

INSPECTION REPORT

CITB Construction Skills

19 October 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 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.

If satisfactory grades are given 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 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 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 improvement. The descriptors for the four grades are:

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

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CITB ConstructionSkills

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) was formed in 1964 as a non-departmental public body under the Industrial Training Act 1964. In 2003, CITB became the Sector Skills Council for the construction industry and became known as CITB ConstructionSkills. CITB ConstructionSkills is also the lead industry body for most construction craft and operative vocational qualifications. CITB ConstructionSkills delivers a wide range of publicly funded education and training provision, through the CITB ConstructionSkills Managing Agency, the National Construction College, and the National Specialist Accredited Centre. The provision from these three bodies is currently managed in separate CITB ConstructionSkills directorates.

The CITB ConstructionSkills Managing Agency (managing agency)

2. The managing agency is the largest provider of construction work-based learning in England. It operates through a network of seven area offices and offers extensive training opportunities in close co-operation with employers. The managing agency is led by a director who provides overall strategic direction and leadership, and reports to the chief executive of CITB ConstructionSkills. The directorate management team consists of two regional managers, one for the north and one for the south, and a standards manager who leads on issues relating to quality improvement. The team also includes a programme-led apprenticeships manager, a finance manager and a systems manager. The standards manager co-ordinates the work of a standards team, which implements the CITB ConstructionSkills quality framework. The two regional managers have operational responsibility for the managing agency and oversee the work of a team of new entrant managers. CITB ConstructionSkills has seven area offices in England comprising the Midlands, North East, North West, Southern counties, South West, Yorkshire and Humber, and Greater London and East. Each area office has a new entrant manager who has day-to-day operational responsibility for the managing agency in their geographical area, and is accountable for quality improvement. Within each area there is a team of apprenticeship officers who are responsible for recruitment, monitoring training, and reviewing the progress of learners within their caseload.

3. The managing agency provides apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in 25 different occupational trades, ranging from wood and trowel occupations to roof slating and tiling, decorative occupations, and plumbing. Learners are located evenly across the seven CITB ConstructionSkills regions. Currently, the Greater London and the East region of the managing agency has the highest proportion of apprentices, at 17 per cent, and the Midlands region has the least, at 12 per cent. CITB ConstructionSkills also provides training in Wales and Scotland which is not included in this inspection. All training is funded by the National Employer Service of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

National Construction College (NCC)

4. The NCC is administered by CITB ConstructionSkills to provide training in specialist construction-related skills that are not readily available elsewhere. The original training centre at Bircham Newton (NCC East) was opened in 1966 to meet the training needs of plant operatives employed in the civil engineering industry. In order to provide a wider geographical spread and more accessible training for the industry, the NCC now has three training centres. In addition to the NCC East, there is NCC South in Erith and NCC Midlands in King's Norton, Birmingham. The provision has diversified and there is now a

comprehensive range of civil engineering training, together with training for many specialist construction trades including scaffolding, surveying, built-up felt roofing, roof slating and tiling, floor-laying, dry-lining, and lightning conductor installation. In addition, the NCC also provides a wide range of health and safety and supervisory training for construction companies. In November 2004, the NCC was awarded interim Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in scaffolding.

5. The NCC is led by a director who reports to the chief executive of CITB ConstructionSkills. There is a board of non-executive directors, drawn from education, training and the construction industry, who provide strategic direction. Meetings of the board of directors take place every two months. The NCC general manager east and a field manager have operational responsibility for the three centres, and the NCC standards manager co-ordinates quality assurance and improvement activity. All these managers report to the NCC director. Each NCC centre has a centre manager and a team of training, support and administrative staff. There is a central team of visiting national vocational qualification (NVQ) assessors who also carry out learners' progress reviews onsite. The NCC new entrant team is responsible for co-ordinating the recruitment of learners and there is also a NCC team for learners' welfare.

6. The NCC provides apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in 18 occupational trades. Currently, 62 per cent of learners attend NCC East, 20 per cent NCC Midlands and 18 per cent NCC South. The NCC East centre has residential accommodation for 400 learners. Learners who receive training at NCC Midlands and NCC South and who do not live locally are provided with accommodation through a network of approved lodging providers. There are also NCC centres in Scotland and a recently established NCC Central which operates in partnership with JCB providing training in plant operations for adults. Both these centres are beyond the scope of this inspection. A quarter of its training is funded by the National Employer Service of the LSC.

The National Specialist Accredited Centre (NSAC)

7. The NSAC was established in 2002. It is based in Loughborough and is a division of the CITB ConstructionSkills National Specialist Office. The centre is managed by a specialist manager and is overseen by an industry management committee. NSAC provides an assessment service to the specialist sector and was set up in response to construction industry initiatives like 'Qualifying the Workforce' and the 'ConstructionSkills Certification Scheme'. It provides training through the industry's on-site assessment and training programme. The training and assessment is intended to qualify operatives who have worked in the industry for many years and to develop existing skills and knowledge of the site environment. Most operatives are working towards NVQs at level 2 but a few are working towards level 3. The specialist manager for NSAC reports to the field directorate. A project manager had been managing the centre since April 2006, but a new NSAC manager has been appointed and took up the post in September 2006. Vacancies currently exist for a lead internal verifier and an internal verifier. In total there are seven internal verifiers and 68 assessors covering 23 occupations. NSAC is an assessment centre and is currently accredited to assess 94 separate construction NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in the specialist and main trades sector. They work with employers to identify and train assessors who are then able to assess candidates within their own organisations. NSAC also provides an assessment and internal verification service for the construction companies with which it works. Since June 2006, part of the NSAC provision has been delivered through subcontracts with established on-site assessment and training providers. The NSAC covers the whole of England. Most of its training is funded by the National Employer Service of the LSC.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS**Grade 2**

8. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** CITB ConstructionSkills' leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for quality improvement, and training it provides in construction, planning and the built environment is good. Its arrangements for ensuring equality of opportunity are satisfactory

9. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** CITB ConstructionSkills' staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. Self-assessment is effective and well established in the managing agency and NCC. The NSAC's process is relatively new but is satisfactory. The managing agency recognises in its self-assessment report the need to have an overall CITB-ConstructionSkills self-assessment process and report to bring together the work of the managing agency, NCC and NSAC. The self-assessment report is sufficiently self-critical, and many of the judgements match those of the inspection team, although some of the strengths are overstated and a few weaknesses are omitted. The self-assessment report covered all the key questions of the Common Inspection Framework. Quality improvement plans are thorough, are linked effectively with the self-assessment report, and allocate clear responsibilities.

10. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** CITB ConstructionSkills' strong leadership focus on improving overall success rates has been very successful. Overall success rates for all frameworks have improved significantly from 23 per cent in 2003-04 to 56 per cent in 2005-06. This represents an increase of 34 percentage points for advanced apprentices and 29 percentage points for apprentices over the past three years. Achievement rates were low in the previous inspection, but apprenticeship success rates are now good in five of the managing agency's regions and satisfactory in the others, and advanced apprenticeship success rates are satisfactory nationally. At NCC South and NCC Midlands, where overall success rates are not yet satisfactory for apprentices or advanced apprentices, there has been a good rate of improvement. There is good achievement of specialist qualifications at NSAC. The managing agency has successfully rectified weaknesses identified by the previous inspection, particularly in the focus on achievement of frameworks, management of off-the-job training and the key skills training. NCC has invested considerably in a dedicated assessment and internal verification team, which has successfully remedied the weakness in on-site assessment identified at the previous inspection.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR CITB CONSTRUCTIONSKILLS:

- continue to improve the overall and timely success rates
- improve arrangements for the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training across all subcontracted centres
- improve the effectiveness and quality of learners' progress reviews and target-setting
- develop further the learners' understanding of equality and diversity
- implement consistent arrangements for work-based assessment
- develop arrangements to assess the levels of literacy and numeracy of candidates on on-site assessment and training programmes
- ensure that staffing levels keep pace with the range and growth of on-site assessment and training provision
- continue to upgrade existing facilities and residential accommodation (NCC)
- develop the relationships and coherence between the managing agency and CITB ConstructionSkills' inter-dependent directorates
- fully implement the work of the standards teams
- develop effective strategies to increase participation by under-represented groups

GRADES

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

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

Construction, planning and the built environment		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Construction main trades		2
Apprenticeships for young people	10,227	2
Construction specialist trades and technicians		3
Apprenticeships for young people	1,023	3
Train to Gain	418	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	20
Number of inspection days	152
Number of learners interviewed	434
Number of staff interviewed	140
Number of employers interviewed	78
Number of subcontractors interviewed	77
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	95
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	47
Number of visits to the provider	1

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Construction main trades	1	15	21	3	40
Construction specialist trades and technicians	1	15	7	1	24
Total	2	30	28	4	64

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good leadership and strategic direction
- very productive relationships with subcontracted providers
- very good use of data and management information systems
- very effective performance management of staff
- very good promotion of equality of opportunity
- good approach to quality improvement
- significant improvement in overall success rates

Weaknesses

- insufficient harmonisation and communication across the managing agency, NCC and NSAC
- weak management of literacy, numeracy and language support
- insufficiently co-ordinated approach to improving the recruitment of under-represented groups
- insufficiently developed monitoring activities

Construction, planning and the built environment

Construction main trades

Strengths

- good overall apprenticeship success rates in most regions
- greatly improved advanced apprenticeship success rates
- good work placements and involvement of employers
- particularly effective promotion and delivery of health and safety training
- good resources for off-the-job training in most subcontracted provision
- very wide range of construction provision
- good support for learners from apprenticeship officers
- very effective operational management

Weaknesses

- inconsistent co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training in some regions
- insufficient use of work-based assessment in some centres
- some weak target-setting in learners' progress reviews
- insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity in learners' progress reviews

Construction specialist trades and technicians

Strengths

- good overall success rates on plant mechanic and operating apprenticeships
- good achievement of specialist qualifications on on-site assessment and training programme
- good achievement of key skills qualifications
- good induction programmes
- good teaching and learning
- thorough and rigorous observations of performance in the workplace
- well-structured portfolios and range of evidence on on-site assessment and training programmes
- very good specialist resources and facilities
- unique range of specialist programmes and additional qualifications
- particularly good welfare, personal and vocational support for learners

Weaknesses

- low but improving success rates on advanced apprenticeship programmes
- low but improving success rates at NCC South and NCC Midlands
- inadequate learner progress reviews
- insufficient action-planning for learners making slow progress on on-site assessment and training programmes
- inadequate arrangements for the assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills on on-site assessment and training programmes
- insufficient internal verifiers to support growth in the number of on-site assessment and training programmes

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT CITB CONSTRUCTIONSKILLS:

- 'enabled me to make good progress with my career'
- the good workshops, facilities and learning resources at college
- the very supportive staff, particularly apprenticeship officers and tutors
- the good, helpful training and teaching
- the very supportive employers
- being treated like adults
- learning good skills in college
- key skills being related to the job
- how the training makes them more valuable to their employers and increases their job security

WHAT LEARNERS THINK CITB CONSTRUCTIONSKILLS COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of support with portfolios and the opportunities to work on them at work
- 'the range of work on site to contribute towards my NVQ'
- the boring theory lessons
- provide more practical sessions
- the number of lunchtime activities and the social areas at college
- access to computers in the evening for learners at the residential colleges

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good leadership and strategic direction
- very productive relationships with subcontracted provision
- very good use of data and management information systems
- very effective performance management of staff
- very good promotion of equality of opportunity
- good approach to quality improvement
- significant improvement in overall success rates

Weaknesses

- insufficient harmonisation and communication across the managing agency, NCC and NSAC
- weak management of literacy, numeracy and language support
- insufficiently co-ordinated approach to improving the recruitment of under-represented groups
- insufficiently developed monitoring activities

11. CITB ConstructionSkills provides good leadership and strategic direction. Leaders and managers have a strong focus on improving the quality of the provision and the overall success rates. CITB ConstructionSkills' board has a very good understanding of the managing agency's role and the progress it is making towards achieving the organisation's objectives. The board has appropriate representation from industry and the colleges, and members are effectively involved in the decision-making processes. Each directorate of CITB ConstructionSkills produces its own business plan. The managing agency's business plan has a clear focus on improvement and the quality of the provision and its targets are linked well with the sector skills agreement. CITB ConstructionSkills' business plans are very accessible and are summarised well for all staff in an A5-sized leaflet. Staff have good awareness of the business plan and of CITB ConstructionSkills' vision. There has been good strategic management of the growth of the NSAC provision, including very good links with some 80 employer federations. CITB ConstructionSkills' recent restructuring has given the managing agency its own directorate and a clearer focus. The organisational structure works well, providing clear roles for regional managers, new entrant managers and the standards team, and has had a positive effect on management. Leadership and management are now effective at all the NCC centres following a period when there was no centre manager at NCC South.

12. CITB ConstructionSkills has built very productive relationships with its subcontracted colleges and providers. The subcontractors have appropriate service level agreements that are updated annually. They have a good awareness of the requirements of their contract, their service level agreement and their targets. The managing agency and the subcontractors hold regular operational contract review meetings, which have a clear focus on learners and their programmes. New entrant managers strongly emphasise framework achievement and monitor it during these meetings. Most colleges and providers have improved their framework achievement rates. Some that had very poor rates or no achievement at all are now much improved and most are satisfactory. The managing agency works productively with underperforming colleges to promote improvement. Events

are held at least once a year to enable subcontracted colleges and providers to promote improvement and share best practice. Recent events have concentrated on the teaching of key skills. Many colleges and providers make good use of the managing agency's monitoring system, to which they have access, to review learners' progress and provide paperwork for the managing agency. Subcontractors' managers receive useful data, including league tables, so they can benchmark their own performance against others. Some managing agency regions have provided information about demand for courses from potential learners, to help colleges and providers plan future training provision.

13. CITB ConstructionSkills makes very good use of data and management information. At a national level there is a comprehensive range of data and reports which enables senior managers to effectively manage the LSC contract and monitor performance in every NCC and managing agency region. The data is arranged effectively in a pivot table, so that managers can cut the data in different ways to produce tabular and graphical information on any aspect of the provision. At a local level, managing agency and NCC staff make good use of a wide range of data and management information reports, to effectively monitor performance and make management decisions. Staff have good access to the data and routinely analyse trends in success rates to monitor their own performance and that of their teams and the subcontractors. The managing agency and NCC have set challenging targets for overall success rates across the organisation, increasing them where improvement has happened faster than expected. Overall success rates have increased considerably over the past three years and are driving up national rates. Managers make good use of scorecards to assess their performance against their targets and to maintain an overview of their progress. Area and regional scorecards feed well into the national scorecards.

14. Performance management of staff is very effective, particularly in the northern regions. Staff receive annual appraisals, quarterly reviews and monthly individual meetings, where many aspects of their performance are discussed thoroughly and recorded. Staff targets are strongly linked to the business plan, score cards and framework achievements. The targets are suitably measurable, and give staff appropriate opportunities for self-evaluation. Line management responsibilities are clear and new managers are supported well, partly through the use of mentors from outside CITB ConstructionSkills. Team performance is reviewed at meetings and compared with that of other teams. Human resources have appropriate moderation systems for appraisal and development.

15. Staff training and development is planned well and managed effectively at local and national levels. New staff receive a comprehensive induction, which is individually tailored to meet their needs, and staff returning from maternity leave receive good additional support. Staff in the managing agency and NCC are appropriately qualified and trained. Assessors at NSAC are well qualified and vocationally experienced. However, there are insufficient internal verifiers to support the growth of the provision at NSAC. Resources are well managed in most areas of the managing agency. Most subcontracted providers have good resources for off-the-job training. The NCC has some excellent specialist resources, although some of the accommodation for learners at NCC East is poor.

16. The managing agency's and NCC's communication strategies enable information to flow effectively between meetings. In some meetings, the monitoring of action points has recently improved. However, in others, the recording and follow-up of action points is vague. Meetings take place regularly, including those for NCC assessors and internal verifiers.

17. Links between the managing agency, NCC and NSAC are insufficiently developed. Some recent improvements, including appointing a new entrant manager and a separate

standards team to the NCC are intended to rectify this. The interdependent functions that operate across CITB ConstructionSkills are not all fully effective. Some targets that affect different directorates lack coherence, including those for the recruitment of learners from under-represented groups and the securing of placements, also the promotion and operation of 'National Construction Week'. There are too few formal opportunities for the sharing of best practice between the managing agency, NSAC and NCC. NSAC uses a different data system from the managing agency and NCC, which makes it difficult to compare data across the organisation and manage the LSC contract. Plans are in place, and training has started, to bring NSAC into the same system as the managing agency. NCC managers are not analysing data effectively to identify specific reasons and trends behind their lower overall success rates.

18. The management of literacy, numeracy and language support is weak. No CITB ConstructionSkills manager has overall responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of literacy, numeracy and language provision. The managing agency does not have an overall strategy for the initial assessment of and support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs by the subcontracted colleges and providers. There are checks on whether initial assessment takes place and support is provided, but these checks often focus on the subcontractor's process rather than on its effectiveness. Data is collected and analysed about the overall success rates for learners diagnosed as needing support. This shows that these learners succeed as well as, if not better than, learners not diagnosed as needing support. The quality of additional learning support is satisfactory in most areas and good in Greater London and East.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

19. CITB ConstructionSkills promotes equality of opportunity very well to learners, the construction industry and the general public. There is an extensive range of projects and partnership working, spanning all the managing agency regions and the NCC. Many of the activities are specifically targeted at equality and diversity, widening participation and raising attainment. In Bradford, CITB ConstructionSkills works with 'Youthbuild' and local construction companies in an effective training and employment project. The project works with unemployed men, women and young people from minority ethnic groups. Youthbuild has supported over 400 learners from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds. Many have achieved qualifications and secured jobs in construction and 54 have progressed to apprenticeships. This project has been extremely successful in breaking down the cultural barriers which have prevented members of these ethnic groups from entering apprenticeships in construction. In the North East a similar project, 'Go for it!', is led by a Muslim co-ordinator and has good links with community leaders. The NCC in the Midlands organises 'Girls' Challenge Days' to attract women into construction. Potential learners are set challenging tasks, such as changing a wheel on a digger, and work in teams accompanied by experienced female construction workers. 'Females for Constructive Communities' days are run in all managing agency regions and during 2006 over 500 girls took part in highly participative curriculum projects such as the design of a residential housing development. These projects and others targeted at under-represented groups are replicated across CITB ConstructionSkills regions. Over the past three years, applications for training by members of under-represented groups have increased but the proportion starting apprenticeships has not reflected this and is still very low.

20. A network of construction ambassadors drawn from industry act as mentors to learners and applicants, particularly those from under-represented groups. The on-site assessment and training programme at NSAC effectively widens participation by providing access to qualifications for experienced workers who would not normally have this.

21. CITB ConstructionSkills effectively promotes equality by providing learning experiences in construction and raising the attainment of many school children. A network of 90 curriculum centres carries out a very wide range of work in schools, including primary and 14-19 projects, using construction as a context for learning. CITB ConstructionSkills has been instrumental in the development and implementation of young apprenticeships and of the double award general certificate of secondary education in construction. These initiatives have facilitated the inclusion of more able pupils in construction education at key stage 4. However, there are few curriculum projects in special schools. The CITB ConstructionSkills website contains a wide range of well-produced key stage 1, 2 and 3 teaching and learning resources which use construction as a topic. These are used regularly and well by primary school teachers.

22. CITB ConstructionSkills has a strong commitment to the development of a more diverse construction workforce. Diversity forms an integral part of the Sector Skills Agreement for construction, and CITB ConstructionSkills has produced a very wide range of well-designed literature, for use with learners and construction employers, that promotes equality and diversity well through positive images and case studies. However, although there are a few good examples of construction companies with diverse workforces, attitudes are proving difficult to change. Some progress is being made through the 'Step into Construction' programme which is a national positive action project run by CITB ConstructionSkills. Financial support is provided to employers that take on women or members of minority ethnic groups on a trial basis. Employers are also helped to devise their own equality and diversity strategies and action plans. Some 190 members of under-represented groups have secured jobs during 2006, and their employers are increasingly positive about diversity in the workforce. CITB ConstructionSkills has two national equality and diversity advisers and eight equal opportunities liaison officers. These staff effectively support young people from under-represented groups on application and coach them for the skills learning exercise. The skills learning exercise is a spatial assessment using construction contexts, and this proves to be a barrier for some groups.

23. CITB ConstructionSkills has an appropriate range of policies and procedures for equality of opportunity. The equal opportunities policy covers all relevant equality legislation and has been updated to include new legislation on age discrimination. There is a satisfactory harassment and bullying complaints procedure, but in the managing agency, bullying or harassment incidents are only recorded on a regional basis. The standards team is unaware of the numbers of incidents or whether these have been appropriately dealt with. During the past year there have been no harassment complaints at the NCC.

24. Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. The induction pack provides an introduction to equal opportunities but is superficial. Too little time is given to equality and diversity during induction, and few learners could recall the content. It is unclear when and how the learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity is being developed during the training programme. Learners' understanding of diversity is not sufficiently reinforced at progress reviews. The standards team has recently developed topic cards on equality and diversity to be used at learners' progress reviews. The cards are a useful tool, but in many of the reviews observed during the inspection, the cards were either not used or were used ineffectively.

25. CITB ConstructionSkills does not have a sufficiently co-ordinated approach to improving recruitment from under-represented groups. Despite many useful projects, the number of women and young people from minority ethnic groups in training remains low. In 2003, the proportion of women starting apprenticeships was 0.8 per cent and in 2006 the proportion was 1.1 per cent, an increase of only nine learners. In 2003, the proportion of young people from minority ethnic groups starting apprenticeships was 1.4 per cent and in

2006 it rose to 2.4 per cent, an increase of only 29 learners. Currently, there are only 301 members of minority ethnic groups and 133 women out of a total of over 12,500 learners. Target-setting for recruitment from under-represented groups does not separate women and young people from minority ethnic groups, which makes it difficult to measure performance and set future action for each group. Targets do not take into account any analysis of local demography or population trends. Areas with large black and minority ethnic communities are not set higher targets to reflect the local population. The business plan does not set separate targets for recruitment from under-represented groups for the NCC, where participation is very low. Targets are set for the recruitment and education team, but when young people are recruited the team relies on managing agency staff to secure suitable placements. Apprenticeship officers and equal opportunities officers report that there can be considerable delays before suitable employers are found, and that sometimes young people from under-represented groups lose motivation and seek other options. Four per cent of current learners have a learning difficulty and 3 per cent have a disability, but no targets are set for the recruitment of young people from these groups.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

26. The managing agency's quality improvement framework has clear purpose and a strong focus on continuous improvement. The three-year development plan proposes significant developments in technology, the streamlining of business processes, and staff training and development. Resources are improving, and managers and mobile staff now have laptop computers. CITB ConstructionSkills has a well-structured approach to introducing new initiatives, using a process analyst who works with each directorate. New initiatives are thoroughly trialled in an area before being made available nationally. In the North East, staff are piloting the use of digital pens in the learner review process and finding them very effective. Where there is best practice in one area, the standards team is evaluating and developing the processes nationally. For example, the new observation system for learners' progress reviews evolved from an initiative in Yorkshire and Humber. The managing agency has well-established arrangements for collecting a sample of employers' and learners' feedback at several stages in their programme. The feedback shows that learners and employers have a good level of satisfaction with many aspects of the programme. Feedback from staff and learners is used well to improve the provision. For example, following a survey of new starters, the managing agency improved the information on the website and introduced an online recruitment system, with support from a dedicated recruitment desk in each area. Additional projects are used well for specific issues. For example, following a project to identify barriers to assessment, learners have been given more user-friendly diaries for collecting evidence from the workplace. The managing agency has successfully rectified weaknesses identified by the previous inspection, particularly in the achievement of frameworks, management of off-the-job training and the key skills provision. NCC has invested considerably in a dedicated assessment and internal verification team, which has successfully overcome the lack of on-site assessment identified as a weakness by the previous inspection. The induction process for learners at NCC has been improved considerably and is now good.

27. CITB ConstructionSkills' strong leadership focus on improving overall success rates has been very effective. Overall success rates for all framework programmes have improved significantly from 23 per cent in 2003-04 to 56 per cent in 2005-06. This represents an increase of 34 percentage points for advanced apprentices and 29 percentage points for apprentices over the past three years. The managing agency has restructured the learners' programmes to ensure key aspects are taught at an earlier stage. Achievement of frameworks was low at the previous inspection, but apprenticeship achievement is now a strength in five of the managing agency regions and is satisfactory in the others, and advanced apprenticeship achievement is satisfactory nationally. At NCC South and NCC

Midlands, where overall success rates are not yet satisfactory, rates have still shown a good rate of improvement. There is good achievement of specialist qualifications at NSAC.

28. Self-assessment is effective and is well established at the managing agency and NCC. The NSAC's self-assessment process is relatively new but satisfactory. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. The managing agency has an effective structure for developing area self-assessment reports which feed into regional and national reports. Quality improvement plans are thorough, with responsibility, effect and monitoring clearly identified, and they link to other strategies and plans. The standards manager and regional managers review progress on the quality improvement plans every three months for the managing agency, NCC and NSAC. The managing agency's self-assessment report recognises the need to have an overall self-assessment process and report for CITB-ConstructionSkills, which brings together the work of the managing agency, NCC and NSAC. Self-assessment is sufficiently self-critical, and most of the judgements matched those of the inspectors, although some of the strengths were overstated and some weaknesses omitted. In a few regions, inspectors found that the local self-assessment reports for the managing agency did not correlate well with the findings of the inspection.

29. NCC and NSAC have effective arrangements for assessment and internal verification. NCC's assessors carry out thorough observations of learners' performance in the workplace. At NSAC, learners have well-structured portfolios containing a good range of evidence. Internal verification and assessment is carried out for the managing agency by the subcontracted colleges and providers. This process is insufficiently monitored by managers. Some centres have been subject to awarding body sanctions, which has delayed achievements for learners. Assessment by the managing agency is generally satisfactory, although in some centres, learners have insufficient assessment by direct observation in the workplace.

30. The standards team has developed a comprehensive range of policies and procedures, with appropriate links to related procedures and guidance notes. A recently produced quality cycle identifies responsibility and timescales for observing, auditing and reviewing key processes. The standards team has made good use of the information from the observation process to devise specific training on reviews and target-setting.

31. CITB ConstructionSkills has a monitoring system designed to improve the quality of progress reviews and target-setting. Much of the system is too new to have brought these areas up to a satisfactory standard. However, apprenticeship officers are observed carrying out reviews and are given good support, suitable development plans and, in three regions, very specific follow-up training, and the managing agency's monitoring system shows an improvement in the quality of the reviews for a small number of apprenticeship officers. Managers make too few observations of learner inductions, aptitude tests and the recruitment process to evaluate the quality of these key processes. NCC has introduced a system of observations of teaching and learning, which is not yet fully developed. Not all NCC observers are confident about making observation judgements and awarding grades, and the observation records have insufficient focus on teaching and learning. The managing agency has very recently introduced a revised process for contract review meetings, which is more thorough. The previous system, which is still used in most colleges and providers, was not being used consistently. In some areas, the action-planning at contract review meetings is poor and there is no written follow-up at subsequent meetings to check whether actions have been carried out. The managing agency collects learners' evaluations, internal verification records, and profiles of teaching and learning observation grades from the subcontracted colleges and providers. However, it makes little use of these to discuss, effect or promote improvement. The profile of observation grades awarded by colleges has been analysed nationally and locally, but has not been used by the managing agency to

make improvements. Inspectors found that a high proportion of the NCC lessons observed were good, but that too much of the managing agency's teaching and learning was no more than satisfactory. The NCC's management and monitoring of complaints is effective. The managing agency manages complaints in its local areas, but, although it plans to manage and monitor them nationally, this has not yet started. Complaints are not yet being analysed to bring about change or improvement.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction, planning and the built environment

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Construction main trades		2
Apprenticeships for young people	10,227	2
Construction specialist trades and technicians		3
Apprenticeships for young people	1,023	3
Train to Gain	418	2

Construction main trades

32. CITB ConstructionSkills provides apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship training programmes in a comprehensive range of construction main trades and building services occupations. These include carpentry and joinery, wood machining, bricklaying, stonemasonry, plastering, roof slating and tiling, painting and decorating, wall and floor tiling, plumbing and electrical installation. The training in England is managed through the managing agency directorate. Off-the-job training and assessment is subcontracted to 159 colleges of further education and a few work-based training providers. All learners are employed from the start of their training and are working towards NVQs, technical certificates and key skills qualifications within the nationally agreed apprenticeship or advanced apprenticeship frameworks for their respective trades. Most learners start on apprenticeship programmes, which take two years to complete. On completion, those with the capability can progress to an advanced apprenticeship which takes a further 18 months. Most off-the-job training is provided on block release. For apprentices this is between 12 and 16 weeks in year one and a further five to seven weeks in year two. For advanced apprentices there is a further seven weeks' off-the-job training. On-the-job training and experience is provided by a wide range of employers that are registered with CITB ConstructionSkills, and learners work on a variety of new-build, refurbishment, repairs and maintenance construction sites and projects throughout England. Learners collect evidence towards their NVQ and are visited onsite and in college by apprenticeship officers who also carry out 12-weekly progress reviews and monitor health and safety.

33. CITB ConstructionSkills runs national marketing and positive image campaigns. Most apprenticeship learners are recruited through employers or referred by local Connexions offices. A significant number of learners progress onto CITB ConstructionSkills apprenticeships after completing foundation construction awards in colleges, and some current learners took programme-led apprenticeships during 2005-06. From September 2006, CITB ConstructionSkills is piloting 16 young apprenticeship programmes across England for school pupils aged 14 to 16. Applicants for apprenticeships take a skills learning exercise and an initial assessment in literacy and numeracy. All successful applicants have an off-the-job induction carried out jointly by CITB ConstructionSkills and college staff, and a period of initial training before they start work. A further on-site induction is provided by employers. Learners are given a set of basic hand tools, and personal protective equipment for use on site. Currently, there are 10,227 learners on construction apprenticeships, 7,775 of whom are apprentices and 2,452 are advanced apprentices.

Construction main trades

Strengths

- good overall apprenticeship success rates in most regions
- greatly improved advanced apprenticeship success rates
- good work placements and involvement of employers
- particularly effective promotion and delivery of health and safety
- good resources for off-the-job training in most subcontracted provision
- very wide range of construction provision
- good support for learners from apprenticeship officers
- very effective operational management

Weaknesses

- inconsistent co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training in some regions
- insufficient use of work-based assessment in some centres
- some weak target-setting in learners' progress reviews
- insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity in learners' progress reviews

Achievement and standards

34. Overall success rates on the apprenticeship programme show an improving trend over the past three years from 31 per cent in 2003-04 to 60 per cent in 2005-06, compared with a national rate in 2005-06 of 53 per cent. The success rate for level 2 NVQs has also increased, from 60 per cent in 2003-04 to 69 per cent in 2005-06, compared with a national rate in 2005-06 of 53 per cent.

35. In most regions, overall apprenticeship success rates are good. In 2006 these include the North East at 79 per cent, Yorkshire and Humber at 74 per cent, East at 73 per cent, Midlands at 72 per cent, and the South West 71 per cent. In the other regions during 2005-06, overall apprenticeship success rates are satisfactory, and include Southern Counties at 67 per cent, North West at 63 per cent and Greater London at 48 per cent.

36. The success rate on advanced apprenticeships across all CITB ConstructionSkills managing agency regions has greatly improved. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, the success rates were 15 per cent and 14 per cent, and in 2005-06 the rate was 49 per cent, compared with a national rate in 2005-06 of 44 per cent. In all the regions, the success rates for advanced apprentices are satisfactory.

37. CITB ConstructionSkills has been piloting programme-led apprenticeships since 2004-05 in all the managing agency regions and in 20 centres. The numbers are small, just 73 learners at present, but are predicted to rise significantly in 2006-07. To date, only 10 learners have left and seven of these have achieved the target NVQ at level 2. Six have progressed to advanced apprenticeships.

38. Although CITB ConstructionSkills offers training in 25 trades, most learners are training in bricklaying, site carpentry, bench joinery, solid plastering, or painting and decorating. Success rates in these trades show considerable variations. Apprenticeship success rates in bench joinery and site carpentry are high at 72 per cent and 70 per cent respectively, while those in bricklaying and solid plastering are lower at 66 per cent and 64 per cent respectively and in painting and decorating, the rate is lowest at 56 per cent. The variation in overall success rates is much more marked at advanced apprenticeship level. Again,

bench joinery and site carpentry are high at 72 per cent and 69 per cent respectively, solid plastering and painting and decorating are much lower at 48 per cent and 45 per cent respectively and bricklaying is very low at only 28 per cent. The success rates for bricklaying advanced apprentices reflect the low pass rate for the technical certificate.

39. Success rates vary by subcontractor. Among those with more than 20 learners, the best performing are Huddersfield College at 92 per cent for apprentices and Darlington College at 90 per cent for advanced apprentices. The worst performing are Wolverhampton College at 25 per cent for apprentices, and Bedford College at 26 per cent for advanced apprenticeships.

40. Most apprentices make satisfactory progress and achieve their qualifications within the planned period. However, some advanced apprentices make slow progress, and some 15 per cent have exceeded their planned completion dates. Rates of progress vary between managing agency regions. For example, 27 per cent of advanced apprentices in Greater London, 23 per cent in Yorkshire and Humber and 17 per cent in North West are beyond their planned completion dates. In the North East, where there are large numbers of advanced apprentices, most make good progress, and only 5 per cent are beyond their planned completion dates.

41. The rate of progression from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships dipped in 2004-05 and although it was higher in 2005-06 it has still not reached the levels of 2002-03 and 2003-04. Around 32 per cent of CITB ConstructionSkills' apprentices progress to advanced apprenticeships, but the regions' rates vary from 47 per cent to 16 per cent.

42. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory overall and in some cases it is good. Learners' work meets the requirements of the qualification and the needs and expectations of their employers. Learners carry out a wide range of practical tasks in the workplace and are able to work with a minimum amount of supervision. Many employers speak of well-motivated and willing learners. Learners spend much time in off-the-job training and most have a satisfactory understanding of the technical aspects of their trades. A few learners produce work of a very high standard and many of these take part in regional and national competitions. In the national Skillbuild competition in 2005, 13 CITB ConstructionSkills learners won medals, including one gold medal winner who has gone on to the international Skillbuild competition.

43. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory. Most contain a wide range of appropriate work-based evidence which covers the range of the NVQ. The better portfolios are supplemented with photographic evidence, witness testimonies and some direct observation of competence on site. Most portfolios are neat, well presented and carefully referenced to the NVQ performance criteria. Some learners in their first year of training are using the new CITB ConstructionSkills work evidence diary. This is useful and straightforward, and is written in terms readily understood by learners and work-based recorders.

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	2,637	69	48	15	31
		Timely	2,700	60	30	13	19
	2004-05	Overall	832	51	48	16	34
		Timely	863	42	31	14	21
Apprenticeships	2003-04	Overall	2,381	60	48	31	31
		Timely	3,533	33	24	19	16
	2004-05	Overall	4630	62	48	46	34
		Timely	4,735	29	29	21	22

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). *indicates data unreliable

The quality of provision

North East

44. Most learners in the North East region make good progress and achieve their qualifications in a timely manner. Only 5 per cent of advanced apprentices are beyond their planned completion date, compared with the average of 15 per cent across all the managing agency regions. Learners' progress is closely monitored by the apprenticeship officers, and a variety of monitoring methods ensures that they are aware of the work completed and the target dates. Learners enjoy their work and quickly respond to their employers' demands, which include timekeeping and attendance. Learners also make good progress at college during off-the-job training.

45. Work placements are good and employers are closely involved in the training. There is a wide range of opportunities for learners and most employers can provide learners with the full range of activities required for the framework. Two level 2 bricklaying learners were given a pitched-roof double garage to build from drawing to finished gable ends. The learners also spent a day with the site manager in the site office dressed in office wear, to see for themselves what goes on during the construction of over 50 houses. They gained an understanding of the organisation involved in bringing together various trades and contractors, including schedules, delays and deadlines.

46. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and some practical training sessions are good. In practical sessions, most learners work on individual projects or occasionally as small groups. The tutors provide effective individual coaching and support, which enable learners to develop good trade skills. They give effective practical demonstrations to the whole group to illustrate new skills or relevant job knowledge. Learners are engaged and are comfortable about asking questions or seeking advice from the tutor. There are appropriate schemes of work and lesson plans for background knowledge, key skills and practical lessons. In the observed sessions, the learning aims were clear and there was sufficient differentiation to ensure that the needs of all learners were met.

47. Off-the-job assessment is carried out in accordance with awarding body requirements. Learners are aware of the relationship between on-site evidence and completing the NVQ. One college uses the first Monday of each block release to gather work-based evidence from learners who have been on site for several weeks. The region has a good proportion of certificated work-based recorders who help the learners to gather evidence on site. The evidence is then assessed remotely by qualified assessors. Few learners have their competence directly observed on site, and many have to repeat tasks at college. Portfolios are satisfactory and contain adequate evidence towards the NVQ.

48. Subcontractors' resources are generally satisfactory and in two colleges they are good. Learners are provided with adequate tools, equipment and materials. Classrooms are well equipped and most have interactive whiteboards which enhance teaching and learning. Learners have access to appropriate books, trade information and computers in the learning resource centres. Appropriate social areas are provided for learners.

49. Recruitment procedures are satisfactory. Learners enter apprenticeships after passing the skills learning exercise and an initial literacy and numeracy assessment. Subcontracting colleges determine whether learners have any additional support needs, but few do.

50. Once on their programme, learners receive regular progress reviews on site and in colleges. Tutors, employers and work supervisors are involved in this process. The reviews are thorough and have a strong emphasis on health and safety. Appropriate targets are agreed by all parties and are then revisited at subsequent reviews.

51. Equality of opportunity is not sufficiently reinforced during learners' progress reviews. The section of the review document that covers this is not consistently applied by apprenticeship officers in the field. Their questions are often perfunctory, are not followed up, and do not show any depth of understanding, particularly with regard to diversity. Most learners are asked how they are being treated at college or on site, and officers sometimes follow this up with questions on bullying.

North West

52. Apprenticeship officers provide good personal support for learners. Although many are not occupationally qualified they give learners useful advice on evidence collection and portfolio building. They work closely with learners in college and in the workplace, and in doing so they gain their trust and confidence. Learners feel comfortable discussing issues with apprenticeship officers that they would hesitate to discuss with their employers and college tutors. Apprenticeship officers work well with workplace supervisors and college tutors to resolve any issues or worries that learners have about their off-the-job training or their work.

53. The progress review process is broadly satisfactory. Review meetings are well structured and are conducted to a clear and consistent agenda. Reviews are carried out at the required frequency and are attended by the learner, the apprenticeship officer and in many cases by the employer and work-based recorder, all of whom make a valuable contribution. Reviews are appropriately focused on the learning and assessment process, and used to set clear measurable targets.

54. Assessment is satisfactory. It is fair, accurate and reliable. The range of evidence is sufficiently broad and includes some direct observations as well as written and photographic evidence. Authentication of work-based evidence is good and is carried out on site by work-based recorders who work well with college-based assessors to produce a reliable evidence base. The internal verification system provides satisfactory quality assurance of the assessment process. The sample size is adequate and records of verification are well kept. Internal verifiers give useful feedback. However, too little internal verification is carried out on site. The regular standardisation meetings are not attended by staff from CITB ConstructionSkills. CITB ConstructionSkills' only monitoring of assessment is through external verifiers' reports.

55. The quality of teaching and learning in the North West varies widely between subcontractors. CITB ConstructionSkills monitors this aspect of the subcontracting

arrangements mainly through learners' feedback, with some degree of success. For example, CITB ConstructionSkills has acted swiftly and effectively to deal with instances of poor teaching or poor health and safety practice in subcontractors' practical workshop sessions. Inspectors observed off-the-job training at a number of subcontractors. In one college, all the teaching observed was good or outstanding. Practical training was carried out in excellent workshops with good-quality tools and equipment. Learners were given excellent individual coaching that was well suited to their needs and linked with group presentations and demonstrations where necessary to maintain interest and reinforce learning. All learners were set challenging targets and were expected to reach a high standard of practical skills. The tutor was a highly skilled craftsman who only accepted work of the highest quality and clearly explained and demonstrated to learners how to achieve the standard required. Learners were eager to meet his exacting standards. In another college the teaching was satisfactory. Most tutors had a scheme of work and lesson plans, but many of these were insufficiently detailed especially for preparing to teach diverse groups of learners. Teaching was dull and uninspiring but learners were making progress and learning. In the poorest session observed, few learners were working consistently and effectively and there was poor health and safety practice in the workshop. In the poorest background knowledge session, two learners were asleep and the learners pointed out that the tutor's presentation and handout contained errors.

56. There are some poor off-the-job training facilities at one subcontractor. The brickwork training workshop was overcrowded. Three separate groups were all being trained simultaneously in a space that was too small for them. Learners worked in cramped, noisy conditions which made it difficult to see and hear demonstrations and instructions. Some learners had to work in pairs and there was a high risk of learners' work being accidentally damaged.

Yorkshire and Humber

57. The promotion and reinforcement of health and safety is very good. Learners receive a thorough health and safety induction in the workplace. Health and safety is a key feature of learners' progress reviews and is reinforced through a detailed checklist. When CITB ConstructionSkills' observers observe progress reviews, they provide apprenticeship officers with thorough feedback on the coverage of health and safety. Apprenticeship officers provide good support to learners who require it before they take the health and safety test. There is good management of health and safety at colleges. At Hull College, brickwork learners are required to complete a detailed risk assessment before starting practical tasks.

58. Teaching and learning are good. Practical sessions are planned to ensure learners have adequate working areas, tools, and supplies of consumable materials. Sessions are clearly linked to schemes of work. Tutors use their industrial experience to support learners, particularly when they attempt new tasks. At Hull College, a tutor and learning adviser provide effective team teaching. In the better background knowledge sessions, good planning ensures a range of activities that maintain the learners' interest. Resources and facilities at most colleges are satisfactory and at some they are good. Workshops are generally well maintained and are equipped with up-to-date tools and equipment. For example, at York College, the stonemasonry workshop is equipped with hydraulic, height-adjustable bankers, a laser-operated profiling bridge saw and a lettering machine.

59. CITB ConstructionSkills provides a very wide range of construction training which effectively meets the needs of learners and employers.

60. Initial assessment and additional learning support arrangements are satisfactory. Colleges are effective in identifying learners' entry levels and support needs and in providing appropriate literacy, numeracy and language support.

61. Key skills training and assessment are satisfactory. Learners who are not required to complete key skills tests or portfolios are identified early by CITB ConstructionSkills and its subcontractors. Construction-related assignments are used to teach key skills, and specialist support is available for learners who make slow progress. In some cases, apprenticeship officers make good links between key skills and work-based activities to reinforce the importance and relevance of key skills. For example, one learner was able to recognise the value of key skills when calculating the volume and cost of roofing materials. However, at York College, the support given to learners before their key skills exam is inadequate.

62. Apprenticeship officers regularly liaise with the college, employer and learner to monitor progress on site-based activities. Progress is normally recorded in the learners' review documents and progress against action points is monitored and recorded by the apprenticeship officer. One work-based recorder has requested copies of teaching plans so that he can co-ordinate the learners' site work with the practical work being carried out off site. The apprenticeship officer has provided these. However, this practice was not evident in all colleges and with all learners.

63. Learners' progress reviews are satisfactory. They are well structured and adequately involve employers. Target-setting is satisfactory and individual apprenticeship plans are referred to, for monitoring and recording learners' progress. In the better progress reviews, apprenticeship officers give learners effective guidance on gathering work-based evidence. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship programme.

64. The volume and quality of direct observation in the workplace varies across the region but is satisfactory overall. For example, Hull College has a rigorous and quality assured process, while Bradford College makes little use of direct observation. Most colleges ensure that learners are assessed in the workplace on at least two occasions during the apprenticeship programme. At York College, the management of work-based evidence is poor. Many files and records are poorly presented, do not refer to NVQ units, and are not dated or signed by employers or assessors.

65. The coverage of equality of opportunity during progress reviews is weak. In most cases, reviewers do not refer to prompt cards, and learners' understanding of equality and diversity is insufficiently developed. This is particularly evident with advanced apprentices.

Midlands

66. Off-the-job training resources are good. Workshops are spacious and well resourced, and some have computers where learners can use interactive learning materials related to their practical tasks. Classrooms are well equipped and provide good learning environments. They often contain interactive whiteboards or information technology (IT) facilities to enhance the learning experience and are used effectively by tutors and learners. Many learners also have access to learning resource centres where they can use a wide range of learning support materials.

67. Employer placements are good. Learners experience a wide range of work activities and are well deployed and supported by supervisors, ensuring the effective development of their practical and personal skills. Many employers have dedicated supervisors who are assigned to learners for the duration of their apprenticeship. There is a wide range of

construction programmes available in all trades, which matches learners' aspirations and meets employers' needs.

68. Health and safety is strongly emphasised in all aspects of training. The reinforcement of health and safety during learners' progress reviews is good. Learners' awareness and understanding of health and safety practices relating to their craft are rigorously checked. High standards of health and safety are maintained during off-the-job training.

69. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Most sessions are planned and structured well. However, many lessons plans fail to identify and cater for individual learning needs. Tutors make good use of a variety of teaching methods to engage learners. The evaluation of learners' understanding and skills development is satisfactory.

70. Assessment practice and the recording of learners' achievements are satisfactory. Learners are actively encouraged to gather evidence from the workplace through a variety of methods, but few are observed in the workplace by their assessors. Evidence is appropriately recorded and cross-referenced to the NVQ criteria in the learners' portfolios. Portfolios are generally well organised and presented.

71. Support for learners' literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. Additional learning needs are identified through initial and diagnostic assessments. These assessments are carried out during the first week of learners' programmes. There are few learners who require additional support, but when a need is identified this is met effectively by specialists at the colleges. Key skills teaching and assessment varies between subcontractors but is satisfactory overall.

72. The co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is insufficiently developed. Some work-based supervisors have a poor understanding of the requirements of NVQs and of evidence-gathering processes, and cannot effectively support the learner. Where assessors do not visit learners in the workplace there is little contact between college staff and the learners' supervisors. Some work-based supervisors are not aware of the training being carried out in the colleges and are unable to complement this effectively in the workplace.

73. The targets set for learners are insufficiently challenging. Most targets for the achievement of qualifications, both in reviews and by assessors, are not detailed enough. Often targets are focused on generating a number of pieces of evidence for whole NVQ units rather than detailing specific work-based activities required for the unit. Some targets need few actions and could be achieved quickly, but target dates are normally set for up to eight to 10 weeks' time.

Greater London and East

74. Teaching and learning are good in most off-the-job training centres. Practical and background knowledge sessions are well planned with good schemes of work and lesson plans. Teaching is appropriately paced and there are regular checks on learning. The learning is reinforced by the use of many good-quality resources, visual aids and learning materials. In many centres the appointment of subject learning coaches and advanced practitioners, and the sharing of good practice have increased variety and enhanced teaching and learning.

75. On all sites visited there was meticulous attention to health and safety and the welfare of operatives. Learners have a very good awareness of health and safety and are able to select safe working practices and appropriate personal protective equipment for given tasks.

There is also very good observation of health and safety during off-the-job training, and health and safety is effectively integrated into all practical and classroom-based activities.

76. Most learners benefit from good work placements and supportive employers that are effectively involved in the training process. Learners are employed on a very wide range of construction projects. Most develop their skills to a good standard and take considerable pride in their work. Learners are able to work with less and less supervision, and many have progressed to more complex operations and tasks within their workplace. Most employers have trained work-based recorders who support the learners in compiling their work-based evidence.

77. Resources and facilities at the subcontracted training centres are good. Most colleges and training providers have well-equipped and spacious workshops where learners can develop good trade skills in a realistic simulated environment. The tools and equipment provided for learners are of a good quality and are generally well maintained. Most classrooms provide a good environment for learning, and many are equipped with interactive whiteboards which are used effectively to enhance teaching and learning. Good-quality learning resources engage learners and enable them to learn independently. Most centres provide good social areas which are much appreciated by the learners.

78. CITB ConstructionSkills offers a wide range of provision which effectively meets the needs of all users. Most learners and employers have a satisfactory understanding of the requirements of their programmes and apprenticeship frameworks. Many learners are given the opportunity to compete in the regional and national Skillbuild competitions.

79. Apprenticeship officers provide very good support for learners and employers. They adopt a very professional approach to their work and ensure qualifications and optional units meet learners' and employers' needs. Apprenticeship officers provide a constant source of encouragement for learners and are quick to resolve any problems that arise on site or during off-the-job training. Visits are carefully planned around learners' and employers' needs, and are more frequent when required. Employers value the occupational knowledge and expertise that the apprenticeship officers provide.

80. Support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills is very good. All learners receive appropriate initial and diagnostic assessment on entry which effectively identifies their level of literacy and numeracy and their specific support needs. Learners identified as requiring support receive this from well-qualified specialist tutors during off-the-job training. The way support is given is determined by learners' needs. It is often very effective individual support in the classroom or discrete work with small groups. Learners who receive additional support achieve as well as those who do not have additional needs.

81. Key skills teaching and assessment is satisfactory. Much of the key skills teaching takes place within the construction training. Many learners effectively cross-refer the same pieces of evidence to achieve the requirements of the NVQ and the key skills qualifications.

82. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training is insufficiently developed. Workplace supervisors do not know what learners are being taught off the job, and have no effective planning process for on-the-job training. Most off-the-job training providers have insufficient information about the training the learners have completed in the workplace. Targets set for learners at reviews are not shared with off-the-job training providers. Some off-the-job training providers set targets for learners as part of their own curriculum planning and review process, but they do not share these targets with the apprenticeship officers.

83. Learners' progress reviews are not always used to set sufficiently challenging targets. Targets are not detailed enough and many are not measurable. Some learners do not know what is required of them with regard to the collection of evidence from the workplace. Action plans often fail to identify clear monitoring points and follow-up procedures.

Southern Counties

84. Learners are provided with good work placements. They gain valuable experience from a wide range of construction projects, including large-scale new-build contracts, housing, refurbishment and maintenance activities. Learners receive good on-the-job training and develop good industry relevant skills. Most quickly gain confidence and are able to complete increasingly complex tasks with a minimum of supervision. Some learners work on difficult tasks early in their training. For example, one apprentice carpenter was fitting doors after just eight weeks. Learners' work is generally of a good standard and meets the expectations of employers and clients. Apprenticeship officers and site employers work very effectively together to enable learners to gain suitable workplace evidence for the NVQ.

85. Learners benefit from good promotion and delivery of health and safety throughout their training programme. Health and safety is covered comprehensively at induction, and reinforced with extensive written information in the induction pack to ensure that learners are prepared well before they start on site. Most learners pass the health and safety test early in the programme, many during their first block of college training. Health and safety is effectively integrated into all aspects of the training programme and is incorporated well into progress reviews. Tutors make very good use of interactive learning materials to make good health and safety practice more interesting and relevant to young learners.

86. CITB ConstructionSkills provides a very wide range of provision in the region, which effectively meets the needs of learners and employers.

87. Learners receive very good support. They feel particularly well supported by apprenticeship officers, and secure in raising issues with them that they would feel uncomfortable raising with their employers. Apprenticeship officers are particularly responsive to learners' needs, and make great efforts to resolve their problems. For example, they find learners alternative employers when they have been made redundant. CITB ConstructionSkills continues to support learners who have reached the end of their funding period but have not yet achieved. It often provides them with extra college training and many go on to complete their qualifications successfully. Learners are supported well by their college tutors, who provide good technical support and guidance, enabling them to prepare and pass phase tests and external assessments, and to complete their portfolios. Learners who require additional support in literacy and numeracy receive it from specialist tutors, enabling them to complete their apprenticeships.

88. Subcontractors' staff do not systematically plan assessment by direct observation in the workplace. Most assessment on site is through portfolio entries supplemented by extensive use of photographic evidence and witness statements from supervisors. Assessment by direct observation in the workplace varies between subcontractors, and learners often have to repeat activities in college, which they have already demonstrated competence in on site. Learners cannot access assessment on demand to help them make better progress.

89. Most progress reviews are carried out in accordance with contract requirements and with the appropriate involvement of workplace supervisors, but the target-setting varies in quality. Some learners are set clear, effective targets but many are set targets that are not

sufficiently specific or measurable. These targets do not sufficiently challenge learners to make better and faster progress. It is difficult to follow them up at the next review or to record learners' progress towards meeting them. The recently introduced observation system for learners' progress reviews has identified target-setting as an area for improvement.

South West

90. The facilities for off-the-job training are good. Most colleges have large well-equipped craft workshops dedicated to each main trade and learners mostly work on full-scale projects. In the practical workshop activities the tutors maintain a detailed record of practical learning assessments. Each practical assessment also includes relevant job knowledge questions that are effectively used to check learners' understanding. Learning resource rooms are normally adjacent or close to the workshops. These are equipped with suites of computers, electronic whiteboards and a good range of technical literature. Learning resources are good and effectively promote learning. Learners have access to well-stocked libraries, good social areas and welfare facilities.

91. Health and safety is reinforced constantly both in colleges and in the workplace. Learners are asked a series of detailed questions on health and safety at their progress reviews to determine their overall understanding. This includes highly relevant questions related to the sites they are working on. Learners demonstrate a good awareness of health and safety and safe working practices on site. Their files contain comprehensive literature on health and safety, and the topic is covered well in background knowledge and practical classes.

92. Work placements are satisfactory, and provide adequate opportunities for learners to further develop their skills. The training programmes are meeting the needs of learners and employers. Support for learners is satisfactory. Learners have ready access to specialist support staff in the college and to the apprenticeship officers through the regular site and college reviews.

93. The quality of teaching and learning is at least satisfactory, and much of it is good. Practical workshop sessions are structured well, and learners' skill development is checked frequently. Learners are industrious and are confident in the use of a wide range of specialist equipment and tools. There is a good sense of purpose and discipline in the workshops. Learners are attentive in background knowledge lessons and appreciate their value. Tutors have appropriate schemes of work and detailed lesson plans. Learners' files are neat and well organised. They contain well-produced technical information produced by their tutors. Tutors add interest to the background knowledge sessions by making good use of visual aids to illustrate how the information is applied. They also make good use of their own industrial experience to reinforce learning and stimulate genuine discussion. In a few of the background knowledge classes the pace was sluggish. In others, tutors enlivened the sessions by relating the background knowledge work to local construction projects.

94. There is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. The two elements coincide largely in isolation. Most employers have little detailed information about the learners' training at college, and few plan or sequence activities on site to complement it. Too few employers attend learners' progress reviews.

95. There is insufficient assessment by direct observation in the workplace. Learners collect detailed evidence of the work they carry out on site. Their portfolios contain mainly written product evidence, although the better ones are supplemented with photographs and witness testimonies. The evidence they collect is authenticated by their learner's site

supervisor and subsequently assessed remotely. CITB ConstructionSkills' apprenticeship officers are seeking to promote more direct assessment through their best practice conferences.

96. Target-setting at learners' progress reviews is weak. The targets set are often generic, and do not always challenge the learners or contain sufficient detail about the tasks to be completed. Review discussions with the learners do not flow well, and there are lengthy silences while the reviewer completes each section of the paperwork. Targets previously agreed and set are not always followed up effectively at subsequent reviews. The new observation system for reviews is very effective. The feedback is improving the quality of reviews and the reviewers' performances.

Leadership and management

97. The managing agency regions are managed effectively. Leadership, strategic direction and focus are particularly effective and are meeting the needs of learners, employers and the construction industry throughout the country. Business plans and actions help to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of the business in meeting its strategic aims and objectives, and to improve learners' progress and achievement.

98. Performance management of staff is good and particularly so in the northern regions. The appraisal system is well managed and consistently applied. Most appraisals are conducted by the due date and are effective in identifying staff development needs. Staff development is successfully meeting the needs of individuals, and the focus of staff training is matched to the needs of the business and the learners. Individual monthly reviews are carried out with staff, measuring their performance against clear criteria linked to the essential tasks of their daily work. Managers deal effectively and sensitively with underperforming staff, offering valuable support to improve their performance. Communications are effective and staff feel well informed on all aspects of their job role. There are regular meetings of the new entrant team where performance is monitored and targets reviewed. CITB ConstructionSkills provides very good support for new staff. A good staff induction, useful opportunities to shadow experienced colleagues, and an extended period of support from individual mentors, help new staff to settle quickly and productively into their new role.

99. Operational management is very effective. Subcontractors that carry out training are managed well. CITB ConstructionSkills makes very good use of achievement data and management information to monitor the performance of each subcontractor. Performance league tables are shared with all subcontractors and are successful in improving overall success rates. A computerised monitoring system was introduced two years ago and it enables staff to monitor each learner's progress towards individual framework components. It incorporates target achievement dates for each unit and component, and a 'traffic-light' system that shows at a glance whether learners are on target to achieve. Apprenticeship officers have a realistic caseload of learners and each is responsible for achieving success rate targets both for learners and for subcontractors. Useful and regular contract review meetings are held to monitor all aspects of the provision. Open and frank discussions have improved working relationships significantly. New entrant managers scrutinise many performance reports on the subcontractors, including external verifiers' reports, internal course reviews and the well-informed comments of apprenticeship officers who work closely with the subcontractors. New entrant managers diligently follow up any action points with the subcontractors to ensure that the quality of delivery is maintained.

100. Health and safety is managed well and strongly emphasised. The reinforcement of health and safety during learners' progress reviews is good. Learners' awareness and

understanding of health and safety practices relating to their craft and the construction industry are rigorously checked. The commitment from employers to ensure safe working environments on site for learners and other operatives is good.

101. Resources are managed well. CITB ConstructionSkills carefully analyses the benefits of proposed investments in terms of their effect on learners and of any operational efficiency gains. Priority is given to appropriate investments. Examples include the provision of laptop computers for apprenticeship officers, a feasibility study on whether digital pens would simplify progress reviews and improve the monitoring of their quality, an analysis of the benefits of satellite navigation systems for company cars, and revised staff recruitment arrangements.

102. Quality improvement is particularly effective. There has been much improvement in overall success rates and in the management of subcontractors. Managers have recently begun a programme of observations of learners' progress reviews. The observations are carried out by new entrant managers, and the feedback given to reviewers is supportive, comprehensive and agreed with both parties. The observations are effectively picking up shortcomings in target-setting and the reinforcement of equality and diversity. Staff's understanding of and involvement in the self-assessment process is good. The CITB ConstructionSkills self-assessment report for the managing agency is self-critical and contains many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. All staff receive copies of the self-assessment report and the quality improvement plan.

103. There is too little monitoring of the additional support provided by subcontractors, especially in the northern regions. The task of monitoring and managing this support is delegated to apprenticeship officers, but there are no adequate quality standards or internal arrangements to help them carry out this important role. The quality of monitoring varies and depends on the individual apprenticeship officer's approach.

104. There are few learners from under-represented groups in any of the regions, and the recruitment target set for these groups was not met in 2005. Equality of opportunity, and particularly diversity, is rarely developed and reinforced effectively at progress reviews. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is generally satisfactory.

Construction specialist trades and technicians

105. The NCC offers apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship training programmes in a range of specialist trade and technician areas including plant operating, plant maintenance, general construction operations, interior systems, scaffolding, lightning conductor installation, roof slating and tiling, built-up felt roofing, roof sheeting and cladding, and flooring applications. It also trains steeplejacks and construction technicians. Off-the-job training is mostly provided by NCC at one of its three centres, but some aspects of the programme for technicians are delivered by the College of West Anglia (CoWA).

106. All learners are employed from day one of their apprenticeships and are working towards NVQs, technical certificates and key skills qualifications within the nationally agreed apprenticeship or advanced apprenticeship frameworks for their respective trades. Most learners start out on apprenticeship programmes which take approximately two years to complete. However, a small number of plant maintenance and construction technician learners start on advanced apprenticeships, following initial assessment. NCC runs its own targeted marketing campaigns and receives referrals from the managing agency and Connexions. Recruitment is carried out by new entrant recruitment officers based at the three NCC sites. There are currently 1,023 learners on LSC-funded apprenticeship programmes, of whom 909 are apprentices and 114 are advanced apprentices.

107. NSAC provides assessment and internal verification services to the specialist sector. It is accredited to provide a total of 94 construction qualifications. The specialist qualifications include land drilling, piling, decorative concrete, rain sheeting and cladding, diamond-tipped drilling and sawing, and road planing. Learners are currently working towards 21 qualifications. NSAC has a network of assessors, who are employed by construction firms and assist learners in gathering evidence and compiling their portfolios. Internal verifiers employed directly by NSAC carry out the verification of assessors' work. The learners' existing skills and current work experience are profiled against the units of the qualification, and any skills gaps are identified. The training needs identified through this process are met by on-site training. There are currently 418 LSC-funded learners on NSAC programmes, and all of them are working towards level 2 NVQs.

Construction specialist trades and technicians

Strengths

- good overall success rates on plant mechanic and operating apprenticeships
- good achievement of specialist qualifications on on-site assessment and training programme
- good achievement of key skills qualifications
- good induction programmes
- good teaching and learning
- thorough and rigorous observations of performance in the workplace
- well-structured portfolios and range of evidence on on-site assessment and training programmes
- very good specialist resources and facilities
- unique range of specialist programmes and additional qualifications
- particularly good welfare, personal and vocational support for learners

Weaknesses

- low but improving success rates on advanced apprenticeship programmes
- low but improving success rates at NCC South and NCC Midlands
- inadequate progress reviews for learners
- insufficient action-planning for learners making slow progress on on-site assessment and training programmes
- inadequate arrangements for the assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills on on-site assessment and training programmes
- insufficient number of internal verifiers to support growth of on-site assessment and training programmes

Achievement and standards

108. Success rates on the plant maintenance and operating programmes are good. Success rates for plant mechanic apprentices have risen from 25 per cent in 2003-04 to 71 per cent in 2005-06. Success rates for plant operations apprentices have risen from 4 per cent in 2003-04 to 64 per cent in 2005-06.

109. The NVQ success rate on on-site assessment and training programmes is good. Achievement currently stands at 76 per cent for 2005-06. Achievement across all programmes is generally consistent and current data indicates that it is likely to increase.

However, timely success is low but improving, and during 2005-06 only 38 per cent of learners completed their NVQ by the planned date.

110. Learners' achievement of key skills at NCC is good. Key skills teaching and achievement for apprentices has improved considerably and is now very good. The process has been improved by the introduction of a dedicated key skills team, delivering from all three NCC centres. Achievements of key skills qualifications at the NCC have risen considerably from a total of 181 in 2002-03 to approximately 500 in 2005-06. The achievement rates for key skills in 2005-06, at NCC East and NCC South, are excellent at 98 per cent. However, the rate at NCC Midlands is 65 per cent. Learners are achieving their key skills qualifications more quickly, and more challenging target dates are being set for key skills achievement. Dedicated key skills rooms have been set up in each of the three NCC centres. All have modern computers and are networked for online basic and key skills assessment, diagnostics, online technical certificate tests and on-screen health and safety tests.

111. Success rates for apprentices at the NCC are satisfactory and have improved from 17 per cent in 2003-04 to 48 per cent in 2005-06. Most learners at NCC are working towards apprenticeship frameworks. However, the timely success rate is low, and many learners, particularly at NCC South and NCC Midlands, are making slow progress.

112. Learners' work is satisfactory. Learners in all trade areas demonstrate good development of the skills for their respective trades or professions. During inspectors' visits to the workplace, learners performed competently. Attendance and punctuality at the three NCC centres are satisfactory.

113. Success rates for advanced apprentices at NCC are low. The success rate in 2003-04 was 21 per cent, and this dropped in 2004-05 to 11 per cent. However, it rose to 30 per cent in 2005-06. Most advanced apprentices are based at NCC East and include technicians following civil engineering or site technical support programmes, and plant mechanics.

114. Framework success rates for site technical and civil engineering technicians are poor but improving. There were no framework achievements until 2005-06, when the success rate was 6.3 per cent. This represented just one framework from 19 leavers. So far in 2006-07, the success rate is 25 per cent. There has been a long history of slow progress, with a number of learners exceeding their funding period between 1999 and 2003. These learners are still being supported and recently achieved a further 37 frameworks. The monitoring of current learners' progress in all aspects of the framework is much improved. The 2003-04 intake, which is still in funding, has only to complete the level 3 NVQ component of their framework. All the 2004-05 apprenticeship learners have achieved key skills qualification and learners are halfway towards completing the national certificate, and most having started to collect evidence towards the NVQ.

115. Success rates on the advanced apprenticeship plant mechanics programme have improved significantly. In 2003-04 the rate was low at 19 per cent. There was a steady improvement from 37 per cent in 2004-05 to 78 per cent in 2005-06. However, the number of learners has fallen, and whereas the 2004-05 figure represents 28 frameworks for 75 leavers, the 2005-06 figure represents 18 frameworks for 23 leavers.

116. Success rates at NCC South and NCC Midlands are low but improving. At NCC South, in scaffolding, only one of the 19 learners who left in 2005-06 achieved the full framework. In the preceding two years none achieved. Recent improvements in management have led to an increase in achievements but these will not be reflected in data

until 2006-07. The 2005-06 success rate in flooring is satisfactory at 67 per cent, but in roofing it is low at 35 per cent. At NCC Midlands the 2005-06 success rates for roofing and scaffolding are poor at 26 per cent for roofing and 10 per cent for scaffolding. However, there has been a steady improvement since 2003-04 when there were no framework achievements.

117. Some learners at NCC South and NCC Midlands make slow progress. At the time of the inspection, 69 learners at the centre had exceeded their expected completion dates, some 35 per cent of all learners. At NCC Midlands there are 59 learners who are significantly beyond their planned completion date, some 27 per cent of all learners. NCC now has a better focus on timely achievement. Some learners who were well past their completion date and unlikely to achieve have been removed from the records, while others who are more likely to achieve remain in learning and are receiving support, assessment and review visits.

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	57	44	48	21	31
		Timely	90	18	30	6	19
	2004-05	Overall	168	18	48	11	34
		Timely	144	12	31	6	21
Apprenticeships	2003-04	Overall	179	39	48	17	31
		Timely	378	20	24	12	16
	2004-05	Overall	336	36	48	26	34
		Timely	297	12	29	7	22
Adult training (long courses)	2004-05	Overall	104	76			
		Timely	6	3			

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). *indicates data unreliable

The quality of provision

118. Teaching and learning at NCC are good. Of the 24 lessons observed by inspectors, 16 were judged to be good or better and only one was unsatisfactory. The teaching of background knowledge is generally closely linked to its practical application.

119. Practical training is well planned and delivered and closely matches working conditions. Tutors pay good attention to health and safety, and demonstrate good levels of experience and knowledge in their vocational areas. The teaching of key skills is very good at NCC South. The full-time tutor is very well qualified and has good teaching experience. Initial assessment results are used to devise learning plans, which contain useful information about each learner's ability in application of number and communication. The tutor provides effective support for those who need it, and learners can take key skills qualifications at a higher level if they already have the required level for the framework.

120. There is rigorous observation of learners' performance in the workplace. At the NCC there is a dedicated assessment and verification team. Its role is to carry out observations of learners' performance and assess them for the NVQ component of the apprenticeship frameworks. Most NVQ evidence is gathered from direct observation. The timely progress towards achieving NVQs is now improving in all trade areas. Assessors in each occupational area cover all areas of the country, and the planning of assessment visits is good. Assessors carry out thorough observations, ensuring that learners are meeting the required standards, and recording the evidence in detail. Internal verifiers effectively support the quality of assessors' work.

121. Resources and training facilities at NCC are very good. Since the previous inspection there has been significant continual investment in facilities and equipment. At NCC East the training areas are very good, with industry standard equipment and tools that are up to date and well maintained. There is an abundance of consumable materials, and for construction operative programmes, and plant programmes a wide range of plant vehicles is available for maintenance and operator training. Learners on general construction programmes have a large indoor area offering a wide range of training plus substantial outdoor facilities. A range of concrete testing facilities is also available. Classrooms at all the NCC centres provide a good learning environment and contain a wide range of information learning technology equipment to support teaching and learning. The interior systems workshop is well equipped to industrial standards, with work bays for learners to carry out a variety of tasks. Instructors in all trade areas are very experienced in their vocational subjects, and have, or are working towards, training qualifications and assessor awards.

122. Both NCC and NSAC deliver a unique range of specialist training and additional qualifications that meet the needs of the construction industry. The specialist programmes offered include scaffolding, steeplejacking, lightning conductor installation, construction plant maintenance and operations, floor laying, roofing, interior systems, general construction operative programmes and construction technician training. No other training provider in the country offers this mix of training. In addition, NCC offers a range of additional training and qualifications which add value to learners' main programmes. These include the scaffold record card schemes A and B, streetworks qualifications, mobile towers, fire fighting, and telescopic boom and scissor lift training. The on-site assessment and training programmes devised by NSAC provide unique qualification opportunities for the construction specialist sector. Qualifications include land drilling, interior systems, rain sheeting and cladding, safety net rigging, diamond tipped drilling, and road planing.

123. The induction programmes at NCC are good. Induction is a two-week programme in most trade areas, with a strong emphasis on the importance of health and safety. The programmes are varied and are memorable to learners. During induction, NCC offers a number of additional formal certificated courses, including first aid, drugs and alcohol awareness and others relating to vocational specialisms. All learners have the opportunity of sampling aspects of other trade areas, to broaden their experience and enhance employability. For example, technician learners complete a dumper-truck driving certificate and use a small compressor with tools such as concrete breakers, compactors and concrete cutters. The employment rights and responsibilities element of the apprenticeship is completed during this period. A thorough diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy is carried out during induction to highlight specific areas where particular support may be required. Where specific learning needs are identified, a member of staff works with learners individually or in small groups. If a more specialist need is identified, such as dyslexia, NCC works with the British Dyslexia Association and a specialist subcontractor that specialises in dyslexia support.

124. NCC and NSAC provide particularly good personal and vocational support for learners. Learners attending NCC are well cared for and receive a good level of personal support. At NCC East, where learners are based in residential blocks on site, there are dedicated welfare officers and a medical centre with a nursing officer. There are leisure and recreational facilities such as a gymnasium and tennis courts, and a café and bar for use in the evening, and around-the-clock security is provided. An extensive range of enrichment activities is available including a variety of sporting events and external visits. These are not available to the same extent at NCC South and NCC Midlands, but learners who are staying in external residential accommodation receive good support from staff, and can contact them outside normal working hours. Assessors on on-site assessment and training

programmes provide good vocational support. Most are employed directly by the organisations that employ the learners, and are able to provide assessment on demand as required. Many assessors encourage rapid progression and plan assessments early to improve learners' confidence. Work-based recorders are available but are not always deployed effectively. They do not work with learners sufficiently to provide additional supporting evidence. None of the work-based recorders interviewed was certificated or had attended the training session provided by CITB ConstructionSkills.

125. Progress reviews at NCC are inadequate. Those that take place on site are ineffective and do not set consistently measurable targets for learners. Targets are often vague, for example 'complete NVQ units'. These do not help learners and are not detailed enough to help employers plan suitable work activities. At the NCC, progress is reviewed by assessors, managing agency apprenticeship officers and subcontractors' staff. The review process is inconsistent. In some cases, the interval between reviews is too short and they are used as assessment planning sessions. The monitoring of targets is inadequate. Sections of the review document are often left uncompleted, and there is too little space for reviewers' comments about the learner. Employers are insufficiently involved in the reviews. The reinforcement of equality of opportunity at reviews is ineffective. The review is not seen as an opportunity to look at the learners' overall progress and to plan for the future with the involvement of the employers. When subcontractors are used to carry out reviews, they do not have access to any management data and find it difficult to obtain information on the learners' progress to date.

Plant maintenance and operations

126. There are 96 apprentices on plant maintenance programmes and 87 on plant operations programmes. A further 58 learners are on advanced apprenticeship programmes in plant maintenance.

127. On plant operations programmes, learners take an NVQ at level 2 in earthmoving and lifting. They can also gain a construction plant competence scheme card for each category of plant they operate. There are 20 weeks of off-the-job training, of which the last two involve participation in a project. This starts the collection of evidence for the NVQ. Further evidence towards the NVQ is then assessed in the workplace. On plant maintenance programmes, learners alternate between block periods at NCC and in the workplace. They take either a level 2 or a level 3 NVQ in plant maintenance which covers general plant mechanics, cranes, access platforms, materials handling and small plant and tool maintenance. The time spent at NCC totals 36 weeks.

128. The teaching on both programmes is good. For example, on the plant mechanics programme, learners were studying a module on common types of braking systems. The tutor reinforced the background knowledge well by first showing learners a scale model and then a system on a full-size vehicle. On the plant operations programme, tutors give good practical instruction, and learners demonstrate good skills in using various types of plant, including using excavators to dig trenches accurately.

129. During one visit to the workplace, inspectors observed the plant assessor and internal verifier working on site with a group of learners, identifying assessment opportunities and devising assessment plans.

130. Equipment and resources are particularly good. Plant operators have a 200-acre plot which provides excellent soil conditions for training activities. There is an extensive range of plant equipment, from small dumper trucks to large excavator diggers. Plant mechanics

benefit from access to small training models which illustrate key components and systems and full-size construction plant and machinery. Learners enjoy their programmes and are making good progress. Employers greatly value the plant training, and report that it supports their needs well.

Access (scaffolders, lightning conductor installers, steeplejacks)

131. There are 397 learners on access apprenticeship programmes. These include 333 scaffolding learners, 39 lightning conductor fitters, and 25 steeplejacks. Scaffolding programmes are taught at all three NCC centres. Lightning conductor and steeplejack training takes place only at NCC East.

132. Scaffolding, steeplejack, and lightning conductor programmes include block-release attendance at NCC centres. There are two scaffolding programmes, of which scheme A comprises six blocks totalling 11 weeks and scheme B involves a 43-week training programme over two years with blocks of one to eight weeks. Typically, learners work in groups of three, and instructors usually observe no more than three activities at a time.

133. Off-the-job training is good on scaffolding programmes. Tutors have significant industrial experience in their vocational area, and most teaching is appropriately planned. Good use is made of resources to support teaching. For example, at NCC Midlands, good use is made of resources in background knowledge sessions, such as a scaffolding rig that has many faults deliberately built in for learners to identify.

134. Resources for access training are good at all centres. Training areas are large and are well equipped with a diverse range of access equipment, enabling learners to develop skills and experience in realistic working conditions. On the lightning conductor and steeplejack programmes, learners develop climbing and abseiling techniques using purpose-built structures and equipment such as bosun's chairs.

135. Assessment in the workplace is improving the progress learners make towards their NVQs. Slow progress and low success rates, particularly at NCC South and NCC Midlands, are being dealt with. Links between on- and off-the-job training have improved through effective working between NCC's tutor teams and the assessment team.

136. The CoVE in scaffolding is working well. Employers relate well to the CoVE manager, using forums to raise any concerns about training and qualifications for young people and experienced workers. The CoVE steering group has recently introduced a course for scaffolding supervisors as a result of requests from industry.

General construction (including interior systems)

137. Construction operations training is provided at NCC East and NCC Midlands. This occupational area also includes interior systems training at NCC East. There are 136 apprentices on construction operations programmes and three apprentices on interior systems programmes.

138. General construction operations' training is delivered in several ways to meet the needs of industry. At NCC Midlands it consists of short block-release periods, usually of three or four weeks, combined with periods of site experience during which learners receive visits from assessors to gather evidence for the NVQ. At NCC East, some learners attend for similarly short periods and others for a continuous 42-week period, followed by site

experience and assessment. On interior systems training programmes, learners have five blocks of off-the-job training lasting four weeks each, over a two-year period. This training scheme has been designed in conjunction with the interior systems industry sector to replicate authentic working conditions.

139. Resources for construction operations training are very good. At NCC East there is an extensive external work area which is used for a variety of activities including drain laying, concreting, and trench support training. The practical workshop for interior systems is well equipped to industry standards, with work bays for learners to carry out a variety of tasks. These include various ceiling layouts and partitioning walls. The standard of learners' work is good. The classroom is equipped with information learning technology facilities and provides a good learning environment.

140. General construction learners benefit from additional training, including basic scaffolding and dumper truck training. In addition they can take part in streetworks training and training for working in confined spaces.

Flooring

141. Training in floor-laying applications takes place at NCC South. There are currently 18 apprentices on the floor-covering programmes, which includes level 2 training in vinyl and textile routes. Learners attend 18 weeks of training over an 18-month period. The training involves a range of practical activities and background knowledge, as well as work experience.

142. Practical training at the NCC centre provides learners with the opportunity to develop appropriate skills. There is good attention to health and safety, and the resources for flooring are good.

143. There is now sufficient collection of work-based evidence for assessment purposes. This was identified as an area for improvement at the previous inspection. Assessors spend considerable amounts of time on sites observing learners at work. Planning of assessment is effective, and learners are clear about what they have done and what they need to do to complete the qualification. Employers are generally kept well informed about their learners' progress at college.

Roofing

144. Roofing training is provided at NCC South and NCC Midlands. Roof slating and tiling, and built-up felt roofing are taught at both centres, while roof sheeting and cladding is taught solely at NCC Midlands. There are currently 60 apprentices on built-up felt roofing programmes, 22 on roof sheeting and cladding programmes, and 90 on roof slating and tiling programmes. Training consists of workshop and classroom activities supported by work experience with an employer. In roof slating and tiling, the training consists of six blocks of three weeks over two years. In built-up felt roofing, there is a two-week induction followed by four blocks totalling 13 weeks in the first year, and eight weeks' off-the-job training in the second year.

145. Training is well structured. Learners in all roofing occupations attain a high standard of skills. Teaching is good, and training resources are very good. There is a good range and quantity of up-to-date specialist equipment including IT facilities. There is good use of direct observation of competence in the workplace. Sixty per cent of all assessments for the NVQ are by direct observation. Most learners' portfolios are neat, well organised and contain a

good range of evidence covering a diverse range of roofing activities. Other forms of evidence such as witness testimonies and photographs are checked well by the assessors on their frequent visits to the sites. The roofing internal verifier makes frequent visits to sites to ensure the quality of assessments. All assessors are carefully risk banded to determine how often they will be visited by the internal verifier. Good links have been established with employers and roofing training groups that are highly supportive of the training.

146. There is good celebration of learners' success and achievement through award ceremonies and trophies. Roofing learners from the NCC centres regularly compete and win medals in the annual Skillbuild competition. In 2004, one of NCC's learners achieved the gold medal and in 2005 one won a silver medal.

Construction technician

147. Construction technician programmes include a 33-week training period in the first year which includes study at the CoWA towards a Business and Technical Education Council (BTEC) national certificate. The second year includes a 17-week block period including study periods at the CoWA and NCC East. The remainder of the programme is spent in the workplace gathering evidence for the NVQ. A technician mentor provides a link between NCC and the CoWA. There are currently 56 learners on the advanced apprenticeship programme.

148. Most off-the-job training for technicians takes place at the CoWA. Inspectors graded all the teaching sessions they observed at the CoWA good or better than good. There are good progression rates onto higher national diplomas by successful technician apprentices. Approximately 60 per cent of learners continue with their studies on block release at CoWA, and a further 20 per cent study on day release at colleges closer to their homes.

149. Key skills training and assessment for technicians take place at the CoWA. In addition to the required key skills in application of number and communications, learners can take information and communications technology (ICT) in order to gain merit criteria in the BTEC units in ICT and computer-aided design.

150. Management of the technician programmes has been strengthened by the appointment in 2004 of a senior instructor, in addition to the technician mentor who has been working with the technicians since 2001. The poor success rates are now improving and the management of the provision is now satisfactory.

On-site assessment and training

151. Learners on on-site assessment and training programmes have well-structured portfolios that contain a good range of appropriate evidence, thoroughly compiled and clearly referenced to relevant units. They are assessed in a regular, timely and punctual way. Most learners are now making good progress. Assessors are experienced and very well qualified in their vocational areas. Assessments are scheduled to occur around work activities and do not disrupt production. However, learners rely too much on the assessor to identify opportunities to gather evidence and to record this, and do not take enough responsibility for this process themselves. Most assessments are carried out by direct observation.

152. The on-site assessment and training programmes devised by NSAC provide unique qualification opportunities for the construction specialist sector. Qualifications include land

drilling, interior systems, rain sheeting and cladding, safety net rigging, diamond-tipped drilling, and road planing, all qualifications that are not available elsewhere.

153. Employers are very supportive of learners, encouraging them to take up training programmes and supporting them throughout. One employer offers a financial inducement to complete the NVQ.

154. Learners receive a satisfactory induction on on-site assessment and training programmes, which includes the Skillsmatch profiling exercise and details of the appeals and grievance procedures. Most of the learners are already skilled tradesmen, and there is little evidence of further vocational training being given. Health and safety and equal opportunities are dealt with adequately at induction. Learners have a good understanding of the assessment and appeals procedure.

155. On on-site assessment and training programmes, there are no arrangements for the identification of learners' literacy and numeracy levels. Where there are clear needs, learners are supported. For example, one hearing-impaired learner received appropriate signing support. However, learners with low levels of literacy and numeracy remain undiagnosed and receive no specialist support. This issue is recognised by the provider as an area for improvement.

156. Some learners are making slow progress on the on-site assessment and training programme, and there is insufficient action-planning to overcome this. A number of learners have been on programme for considerable lengths of time, including some for nearly four years. No specific action plans have been produced to deal with this slow progress. The timely success rate has been low, although this is now improving.

Leadership and management

157. Since the previous inspection, a number of effective actions have been taken to improve the quality of provision across all NCC sites. The management arrangements have been improved and a field manager now provides effective management for the NCC South and NCC Midlands centres. These two centres now have a good focus on performance and their success rates are improving. The lack of on-site assessment was identified as an issue at the previous inspection, and NCC now has a dedicated assessment and verification team, representing a significant investment. A quality standards team has been established to develop and improve training processes and support functions. There is now a dedicated basic and key skills team and the achievement rate for key skills is now good.

158. The NSAC provision has grown significantly over the past four years and provides a valuable and unique range of services to the specialist sectors of the construction industry. This growth has been managed and planned well, using good links with specialist industry federations to develop and devise previously unavailable qualifications. The establishment of on-site assessment and training programmes has led to plans to develop apprenticeships in further specialist sectors.

159. Resources are good and are managed well. Staff are well qualified and trained, and in most areas there are enough of them. However, there are too few internal verifiers for the on-site assessment and training provision, and this is a barrier to maintaining quality. There are also too few specialist assessors on some of the on-site assessment and training programmes.

160. Local leadership and management at NCC South and NCC Midlands are now good. This follows a period where NCC South was without a manager, and several members of

staff were temporarily in charge. The new field manager and centre managers work well together, focusing on key areas of performance. Data management has improved, and staff are clear on performance in key areas of the provision. At NCC Midlands the manager regularly attends NCC meetings and follows them up with regular meetings with his own staff. The strategic direction is clear and the manager is aware of the proposed service level agreement with the managing agency. There are regular meetings with the central internal verification and on-site assessment team to share information and to review learners' progress.

161. A system for the observation of teaching and learning has been established, but it is not yet complete. Most observations are carried out by tutors' peers and they have not been useful in raising standards. The observers do not all feel confident in their ability to carry out observations and, more particularly, to award grades for the lessons observed. The paperwork used for observations is not helpful, as it contains too many general points about learners' progress. Lesson observations have also been carried out by an external contractor. These were not graded but did give useful feedback to tutors.

162. Some of the vocational teams in NCC centres do not use data effectively to identify the units and elements of awards that are holding learners back and affecting success rates. There are a number of factors that have contributed to low success rates in the past. These include low achievement in NVQs, technical certificates, health and safety tests and employment rights and responsibilities tests. However, NCC has failed to use data effectively as a tool for improvement and has made slow progress in resolving these issues. Staff believe that frameworks have been completed in the past but have gone unclaimed because of the lack of effective management and administration. In order to deal with this, a framework administrator has been appointed and is due to start in November 2006. Also, some senior instructors have been given management training to enable them to manage their provision and performance more effectively.

163. Participation rates from under-represented groups are low. There are currently no female learners at NCC South, and across the whole of the provision there are five female learners and nine learners from minority ethnic groups out of a total of 1,057 learners on LSC-funded programmes. The number of learners from minority ethnic groups is particularly low in relation to the local population around the two NCC centres in Birmingham and Erith. The recruitment co-ordinator has visited schools for girls and careers fairs and continues to promote the construction industry. NCC Midlands holds an annual 'Girls Challenge' initiative to attract women into construction, but so far this has had little effect on the recruitment of female learners. Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity.

164. The self-assessment process is well established throughout NCC but is relatively new in the NSAC provision. CITB ConstructionSkills holds meetings to evaluate programmes, and each trade area has a useful annex in the self-assessment report detailing the quality of its provision. The NCC and NSAC self-assessment reports were sufficiently self-critical and identified many of the same strengths and weaknesses as the inspection team. However, some strengths were overstated and some weaknesses were not identified.