

NRS Training

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Business administration and law

Description of the provider

1. NRS Training is a subsidiary of Nova Recruitment Services which is a private recruitment agency based in Dudley in the West Midlands. NRS has been providing apprenticeship training since 1999. The company has a contract with the Black Country LSC which represents 25% of business turnover. The provision covers business administration, customer services, information communications technology, contact centres and food processing and cooking. In November 2007, 80 learners were involved in business administration and customer services with nine learners in the other areas.
2. The senior management team consists of a managing director, an associate director and a training manager. NRS employs five other staff directly involved in apprenticeship training including one contracted assessor. Learners are mostly employed in the West Midlands, predominantly Dudley, in the public and private sector. Most learning takes place at work. NRS provides a range of commercial courses which learners can access.
3. Over 71% of employment in the region is in the service sector. The Black Country has an unemployment rate of 4%, although within the area some boroughs have a higher rate, for example unemployment in Sandwell is 10.4%. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the region is 20% of the population with the largest single group being Asian at 15%. The minority ethnic population in Dudley is 4.9 %.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Capacity to improve	Outstanding: Grade 1
Achievement and standards	Outstanding: Grade 1
Quality of provision	Outstanding: Grade 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding: Grade 1
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Business administration and law	Outstanding: Grade 1
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision are outstanding. Leadership and management are outstanding. The provision for business administration, including customer service is outstanding. Equality of opportunity is good.

Capacity to improve

Outstanding: Grade 1

5. NRS has demonstrated that it has an outstanding capacity to improve. Overall success rates have improved significantly and are now outstanding with some programmes achieving 100% framework success rates. Timely success rates show very good improvement and are more than twice the national rate for 2005/2006. Since the previous inspection, quality improvement and strong performance management have significantly improved overall performance. The strengths identified at the previous inspection have been maintained and developed further. Weaknesses from the previous inspection have been tackled rigorously and in many cases, for example the management of performance and target-setting, are now strengths. Leadership and management and business administration both previously judged satisfactory are now outstanding.
6. The self-assessment process is thorough, inclusive and well established. It fully involves the staff in making judgements about the quality of the provision and has good arrangements to collect and assess the views of learners, employers and other stakeholders. The self-assessment report is informative and uses data well, including clear analysis of learners' progress and success rates, to arrive at judgements. The report accurately reflects many of the strengths identified by inspectors, although the grades awarded by inspectors are higher apart from the equal opportunities grade which was the same. The report lacks some self-critical comments in a few areas and is not clearly linked to all aspects of *The Common Inspection Framework*.

Key strengths

- Outstanding overall success rates
- Very good skill development and progress by learners
- Very effective personalised learning programmes
- Very good rate of additional qualifications achieved
- Highly effective strategic leadership
- Very good operational management
- Very effective initiatives to improve training
- Good strategies to widen participation

Key areas for improvement

- Reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Outstanding: Grade 1

7. Achievements and standards are outstanding. Overall success rates are outstanding. In 2006/07, the provisional framework success rate for advanced apprentices in administration is at 95% and for apprentices it is at 93%. The framework success rate for advanced apprentices in customer service is 100%.
8. Learners develop very good skills at work. They demonstrate high levels of competence in applying administration and customer service skills. For example, a learner introduced a business process and collected evidence of very good customer feedback in response to her resolution of sales order queries. In another case a new learner had made very good progress in skilfully using spreadsheets and presenting data to a very high standard using graphs, tables and pie charts. For many learners who are in their first job since leaving school the achievement of such skills leads to increased confidence and motivation to achieve further.
9. Learners make very good progress and in many cases achieve ahead of planned deadlines. The rate at which learners progress and achieve qualifications with NRS has improved significantly over the past three years and is now very good. Many learners progress to higher level qualifications and to positions of responsibility at work. For example, a learner has progressed from the NVQ Level 2 in administration, through Level 3 to Level 4, is now participating in a higher national certificate programme in business and is planning to progress to a degree. The same learner is now in a management position at work.

Quality of provision

Outstanding: Grade 1

10. Learners benefit from very effective personalised learning and assessment programmes. Learners are visited by their personal assessor regularly and frequently at work, usually at least every two weeks. Learners value the assessor's visits highly. They provide very helpful guidance, supportive advice and expertise in providing information relevant to the attainment of business administration and customer service skills. The assessor works closely with learners and employers to determine a programme of learning and assessment. Learners gain confidence and motivation through the very skilful way assessors observe and link naturally occurring work tasks to occupational standards. Observations are carried out very effectively and good feedback is provided for learners. Learners maintain a clear view of what they have to achieve to qualify and what progress they have made. Employers provide good on-the-job vocational support and plan activities to enable the learning aims to be achieved. Further training is provided at work and through off-the-job workshop sessions. Learners are expected to record training in a training log. Most do, although the way in which the log is then used lacks any specific purpose. Other training and assessment records are used appropriately. Learning support and training for literacy and numeracy is effective. When required it is arranged by the

assessor and in some cases provided by other staff often at work and again individually planned and delivered.

11. Many learners benefit from participating in training which leads to additional qualifications. NRS provides a range of commercial training opportunities for local businesses to which learners have access if required. Some learners participate in public service workshops specifically to learn about the context in which they work. Learners participate in workshops and training sessions covering, for example, the use of spreadsheets, word processing, telephone techniques, health and safety, supervisory management, first aid and others. One learner demonstrated very good customer service skills while discussing a customer's requirements over the phone. She valued the training sessions that had enabled her to do this competently and with such confidence.

Leadership and management

Outstanding: Grade 1

Equality of opportunity

Contributory Grade: good: Grade 2

12. Strategic leadership of the apprenticeship programme is highly effective. Directors of NRS Training have maintained a clear sense of direction for work-based learning and have positioned apprenticeship training securely within their parent company's overall business strategy. Learners directly benefit from this strategic commitment in that resources and practical support are provided for learners, sometimes for a number of weeks, before they enter their programmes. Similar support is also provided for those few learners whose funding expires before completing their apprenticeships. Learners benefit from access to commercial training programmes provided by the parent company and from recruitment and training opportunities that arise through their marketing and recruitment operations. The NRS staff team are very clear about the direction of the company and their own contribution to achieving its objectives. NRS has maintained and further developed very good relationships with local employers.
13. Very good operational management supports the achievement of successful outcomes. Management of apprenticeship training programmes is highly effective. Learners, employers, assessors and internal verifiers are all kept well informed and internal communication is good. All benefit from a well-developed management information system that provides assessors with comprehensive information at the start of each programme and at reviews. Learners are clear about their progress and speak positively about the way their programmes are organised. The provision of key skills and technical certificates is managed very effectively. The visual display used by staff, known as the 'Road', provides an effective progress monitoring and target-setting system. This is complemented by particularly informative reports derived from well organised management information systems. Staff teamwork is good and the clear sense of purpose amongst the staff team focuses on learners' progress and achievement. Staff are very experienced and use their expertise very effectively to the benefit of learners. Incentives are used effectively for learners and staff to celebrate and reward the achievement of targets.
14. Particularly effective initiatives improve training. Many of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection have become strengths of the organisation. For

example, programme planning and target-setting by assessors, seen as a weakness at the previous inspection, are much improved and the strategy for the delivery of key skills and technical certificates is highly effective. Learners' framework achievement rates are now outstanding. Performance management, a weakness at the previous inspection is now considerably improved. Subcontracted staff have service level agreements and assessors have a clear understanding of quality procedures and the requirements of the apprenticeship programme to which they are contributing. The management of assessors and the way in which assessment is planned have improved significantly and are now very good. Standard procedures and staff guidelines have been introduced which have contributed to the improvement.

15. Quality assurance arrangements are well established and all staff have a good understanding of quality procedures. Internal verification is well managed and effective. Feedback from learners is collected systematically and is used effectively to improve the provision. For example, changes to the induction programme were made following learner feedback. However, the system for observing workshops and training sessions is not sufficiently developed. The criteria used are not clear and the feedback records lack critical comments. Staff are well qualified, experienced and enthusiastic. Learners speak positively about their assessors. However, there is no member of staff formally qualified to offer literacy and numeracy support, should it be required.
16. Strategies to widen participation are good. NRS continues to be successful in the inclusion of learners with disabilities in training and employment. This was identified as a strength at the previous inspection. Collection and analysis of equal opportunities data is good. Representation of learners from minority ethnic groups is higher than in the local population. Strategies to widen participation for males have been particularly effective. For example, NRS has targeted specific sectors within business administration to engage male learners and has doubled the rate of participation over two years.
17. Equality of opportunity arrangements are good and learners receive a good induction, including rights and responsibilities at work, as well as learning tasks in their programmes relating to equality and diversity. There is, however, insufficient reinforcement or discussion of these matters at reviews when closed questions are often used and there is an over emphasis on general checking and recording. NRS has recognised the need to improve this part of the programme and had already been preparing to introduce a more reflective approach to learning about equality and diversity by using topics, questions and discussions to enable learners to develop their understanding.

What learners like:

- The very helpful staff, ☐ 'Always there to answer my questions'
- 'I like the way I can learn at work'
- 'It suits me very well to train like this ☐ they come here'
- 'Everything is explained very well'
- Very well organised training
- 'The training workshops are really helpful'
- 'Really helpful assessors, they help me if I am unsure'
- 'The last course I completed was really good for me and I am looking forward to starting the next one'

What learners think could improve:

- No suggestions were made

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by NRS Training **2004 to 2007**.

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	48	42	48	31	34
		timely	48	31	31	23	22
	05-06	overall	29	83	53	83	44
		timely	34	71	34	71	27
	06-07	overall	44	95	N/a	95	N/a
		timely	43	77	N/a	77	N/a
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	34	88	51	79	39
		timely	36	69	29	64	22
	05-06	overall	58	91	58	91	52
		timely	58	84	38	84	34
	06-07	overall	74	93	N/a	93	N/a
		timely	71	82	N/a	82	N/a

Note: At the time of the inspection - LSC data for 2006 to 2007 had yet to be fully validated

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the Individual Learning Record