

INSPECTION REPORT

North West Training Council

28 September 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

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

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

Pre-inspection analysis

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

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

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

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

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

Overall effectiveness

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grading

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

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

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North West Training Council

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. North West Training Council (NWTC) is a group training association with 350 member companies, mainly in Merseyside, South Lancashire and Cheshire. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity, and is governed by a board of trustee directors. The directors are unpaid and drawn mainly from senior executives of member companies. NWTC was established in 1963 to deal with a shortage of engineering apprentices in Merseyside. It has since broadened its range of training programmes to include motor vehicle engineering and construction. The company's mission statement is 'to provide the very best learning, education and assessment by a process of continuous improvement and a commitment to quality.'

2. The company employs 65 permanent full-time staff. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the chief executive, and he is supported by a team of eight senior managers. Learners are referred by the Connexions service or by employers. Training is funded by Merseyside and Lancashire Learning and Skills Councils (LSC). NWTC subcontracts assessment and off-the-job training for its motor vehicle learners to Liverpool Community College. NWTC holds a contract from Joint Training Limited (JTL), another training provider, for the delivery of key skills and technical certificate training for 23 construction learners. NWTC also offers a range of commercial management, and health and safety courses. Government-funded training accounts for 73 per cent of NWTC's business.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** More specifically, training in engineering and manufacturing technologies is good and training in construction, planning and the built environment is satisfactory. Leadership and management, quality improvement, and equality of opportunity are satisfactory.

4. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is critical and inclusive. The company makes good use of learners' and employers' feedback to make judgements about the quality of the provision. It identified most of the key strengths and some of the weaknesses that the inspectors found, but overstated some strengths in leadership and management. The quality improvement plan is comprehensive and provides clear timescales and responsibilities for improving the provision. Inspection grades for engineering, construction and equality of opportunity matched those in the self-assessment report, but inspectors gave lower grades for leadership and management and quality improvement.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** Engineering provision is now good. Success rates for apprentices in engineering and construction are satisfactory and improving, but for advanced apprentices in construction they are poor. The proportion of learners who complete their programme within the planned timescale is too low. Some weaknesses identified during previous inspections have been successfully tackled, particularly in engineering. Overall inspection grades are

similar to those given at the previous inspection and reinspection.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR NORTH WEST TRAINING COUNCIL:

- improve overall and timely success rates for apprentices
- improve capacity to evaluate the quality of key processes in all areas of learning
- raise awareness of equality and diversity among learners and staff
- broaden recruitment of learners to reflect local diversity
- provide opportunities for learners to progress onto level 3 programmes in construction

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			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Engineering		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	240	2	
Other government-funded provision	119	2	

Construction, planning and the built environment			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Construction crafts		3	
Apprenticeships for young people	295	3	
Other government-funded provision	41	None	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Inspectors reported on and graded NWTC's work-based learning in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and construction, planning and the built environment. A contributory grade was given for learners on the 'higher workforce' programme in engineering. 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 arrangements.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	47
Number of staff interviewed	25
Number of employers interviewed	13
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	17
Number of visits	1

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- very effective relationships with a wide range of employers
- good key skills strategy
- comprehensive and effective quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- late implementation of strategies to improve learners' progress on apprenticeship programmes
- insufficient use of observation for continuous improvement

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Strengths

- good on- and off-the-job training
- good recording and monitoring of learners' progress
- good progression for learners
- very effective learner support
- good management of programmes

Weaknesses

- some slow progress for advanced apprentices towards framework completion

Construction, planning and the built environment

Strengths

- wide range of provision
- very effective initiatives to improve apprenticeship programmes
- good use of data to monitor learners' progress

Weaknesses

- poor advanced apprenticeship success rates
- insufficient progression opportunities
- insufficient support for learners' transition into work

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT NORTH WEST TRAINING COUNCIL:

- 'the fact that I'm learning and developing a skill'
- the very supportive and understanding assessors
- being treated as an adult
- 'able to develop own confidence'
- 'excellent support from my employer and assessor'
- being given a chance to develop
- the very knowledgeable staff
- 'food in the canteen is good'
- 'reviews are useful - I feel like I am progressing well'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK NORTH WEST TRAINING COUNCIL COULD IMPROVE:

- 'long days for BTEC programmes - 11 hours'
- 'knowledge questions for the national vocational qualification (NVQ) are difficult to interpret'
- maintenance of the tools
- the amount of help given with finding a job
- 'I would like to get a level 3 qualification'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- very effective relationships with a wide range of employers
- good key skills strategy
- comprehensive and effective quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- late implementation of strategies to improve learners' progress on apprenticeship programmes
- insufficient use of observation for continuous improvement

7. NWTC has very effective relationships with a wide range of small and medium-sized engineering and construction employers. Learners benefit from the company's good reputation with employers, and are carefully matched to the one that is most appropriate for them. There is a thorough process to ensure that learners' interests, skills and aptitudes are identified at an early stage, and are used to find the workplace that will suit them best. Learners in all locations work in fully developed roles for their employer and demonstrate good standards of workplace performance. Employers value the help and support provided by NWTC'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 employers or been given enhanced roles, which they value. NWTC's staff regularly meet employers to share information about their learners' progress.

8. Managers have implemented a good strategy for supporting and developing learners' key skills. The company identified the late introduction of key skills into apprenticeship training as a significant factor in slow framework achievement. All learners now receive an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language skills to ensure that they study each key skill at the level most appropriate for them. Learners now study key skills at the beginning of their training and are required to complete all elements during the first year. Key skills teaching is effectively integrated with vocational training during off-the-job training sessions. Overall success rates for learners have improved over the past three years and are now generally satisfactory.

9. NWTC is committed to promoting staff training and development, and these areas are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced, and most either hold a recognised teaching qualification or are working towards one. Attendance at training and development events is satisfactory. Appraisals are tied in with the company's business plan and learners' needs. New staff are supported well. NWTC holds the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

10. The chief executive provides clear strategic direction and staff at all levels have a good understanding of this. NWTC 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 Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

11. The company produces accurate and reliable data on learner success rates. This is used during staff meetings to monitor the company's performance and the progress of individual learners. The company has a well-established system for monitoring learners' progress which enables managers to identify the number of units and the proportion of the qualification that learners have completed. Progress towards achievement of key skills units and technical certificates is carefully recorded and kept up to date. Managers make good use of this information to identify learners who are making slow progress and take action to improve their performance.

12. Internal communications are good. The company holds effective management meetings every month to consider all aspects of its performance. Managers prepare detailed reports on different aspects of the company's work, such as quality improvement, financial performance and learners' success rates. There are regular cross-sector meetings to share good practice between different engineering and construction trades. Vocational teams meet regularly to consider learners' progress and to standardise assessment practice. Informal communication is strong, and staff demonstrate a good team spirit. Minutes are recorded and promptly circulated to all staff. Actions, timescales and responsibilities are clearly identified.

13. The management of learning support is satisfactory. Apprentices receive an initial assessment during their induction, and this is used to agree an individual action plan and appropriate targets with learners and tutors during off-the-job training sessions. The key skills tutor provides additional literacy and numeracy support for learners who need it.

14. NWTC has only recently implemented initiatives to improve the progress of apprentices. This is recognised in the self-assessment report as a weakness. Though overall success rates have improved for all learners and are now generally satisfactory, few learners complete their framework within the planned period. In 2004-05, only 11 per cent of leavers completed within the planned period, compared with a national average of 22 per cent. Provisional data for 2005-06 indicates that timely completions have improved, but they are still low. To try to remedy this, NWTC has significantly improved the arrangements for teaching key skills and technical certificates, and learners' progress is now carefully recorded and monitored. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

15. NWTC celebrates learners' achievement well. Candidates for the apprentice of the year are rewarded with the opportunity of a study visit to Cologne as part of an annual exchange arrangement. Reports written by the successful apprentices show that learners value this recognition and the understanding they gain of other cultures.

16. NWTC has satisfactory policies and procedures for the prevention of bullying and harassment, and for dealing with complaints, child protection, and learners with disabilities. These formal arrangements are supported by less formal arrangements such as a dedicated helpline, on which learners can report problems. Trainers provide good individual support for learners who need extra help to develop their literacy and

numeracy. This informal and flexible arrangement takes good account of the reluctance some learners may feel in seeking help. However, there is insufficient reference in the company's equality policy to the most recent legislation and to how equality of opportunity will be reinforced during training. For example, there is little reference to different learning styles, or to the promotion of equality of opportunity through teaching materials and resources.

17. Most staff attended a recent equality and diversity awareness-raising event. NWTC's managers have a good understanding of the social and ethnic composition of the local community and of patterns of residence. About half of the learners live in the most deprived areas of Merseyside. However, there are currently no minority ethnic learners and no female learners. NWTC recognises the need to make its provision more accessible to these groups and has set challenging targets for the recruitment of women and members of minority ethnic groups. It is working with a local consortium of learning providers to develop alternative routes to progression for minority ethnic learners, and has plans to improve its marketing by advertising programmes in minority ethnic publications.

18. NWTC includes equality of opportunity in its induction and progress review arrangements. It has developed a number of questions to be used during progress reviews to reinforce the importance of equality and diversity. However, these are superficial and do not encourage learners to reflect on equality and diversity issues.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

19. NWTC has developed comprehensive and effective quality improvement arrangements. The organisation has begun to move away from practices that do little more than ensure compliance with procedures, and to focus on arrangements to improve the learners' experience. These arrangements cover 24 separate quality improvement procedures, which are reviewed annually. They focus well on the learning process and cover induction, progress reviews and training. An annual calendar clearly shows what actions should be taken, and when. Progress against this plan is monitored and recorded by the quality manager. There are good arrangements for reporting the progress to managers. The system draws on feedback from employers, new and completing learners, using telephone surveys of early leavers and interviews with current learners. The procedures work well to identify problems and improve quality. NWTC has recently made improvements to the training environment, learning resources, target-setting and the monitoring of learners' progress.

20. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. The quality of subcontractors' provision is adequately monitored by means of regular meetings with appropriate staff and routine checks on the subcontractors' own quality assurance system.

21. Managers make good use of management information to monitor success rates, and trends and performance in recruitment. Reports prepared for middle and senior management meetings make routine use of clearly presented statistical information, to help managers judge how much improvement the organisation has made. For example, the quality manager has devised an innovative system to quantify trends in external verifiers' reports. Using this analysis, he is able to produce a graph that illustrates how improvements identified through external verification have been made or sustained.

22. NWTC makes insufficient use of observation to bring about continuous improvement.

It has a well-established scheme for the observation of teaching and learning, and the feedback given to staff is helpful. Most sessions are judged to be satisfactory or better, but actions for improvement are rarely identified. The system is not raising the quality of performance to better than satisfactory. Moderation arrangements, to ensure that consistent judgements are made during the observation process, are inadequate. A procedure for the observation of induction sessions has recently been introduced. Although only a few have been carried out so far, these observations do identify actions for improvement. The quality improvement system does not currently include a scheme for observing the teaching of key skills.

23. NWTC's self-assessment is a rigorous and inclusive process, which draws on an appropriate range of evidence. A comprehensive quality improvement plan is closely tied in with judgements in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report accurately identifies most of the strengths and some of the weaknesses found by inspectors. Inspection grades for engineering, construction and equality of opportunity match those in the self-assessment report, but inspectors gave lower grades for leadership and management, and quality improvement.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Engineering		2
Apprenticeships for young people	240	2
Other government-funded provision	119	2

24. NWTC provides training and assessment for 195 learners on engineering programmes and 45 on motor vehicle programmes. All learners are working towards an NVQ at level 2 or 3. In engineering, there are 164 advanced apprentices and 31 apprentices. In motor vehicle, there are 20 advanced apprentices and 25 apprentices. Most apprenticeships take 24 months to complete and advanced apprenticeships take 48 months.

25. Learners on apprenticeship programmes are referred by Connexions or by their employers, or recruited directly from schools. NWTC carries out initial assessments to identify their additional support needs. All engineering learners attend the NWTC training centre on block or day release. They work towards an NVQ at level 2 in performing engineering operations, key skills at level 2 and the technical certificate. A team of assessors visits the workplace every six to eight weeks to carry out assessment and progress reviews.

26. Motor vehicle learners attend one of five local colleges of further education to work on their key skills at level 1 and 2 and the technical certificate. Those on motor vehicle maintenance programmes are visited in the workplace every four to six weeks by an NWTC assessor for assessment and review. Learners on motor vehicle body repair programmes are assessed in the workplace by college assessors. The NWTC assessor carries out progress reviews for motor vehicle body repair learners.

27. Since December 2004, the company has provided a 'higher workforce' programme to enable 119 employed adults to gain an NVQ in engineering. Of these, 97 are following engineering NVQs at level 3 and 22 at level 2. Most learners complete their programme in 12 months. Learners are referred to NWTC by their employer. They attend NWTC's training centre for one day each week for off-the-job training. Assessors visit them in their workplace every four weeks to carry out progress reviews and NVQ assessment.

Strengths

- good on- and off-the-job training
- good recording and monitoring of learners' progress
- good progression for learners
- very effective learner support
- good management of programmes

Weaknesses

- some slow progress for advanced apprentices towards framework completion

Achievement and standards

28. Learners acquire appropriate practical skills in the workplace and quickly gain sufficient competence to work with minimum supervision on demanding tasks. Learners work to very high standards on computer numerically controlled machining operations in a local company that manufactures precision aircraft components. Motor vehicle learners carry out complex vehicle maintenance and repair operations to a high standard with minimum supervision.

29. Success rates on advanced apprenticeship engineering programmes are satisfactory and improving. Success rates in 2003-04 were above the national average at 52 per cent, but they declined to 40 per cent in 2004-05, which is slightly below the national average. Advanced apprenticeship success rates for 2005-06 are improving, and provisional data from the funding body for 2005-06 shows that they are generally satisfactory.

30. Apprenticeship success rates are generally satisfactory. The success rates in 2003-04 and 2004-05 were 20 per cent and 34 per cent respectively, compared with national averages of 32 per cent and 41 per cent. Provisional funding body data for 2005-06 shows a considerable improvement in success rates to around 60 per cent.

31. Despite the recent improvement in framework achievement rates, there is a group of about 30 advanced apprentices who continue to make slow progress, and have not achieved their framework within the planned period. NWTC's staff are aware of this problem and have begun to work with these learners to help them achieve.

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	77	65	57	52	46
		timely	76	32	34	21	27
	2004-05	overall	97	55	57	40	45
		timely	95	19	33	13	25
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	30	53	48	20	32
		timely	37	38	22	19	13
	2004-05	overall	50	46	52	34	41
		timely	63	24	27	16	19

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

The quality of provision

32. Training is good, both on and off the job. Learners receive a thorough induction that includes good instruction in health and safety. Most teaching is good. Lessons are

planned well and learning outcomes are shared and discussed with learners. Lesson plans and schemes of work are comprehensive. In the better lessons, tutors use a wide variety of teaching methods. They make good use of focused discussions and challenging group work activities. In practical sessions, they set high standards and provide good support to help learners achieve. Most employers have a well-developed and co-ordinated on-the-job learning plan to help learners develop and practise their skills.

33. Recording and monitoring of learners' progress is good. Records of team meetings include actions to improve the progress of those identified as falling behind. Learners' progress is carefully monitored by means of thorough and well-documented reviews every six weeks. Learners' progress is carefully checked against previous action points, and monitored against their individual learning plan. Learners are set challenging targets that help them to achieve their qualification. A newly introduced progress document is updated regularly to show progress towards the framework in relation to planned timescales. Learners and staff have copies of these records. Staff also have a detailed chart that accurately shows the progress of each learner. This enables them to quickly identify those who are making slow progress, and to provide them with extra help.

34. Learners at all levels are making good progress, and are aware of the progression opportunities available to them. Many apprentices progress on to advanced apprenticeship programmes. NWTC and employers actively encourage learners to study for a higher level NVQ after they have completed their initial qualification. Some employers provide financial support for learners to study additional or higher qualifications, including Higher National Diplomas and Higher National Certificates in engineering. Sixty-six per cent of the current learners are studying for higher qualifications.

35. NWTC provides very effective support for learners. Learners are carefully matched to courses which suit their ability and aptitude. Each learner's programme is individually tailored to meet their needs. The level 2 NVQ in performing engineering operations can be delivered at a variety of times to suit learners' shifts and work patterns. Attendance can be either day release, sandwich or block release. Learners are supplied with the mobile telephone numbers of the senior training officers, and are encouraged to contact them whenever they encounter personal or work-related problems. Employers also provide very good support for learners. They take a keen interest in learners' progress, and actively identify opportunities for learners to carry out particular tasks to enhance their practical engineering skills and to support their apprenticeship studies.

36. Initial assessment of learners' skills is satisfactory. NWTC uses dedicated software tools to identify learners' occupational suitability and potential. A separate assessment of learners' key skills abilities is also carried out. There is a dedicated key skills department that offers effective support and assistance to learners. Support for learners with additional needs is satisfactory.

37. Assessment is satisfactory. Learners' portfolios of evidence are thorough. They contain work that has been compiled to a high standard. Assessment plans and supporting paperwork are detailed and carefully prepared. Portfolios include a wide range of diverse evidence, such as assessor observations, photographic evidence, job sheets and learners' written explanations of work they have carried out. There is also comprehensive job paperwork that is carefully completed to demonstrate knowledge and understanding. This is supported by verified witness testimonies. Assessors regularly ask

learners relevant background knowledge questions to support portfolio evidence.

38. Advice and guidance are satisfactory. Learners receive good information at the beginning of their programme about career and progression opportunities in the engineering industry. This is reinforced during monitoring visits and after learners complete their qualification. Employers are fully involved in guiding and supporting learners and they take a genuine interest in learners' development and progression.

Leadership and management

39. The management of programmes is good. NWTC has implemented a range of effective strategies to improve learners' achievement. This includes the appointment of a key skills co-ordinator, the decision to teach key skills early in the learners' programme, and the improved monitoring of learners' progress. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive effect on success rates. The engineering department has strong links with a wide range of companies providing good training and employment opportunities. Employers are very supportive of the programme and work closely with NWTC. The employers appreciate the professional way the programmes are managed and speak highly of NWTC. The company has introduced thorough quality assurance procedures to monitor the quality of provision by employers.

40. Communications are good. There are monthly staff meetings and separate additional meetings of training officers, instructors, internal verifiers and assessors. Meetings are recorded and contain clear action points. There is regular and frequent contact with employers.

41. Tutors and assessors are well qualified and occupationally experienced. Staff turnover is low. Staff have annual appraisals during which objectives are agreed and personal training needs identified. All staff receive equal opportunities refresher training.

42. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work. They are familiar with the procedure for making a complaint about unfair treatment. Information about equality and diversity is discussed during induction, but learners do not recall this information well. Discussion of equality of opportunity during progress reviews is superficial.

43. Self-assessment is an inclusive and rigorous process. The company correctly identified most of the key strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors. The self-assessment grade matched the grade given by inspectors.

Construction, planning and the built environment**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Construction crafts		3
Apprenticeships for young people	295	3
Other government-funded provision	41	None

44. NWTC provides training in construction trades for 336 learners. Most of the 144 advanced apprentices are on electrical installation programmes. Of the 151 apprentices, there are 24 bricklayers, 53 plumbers, 49 site carpenters, 20 plasterers and a small number of floor tilers, painters and cabinet makers. There are also 41 employed learners following an NVQ-only programme at level 2 in a range of construction trades. NWTC also provides practical joinery skills training for a small group of 14- to 16-year-old school pupils who attend the training centre for one day each week. NWTC subcontracts with JTL for the training and assessment of 23 level 2 apprentices in key skills and technical certificates. Learners are referred by Connexions, employers or directly recruited by NWTC. Training officers carry out progress reviews in the workplace every three months. Off-the-job training, key skills and the background knowledge for technical certificates are taught at NWTC's training centre. The provision is managed by a full-time training manager, assisted by four training officers, four instructors and six part-time assessors.

Strengths

- wide range of provision
- very effective initiatives to improve apprenticeship programmes
- good use of data to monitor learners' progress

Weaknesses

- poor advanced apprenticeship success rates
- insufficient progression opportunities
- insufficient support for learners' transition into work

Achievement and standards

45. Skills development at work is satisfactory. Workplace supervisors provide good coaching and support for learners. However, they are not sufficiently involved in assessments or progress reviews. Skills development in the training centres is satisfactory. Full-time, intermediate construction award learners develop skills quickly. Their programmes are generally well managed and learners are fully engaged and keen to progress.

46. Classroom and workshop sessions all have written programmes of learning and detailed records of learners' progress. Useful wall charts showing learners' progress towards their qualification are used to keep them informed of work completed and work still to be done. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory. They are all well organised and the best examples contain a good range of evidence gathered by the learners. In the better teaching sessions, tutors effectively use questioning to check learners' understanding. In

the less effective sessions, tutors do not correct basic errors made by learners.

47. Success rates for apprentices are satisfactory. They declined from 33 per cent in 2003-04 to 17 per cent in 2004-05. NWTC then introduced a number of changes to improve them, and provisional data from the funding body for 2005-06 shows an upward trend. Current learners are making satisfactory progress.

48. Success rates for advanced apprentices are poor. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, the success rates were at or below national averages at 29 per cent and 30 per cent respectively. Of the learners who completed the programme in these years, few did so within the planned period of study. There has been some improvement in success rates in 2005-06, but they remain low.

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	38	34	51	29	26
		timely	45	4	36	2	17
	2004-05	overall	47	32	55	30	40
		timely	59	15	33	14	22
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	9	33	42	33	25
		timely	12	0	17	0	9
	2004-05	overall	41	24	52	17	39
		timely	69	6	20	1	13

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

49. NWTC provides level 2 construction training across a very wide range of programmes. Learners follow programmes in electrical installation, bricklaying, plumbing, heating engineering, site carpentry and plastering. Some are training in floor tiling, cabinet making, and painting and decorating. NWTC also provides level 3 advanced apprenticeship training for electricians, security installation technicians and heating engineers. Many local and regional training providers no longer provide training in some of these craft areas. NWTC has developed good links with local colleges to maintain its capacity to offer this range of provision.

50. NWTC has well-established relationships with a wide range of small, medium and large construction companies. These companies employ apprentices or provide work experience and assessment opportunities for learners who are unable to gain the necessary range of skills development and assessment opportunities with their own employer. This aspect of the training programme is very well managed and particularly effective in providing learners with opportunities to develop their skills. NWTC's tutors and training officers closely monitor learners' progress. They work hard as a team to link the off-the-job training with the learners' work patterns to provide assessors with a useful

range of work-based evidence for assessment.

51. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. All new applicants receive an individual interview during which they are provided with information and guidance about the programme they intend to study. When learners start their programme, they receive useful information that provides them with a satisfactory understanding of their responsibilities as a learner. These aspects of induction are further developed during their training programmes when they learn about employees' rights and responsibilities.

52. Review arrangements are generally satisfactory. The process is thorough and reviewers work closely with tutors to ensure that targets set during reviews reflect the requirements of the qualification. However, learners' supervisors are not sufficiently involved in the review process and the targets set for progression are not always defined well.

53. NWTC's staff provide learners with good support that keeps them and their employers well focused on qualification progression. Key skills teachers provide a satisfactory level of support for learners with literacy or numeracy support needs during their key skills training period. However, after the key skills training is completed, there is no structured support to improve learners' literacy or numeracy.

54. Assessment and verification arrangements are satisfactory. For most learners, assessments are planned well to include work-based assessment. Assessors use a good range of evidence to support their assessment judgements, such as direct observation, product evidence, witness testimony, oral questioning, photographic evidence and job reports completed by the learner.

55. There are insufficient opportunities for learners to progress onto level 3 programmes. This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. NWTC does not provide learners with a clear career progression plan or alternative progression routes after they complete a level 2 programme. NWTC has plans to review its provision and to introduce level 3 progression routes across all trade areas.

56. NWTC provides insufficient support for learners' transition into work. Learners who do not have a guarantee of employment at the end of their apprenticeship are not sufficiently prepared for the world of work. Learners do not receive any training or coaching in jobsearch, curriculum vitae compilation or interview techniques. There is no follow-up support when learners leave NWTC, and the company does not monitor their destinations. NWTC does not know how many of its apprentices go into work in the construction industry.

Leadership and management

57. Over the past two years, NWTC has introduced very effective initiatives to improve its apprenticeship programmes. There is a more rigorous initial assessment and screening process for all new learners, and there is comprehensive monitoring of progress. The company has bought many new learning and assessment resources to support learning. Key skills training and assessment are now managed more effectively. Most learners now achieve their key skills qualification in the first few months of their training programme. Learners now benefit from a well-structured learning programme. Few learners leave training early and the qualification progression rates for current learners are good.

58. NWTC's staff make good use of data to monitor learners' progress. Data is made available to learners, staff and managers to show the progress learners are making with all aspects of their apprenticeship programme. Staff use this information effectively to monitor progress and motivate learners. All tutors, managers and training officers carefully record and monitor learners' progress, often every week. This monitoring regularly results in staff scrutinising individual learners who are making slower progress than expected, and developing action plans and interventions to help them move on. The area of learning manager receives a regular and very useful range of management information on the business performance of the programmes. This information allows him to review overall performance across all aspects of the apprenticeship programmes.

59. NWTC has recently carried out an ambitious refurbishment programme in many of the workshop areas. The workshops are well equipped, clean and safe. Learners have good access to tools and equipment. There is a dedicated workshop for school pupils who come to the training centre for basic training in carpentry and joinery. There is little access to learning resources, other than the information and testing materials used for the technical certificate and key skills. There are few textbooks or other interesting reference materials for learners. Learners have insufficient access to the two computer suites at the training centre. Teaching staff are generally vocationally experienced, but many are new to teaching. Staff who are not qualified as assessors or teachers are working towards recognised qualifications in these areas. They are mentored and supported by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

60. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Learners receive information about equality and diversity during their induction, and this is reinforced during learning sessions at the training centre. Learners have a basic understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work. However, reinforcement of equality of opportunity during progress reviews is superficial. There are few discussions to develop learners' understanding of equality or diversity.

61. The self-assessment process was generally inclusive and rigorous. The company identified most of the strengths but only one of the weaknesses found by inspectors. Managers did not correctly identify poor success rates for advanced apprentices as a key weakness, but found other weaknesses instead. Inspectors gave the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

