improved and is effective. Zodiac has good support mechanisms for staff, particularly when staff take learning and development qualifications or have an identified development need. Staff are appropriately qualified and many are now working towards teaching qualifications. Industrial experience is routinely updated. Staff make good use of data in monthly meetings where training advisers' and learners' performance is discussed. In the current year, there are early indications of an improving trend in success rates and rates of learners' progress. Zodiac has improved the initial advice and guidance process. Learners are now signed up for programmes by training advisers with customer service experience, rather than the recruitment team.

128. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and their rights and responsibilities. While some learners receive focused training on equality and diversity, others receive little training and are often guided to websites to research the subject in their own time. There is insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity with learners during the review process. Zodiac's training assessors have worked productively with managers and learners when issues have occurred at work, to resolve the situation to all parties' satisfaction.

129. Internal verification is satisfactory. Internal verifiers carry out regular and thorough observations of assessors, resulting in appropriate feedback and support. The process includes frequent interviews of learners. Some assessment inconsistencies are not yet being rectified by internal verification. Best practice is shared through regular standardisation meetings. Employers' and learners' feedback is collected by the customer services team and shared with training advisers. Systems for observing the quality of teaching and learning are insufficiently thorough in improving the quality of the learners' experience, tending to be more descriptive and focusing on completion of paperwork.

130. Self-assessment is inaccurate for customer service, and only recognises one weakness of the poor achievement rates. Most of the areas identified as strengths in the self-assessment are no more than normal practice.

