

The NOVA Partnership and Thames Gateway Train to Gain Consortia

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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 took 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 considered 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.

Of the partners making up the consortia, Central Training Academy Ltd, Lifeskills Solutions, SEEVIC College, Southend Adult Community College, South East Essex College and Thurrock and Basildon College have direct contracts with the LSC and their provision has been inspected since the start of inspection cycle 2 in 2005. Eden Training and Vocational Training Services Ltd do not have direct contracts with the LSC but their provision has been inspected since 2005. However, this is the first inspection of both the NOVA Partnership and the Thames Gateway Train to Gain consortium.

In arriving at their judgements, inspectors sampled provision that is funded through the consortia and had not been inspected since 2005 unless numbers of learners in the sector skills area were very small. If other provision that is funded through the consortia had previously been inspected, inspectors took account of inspection reports, monitoring visit reports, position statements and had interviews with providers of provision to help them arrive at judgements on provision as a whole. courses are small, and this provision is offered by partners with direct LSC contracts.

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:

- Health, public services and care
- Agriculture, horticulture and animal care

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies
- Construction, planning and the built environment
- Information and communication technology
- Retailing and wholesaling
- Hairdressing
- Employability training
- Business, administration and law

Description of the provider

1. The NOVA Partnership (NOVA) and the Thames Gateway Train to Gain Consortium (Thames Gateway) are LSC funded consortia led and managed by South East Essex College (SEEC) in Southend-on-Sea.
2. NOVA was established in 1997. It offers Entry to Employment (E2E) and apprenticeships in a range of occupational areas to learners in south Essex. It has 14 provider members (partners). NOVA's management board comprises directors from each of the partners and is chaired by the principal of SEEC. The college's head of quality, the NOVA partnership manager and the NOVA finance manager represent the central NOVA team. SEEC is currently a non-delivery partner in the consortium.
3. Thames Gateway was set up in November 2007. It offers training funded through Train to Gain in a similar range of sector subject areas as NOVA. It has 12 provider members (partners). Most of these are also members of NOVA. Day to day management of Thames Gateway is carried out by a development manager. The consortium is adopting many of the structures and processes of the NOVA Partnership, and is planning to share some central services.
4. The LSC and NOVA agree that provider performance data for the partnership is not fully reliable. Because LSC data cannot currently be disaggregated at provider level, NOVA is unable to find the source of any errors. Inspectors checked qualification success rate data provided by the LSC for period 12 of 2007/08 against consortium data and found them to be broadly comparable. They used these and consortium data to help make their judgements on achievement and standards for learners.
5. The consortia have 2,994 learners on programme. Of these, 14 are pre-apprentices, 1,647 are apprentices, 526 are advanced apprentices, 254 are on E2E programmes and 553 are following programmes funded through Train to Gain.
6. According to 2001 census data, 5.5% of the population of Essex is from minority ethnic groups. Unemployment in the county is 4.5%, slightly lower than the national rate. The proportion of the population with qualifications at Level 2 and above is also slightly lower than that of Britain as a whole. However, this data masks local differences and the consortia serve a region which includes pockets of significant deprivation.
7. The following table shows the providers associated with the NOVA and Thames Gateway consortia.

Consortium	NOVA	Number of	Thames	Number of	Visited on
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members	member	learners	Gateway member	learners	inspection
Badgehurst Training Ltd	Y	90	Y	7	*
Central Training Academy	Y	348	Y	16	*
Crown College	Y	174	Y	58	*
Eden Training	Y	86	Y	25	*
ITEC Learning Technologies	Y	88	Y	37	*
J&E Training Consultants	Y	388	N		*
Lifeskills Solutions	Y	255	Y	121	*
NOVA Thurrock Centre	Y	45	N		*
Prospects College	Y	308	Y	46	*
St Nicholas School and E2E Centre	Y	0	N		
SEEVIC College	Y	40	Y	7	*
South East Essex College	N		Y	94	
Southend Adult Community College	N		Y	43	
Southend YMCA	Y	16	N		*
Thurrock and Basildon College	Y	200	Y	56	
Vocational Training Services	Y	403	Y	43	*

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Good: Grade 2
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Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

Sector subject area

Health, public services and care	Good: Grade 2
Agriculture, horticulture and animal care	Good: Grade 2
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Good: Grade 2
Construction, planning and the built environment	Good: Grade 2
Information and communication technology	Good: Grade 2
Retailing and wholesaling	Good: Grade 2
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	Good: Grade 2
Employability training	Good: Grade 2
Business, administration and law	Good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

8. The effectiveness of provision at NOVA and Thames Gateway is good. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners gain good work related skills. Overall success rates are satisfactory. The quality of provision is good. Nine sector skills areas were inspected and all were judged to be good. Teaching and learning are good, as is the consortia's provision to meet the needs and interests of learners. Links with employers

are particularly strong. Guidance and support for learners are good. Leadership and management are good, as is equality of opportunity.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

9. The consortia's capacity to improve is good. Strategic management of the consortia is very good, and has been particularly successful in developing collaborative partnerships that enable access to good provision in a wide range of sector skills areas. NOVA has taken successful action to improve provision. It provides good guidance on policies, procedures and standards that is well understood and used by partners and facilitates the sharing of expertise and good practice among partners to improve provision. Partners take part in a wide range of specialist and generic training activities designed to develop and improve their practice. NOVA and the Thames Gateway provide good individual support for partners to help develop their provision. During the past three years success rates have risen more steeply than improvements in national rates. Overall success rates for apprenticeship programmes are now at the national rate and are satisfactory. Timely success rates for apprenticeship programmes are just below low national rates. NOVA includes actions to improve overall and timely success rates in its development plan for provision and carefully monitors the implementation of the plan. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes in the Thames Gateway consortium are very high.
10. Self-assessment processes are systematic, thorough, involve appropriate staff, and make good use of data and learners' feedback. Self-assessment reports are evaluative and accurate, if somewhat long. They correctly identify strengths in provision and areas for improvement. Detailed plans for the development of provision in the consortia are prepared and their implementation is properly monitored. Quality monitoring systems at NOVA are well established and implemented effectively. However, some processes for improving key aspects of work-based learning are not yet sufficiently effective and the Thames Gateway has not yet implemented NOVA's quality processes.

Key strengths

- Good development of learners' work related skills
- Good strategic and operational management of provision
- Successful action to monitor provision and improve achievements
- Outstanding collaborative partnership working
- Good links with employers
- Particularly good support and staff development for consortia members
- Very successful development of provision to widen participation

Key areas for improvement

- Slow progress of learners on some programmes
- Incomplete implementation of quality arrangements in the Thames Gateway consortium
- Insufficient provision of skills for life in train to gain provision
- Insufficient monitoring of partners' equality and diversity procedures

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners on apprenticeship programmes develop good practical and work related skills during their training. On Train to Gain and E2E programmes, learners' knowledge and understanding improves and they gain significantly in motivation and self-confidence. The standard of learners' work is good.
12. Success rates on apprenticeship programmes and on E2E are satisfactory. Apprenticeship success rates have risen significantly over the past three years. Overall success rates for apprenticeships have risen at a faster rate than national rates, from 42% in 2005/06 to 64% in 2007/08. The progression rate for E2E was 66% for 2007/08. The overall success rate for Train to Gain is very high, at 100% in 2007/08. Although the NOVA partnership has been successful in improving learners' progress, timely success rates remain low at 43%, and just below the national rate of 46%. Learners on Train to Gain programmes make satisfactory progress. Timely success rates were 71% in 2007/08.
13. NOVA uses data well to monitor the performance of different groups and set targets to reduce any imbalances in recruitment, retention and achievement of learners. However, it has not yet set targets for action with partners. This, and other strengths and areas for improvement in achievement and standards, are identified in consortia self-assessment reports.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

14. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Training is well matched to learners' needs and the requirements of their jobs. Employers are well informed about learners' programmes and provide good opportunities for learners to develop and practice their skills. Partners provide good resources for learning. Assessment is thorough and generally makes good use of a range of assessment methods. Partners have suitable arrangements for the internal verification of assessment. They provide effective support to meet learners' literacy and numeracy needs on apprenticeship programmes and E2E. However, skills for life courses and qualifications are not promoted sufficiently on Train to Gain programmes. This is recognised in Thames Gateway's self-assessment and a project worker has recently been appointed to rectify this area for improvement.
15. The consortia's provision to meet the needs and interests of learners is good. They offer a wide range of work-based learning in Essex and have been particularly successful at targeting provision to meet the needs of disadvantaged learners. Partners have particularly effective links with employers which are used well for recruitment and to provide good work-based learning opportunities for learners.
16. Guidance and support for learners are good. The consortia and their members provide good initial information and referral arrangements to enable learners and employers to select provision to meet their needs. Support is successful in enabling disadvantaged learners to overcome significant barriers to participation. Links with specialist external

agencies are good. Assessors are responsive and accessible to learners. Employers and supervisors provide good support for learners' development and assessment. These and other strengths and areas for improvement in the quality of provision are identified in consortia self-assessment reports.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

17. Leadership and management of the consortia are good. Strategic planning is very good. Leaders respect the individuality and history of partners and have successfully developed a culture of co-operation rather than competition in planning provision. Consortia development plans take good account of national and local priorities. Their implementation is monitored carefully. Operational management is good across partners in all sector areas. Self-assessment is accurate and evaluative. Reports correctly identify strengths and areas for improvement.
18. NOVA has taken successful action to improve achievement on apprenticeship programmes and E2E. Overall and timely success rates have risen significantly during a period of rapid growth in recruitment. Both consortia recognise that too few learners achieve within their planned period on programme and have improved the monitoring and support they provide. Current learners are making better progress than before.
19. Collaborative working between partners is outstanding. Partners are involved in management decisions at strategic and operational level. They willingly share good practice and expertise, sometimes working together to deliver courses on shared premises. The consortia and its members make good use of their networks to obtain additional funding or services to improve provision. Partners have excellent links with employers, local authorities and support agencies. All partners acknowledge the benefits of collaborative working.
20. NOVA provides very good support and staff development for partners. It offers them an extensive programme of specialist training on topics such as health and safety, child protection, equality and diversity and strategies for improving success rates. Events are well attended and successful in developing partners' practice. NOVA provides helpful support on working with disadvantaged or disaffected learners. The Thames Gateway team provides good support to enable partners to achieve Matrix accreditation. NOVA represents partners effectively at external events and produces professional marketing materials for consortia provision.
21. NOVA has highly effective arrangements for monitoring the quality of most aspects of provision. A detailed quality handbook contains clear policies, procedures and standards for all key processes and is well used by partners. The NOVA team monitors provision carefully and takes swift corrective action if necessary.
22. Financial controls are sound. Allocation of subcontracted provision to partners is open and transparent, based on previous performance and local needs. Contract performance

is monitored every month. Partners' adoption of a common management information system has significantly reduced data errors.

23. Some quality arrangements have not been fully implemented. Although individual partners gather feedback and analyse complaints to improve provision, this is not systematically monitored or analysed by NOVA. Observation of key aspects of provision is not yet well established in all providers. The Thames Gateway Consortium is adopting many of NOVA's quality procedures, but has yet to implement the quality handbook or establish observation of key aspects of provision. These areas for improvement are identified in consortia self-assessment reports.
24. NOVA's arrangement for supporting learners with language, literacy and numeracy needs are satisfactory. However, arrangements for the promotion and delivery of skills for life have not yet been established for Train to Gain programmes. This is recognised in the self-assessment report. The consortium has recently appointed a project worker to develop this aspect of provision.
25. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet government requirements, and have been implemented by all partners for learners in both consortia. All relevant partner staff have had criminal records bureau checks. Training in safeguarding, diversity and the single equality scheme is provided for partner staff and participation in this training is good. Each partner has its own child protection policy and a designated and trained child protection officer.
26. Equality of opportunity is good. Initiatives to widen participation and promote social inclusion are highly successful. Opportunities for learners in the Southend and Thames Gateway area have improved significantly as the partnership has grown and expanded. The take-up of apprenticeships has increased. New centres in Thurrock, Grays and Basildon have improved local opportunities for learners with a wide range of learning difficulties and physical disabilities. Excellent opportunities for careers in construction and engineering are provided for disaffected learners. NOVA is very successfully engaging disaffected 14 to 16 year olds through imaginative link programmes. Partners have taken effective action to increase participation from minority and under-represented groups.
27. Learners are aware of their rights and feel protected against bullying and harassment. On most programmes, equality and diversity are effectively reinforced in induction and reviews. Learners and staff treat each other with mutual respect and dignity. All partners have procedures for monitoring equality and diversity. However, NOVA does not carry out sufficient monitoring of the application and effectiveness of these procedures. This area for improvement is recognised by NOVA.

What learners like:

- The support and help provided by staff
- Being treated as adults
- 'It's been an amazing experience and the course has helped me understand my job better'
- 'The more I learn, the more I enjoy my job'
- Gaining new practical and key skills
- Access to provision and the job prospects it provides – 'Getting a qualification has improved my CV and given me a chance to try a different career,' 'I dropped out at school and now I've had a second chance I didn't expect'
- The flexible arrangements for assessment that fit in with work demands
- The good descriptions and explanations provided by assessors
- The confidence they gain while on their courses
- The resources available to them

What learners think could improve:

- The planning of training at work
- Access to information on what learners can do next
- The amount of theory work in hairdressing (they would like more)

Sector subject areas

Health, public services and care

Good: Grade 2

Context

28. The NOVA Partnership and Thames Gateway consortium deliver apprenticeship training and Train to Gain programmes at South East Essex College, Vocational Training Services, Eden Training, and Southend Adult Community College. They provide advanced apprenticeships, apprenticeships and Train to Gain provision in health and social care (HSC), and children's care, learning and development (CCLD) at Level 2 and 3. A total of 635 learners were on programme at the time of inspection.

Provider	SSA 2 nd tier	No of Apprentices	No of Advanced Apprentices	No of Train to Gain learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
South East Essex College	HSC			22	
	CCLD			44	
Vocational Training Services	HSC	147	121	43	Y
	CCLD	65	70		
Eden Training	HSC				Y
	CCLD	72	10	25	
Southend Adult Community College	HSC			16	Y

Strengths

- Good development of learners' practical, social and theory skills
- Good working relationships with employers
- Wide range of progression opportunities for all learners within the consortia
- Excellent support from the consortia

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently detailed review records for apprentices
- Inadequate provision for skills for life training
- Insufficiently well established observation of teaching and learning

Achievement and standards

29. Learners develop good practical skills and improve their understanding of theory very effectively during their training. They are able to support colleagues more effectively and to offer good suggestions to improve clients' wellbeing. Learners working with elderly, mentally ill clients have greater understanding of their clients' needs. Learners who work with young people and adults with challenging behaviour make good use of strategies to engage their clients in purposeful activities. Learners with previous low attainment in education and training gain confidence and take advantage of additional

learning opportunities. Employers value the growth in competence and confidence of their staff.

30. Overall success rates are improving and are now satisfactory. Overall success rates for advanced apprenticeships have risen from 27% in 2005/06 to 60% in 2007/08. For apprenticeships, overall success rates have risen from 40% in 2005/06 to 65% in 2007/08. Train to Gain was introduced in 2007. No learners have yet completed their awards but are making satisfactory progress and most are expected to complete by their planned end dates.

Quality of provision

31. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The programme of learning for Train to Gain learners at Eden Training is particularly well planned. Learners have a thorough induction to all aspects of the award. The scheme of work for teaching sessions includes suggestions for preparatory reading and research. Learners use this well to reflect on learning and prepare for their next session. Learners are assessed at least once each month. Assessments are well planned and used to capture evidence of real work activities.
32. Partners have well resourced, welcoming environments for learning. Teaching areas are suitably decorated with a relevant selection of learners' work. Resources on diversity and equality of opportunity, journals and learning packs are available for learners, although many also buy their own textbooks. Most teaching and assessment staff have teaching qualifications and are very experienced. They inspire confidence in learners, who make good use of their expertise, for guidance or to help them interpret new legislation within the sector.
33. Assessors frequently review learners' progress, often at each assessment visit. Employers participate fully in learners' reviews. However, these contributions are not recorded in sufficient detail on learners' individual learning plans or review records.
34. Progress review records include comments on learners' success but are insufficiently detailed. They do not provide enough written guidance for learners or employers on what needs to be done between assessor visits.
35. Learners' literacy and numeracy needs are identified during induction. Assessors provide suitable support to enable learners to achieve their vocational qualifications. However, providers do not offer specialist provision to enable learners to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Skills for life qualifications are not sufficiently promoted to Train to Gain learners.
36. Arrangements for meeting the needs and interests of learners are good. The consortia offer a wide range of courses which provide progression opportunities for all learners. Programmes are well matched to learners' development needs. Partners' training premises are located within easy reach of public transport.
37. Partners have good working relationships with employers. Vocational Training Services provides a particularly attractive and informative pack for employers. Providers in the consortia are well regarded by employers, who have used their services for many years. Providers are responsive to employers' requests for additional training for their employees. Many employees progress to higher levels within the profession. Others take

additional qualifications in, for example, customer service and business administration. Employers make good use of providers as source of reliable information and advice on developments in the sector.

38. Guidance and support are good. The consortia offer a wide range of progression opportunities to learners. Learners are given good information and help to place them on suitable programmes and enable them to progress to other, often higher level awards including management awards at Level 4. Many Train to Gain learners have been promoted while on their programmes, or have accepted additional responsibilities at work. Learners with learning difficulties acquire good work skills and some have progressed to the Level 2 qualification in children's care, learning and development. Consortia members are currently negotiating with a local university to offer higher education awards.

Leadership and management

39. Leadership and management are good. Partners receive excellent support from the consortia. They have helped share good practice and have strengthened teaching and assessment for key skills. Particularly effective support was given to one partner during its restructuring to help improve achievement on apprenticeship programmes. The consortia pay particular attention to health and safety, and have helped develop health and safety monitoring arrangements at partners. Partners have been given good help to promote and implement arrangements for providing training through Train to Gain.
40. Provision is managed well. Communications with employers and staff are good. Self-assessment is thorough and accurate. It makes good use of learners' feedback and evaluation. Action plans for improvement are clear, and focus clearly on improving the quality of provision. Managers ensure that plans are implemented effectively. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory.
41. Observations of teaching and learning are insufficiently well established. Internal verifiers observe assessments effectively, give suitable feedback and monitor actions points for improvement of assessors' practice. However, partners have only recently begun to observe other aspects of learners' programmes, such as progress reviews and coaching in the workplace. Joint observations have recently started within the consortia but the recording documentation is not always suitable for observations in care settings.
42. The consortia provide good support on matters relating to equality and diversity. Each provider has a named equality and diversity contact. Learners' awareness of their rights and responsibilities, and those of their clients, is good. Learners are treated fairly and with proper attention to their individual needs. The consortia and partners collect data systematically to monitor equality and diversity. Partners' action plans for development include actions to tackle any imbalances in performance. Partners have been successful in targeting some under-represented groups. For example, they have increased the proportion of men on training programmes in health and social care.

Agriculture, horticulture and animal care

Good: Grade 2

Context

43. Agriculture, horticulture and animal care provision within the NOVA partnership and Thames Gateway consortium is delivered by Badgehurst Training Ltd and Southend Adult Community College. There are 88 learners on apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes. Badgehurst employs a team of seven staff to manage and support the delivery of these awards. Learners are also supported by freelance assessors, verifiers and trainers.

Provider	SSA 2 nd level tier	No of Apprentices	No of Advanced Apprentices	No of Train to Gain learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
Badgehurst Training Ltd	Horticulture	6	0	5	Y
	Floristry	3	0	0	
	Veterinary services	14	14	0	
	Animal care	19	5	2	
	Equine	11	5	0	
Southend Adult Community College	Horticulture			4	N

Strengths

- Good overall success rates on apprenticeships in veterinary services and horticulture in 2007/08
- Good learning materials in animal care and horticulture
- Successful actions to improve provision

Areas for improvement

- Late completion of advanced apprenticeships in veterinary services
- Insufficient development of independent learning skills in animal care

Achievement and standards

44. Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. In 2007/08, overall success rates are good for apprenticeships in veterinary services and horticulture, at 86% and 89% respectively. Overall success rates for the sector skills area as a whole have improved significantly over the last three years, rising from 23% in 2005/06 to 63% in 2007/08. Learners develop good occupational skills while on their programmes and they are enthusiastic about their training and employment. They value highly the opportunity to gain a qualification while employed. Learners' portfolios of evidence for their NVQs are well organised and most learners have a good understanding of the assessment process. Their understanding of health and safety requirements is particularly good, and is reinforced during training, at work and in progress reviews. Learners' achievement of key skills and technical certificates is good.
45. In veterinary services, most advanced apprentices completed their programmes some time after the planned end date in 2007/08. The timely success rate was 20%. The

awarding body's confirmation of learners' success was delayed and Badgehurst was not notified of learners' successful achievement of their awards until several weeks after their completion.

Quality of provision

46. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Very good video recordings and activities are used to develop learners' health and safety awareness on all courses. Materials for independent learning in animal care and horticulture are good. They are well designed by teaching staff and are successful in improving and reinforcing learners' knowledge and understanding. Materials are available in several formats to meet the needs of learners. For example, they can be accessed online, as computer disks, or as work books for those learners who do not have easy access to a computer.
47. Initial assessment is used effectively to identify learners' individual needs and develop their individual learning plans. Partners make good use of skills audits to identify the needs of learners on Train to Gain programmes and to plan the accreditation of their prior learning and previous vocational experience. Key skills training is provided on- and off-the-job and arrangements are successful in meeting learners' individual needs. Progress reviews are regular and make effective use of target-setting and action plans to help learners progress.
48. Training is provided at a training centre or at learners' place of work, to meet their individual needs. In training or individual coaching sessions, trainers provide clear explanations for learners and use good resources to aid learners' understanding. One session made good use of peer assessment to develop learners' knowledge and skill. Learners acquire good practical skills during their training. However, some trainers rely too heavily on instruction and do not always involve learners sufficiently in the session.
49. Assessors provide insufficient development of learners' independent learning skills in animal care. Learners' portfolios are kept by their assessors and learners have insufficient opportunity to take responsibility for their own evidence collection and portfolio-building.
50. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners are good. Learners at some employers have very good access to facilities that enhance their experience. For example, one equestrian yard has an excellent indoor riding school which also provides enrichment activities for learners. Some learners are encouraged to compete at equestrian shows. Visits to events such as the Horse of the Year Show are organised for learners. A local authority parks department provides a good variety of seasonal work for learners studying horticulture. However, some workplaces, such as pet shops, offer a more restricted range of resources and learning experiences.
51. Badgehurst has well established links with over 30 employers and it communicates with them well. The consortia provide a suitable range of courses and qualifications for learners to enable them to progress within their chosen careers.
52. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Learners are well supported by their assessors. They maintain good contact with learners through regular and frequent visits or by e-mail and telephone. Where learners encounter difficulties or barriers to participation, they provide suitable support to help learners continue. Learners are confident that their concerns and queries will be dealt with effectively by their assessors.

Leadership and management

53. Leadership and management of provision are good. Managers at Badgehurst have taken successful action to improve the quality of provision. They pay good attention to the needs of the local area in planning provision. Self-assessment is thorough and evaluative and involves all staff. It makes good use of inspection reports, data and of feedback from learners and employers to monitor and evaluate provision. Observations of teaching, coaching and progress reviews are carried out regularly. Paired observations and moderation of observation reports with the quality manager at NOVA are effective in monitoring provision. Feedback on observation reports include recommended action for improvements and these are followed up successfully in subsequent observations. The self-assessment report is accurate and evaluative. Action for improvement has been effective in improving aspects of provision such as initial assessment, planning of learning and the monitoring of learners' progress. Overall success rates for learners have improved during the three year period leading up to the inspection.
54. Staff have good vocational skills and knowledge, and are successfully encouraged to update their current industry practice on a regular basis. Communication and teamwork are good. Managers evaluate performance thoroughly and regularly update procedures to help improve provision. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. The consortia provide good support to help manage provision.
55. Equality of opportunity is covered well at induction and reinforced effectively during learners' programmes and progress reviews. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They are treated fairly and with good attention to their individual needs. Badgehurst's flexible arrangements for delivery of provision are effective in enabling learners to overcome barriers to participation. Staff, learners and employers' awareness of Badgehurst's policy on equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Managers use data well to monitor the impact of their equality and diversity policies and take action to rectify imbalances if they occur. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups exceeds that of the local population.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Good: Grade 2

Context

56. Apprenticeship training and training funded by Train to Gain is provided for the NOVA Partnership and the Thames Gateway consortium by Thurrock and Basildon FE College and The Prospects Learning Foundation. The Foundation is a large educational charity based in south Essex. Its skills centre in Basildon, named Prospects College (Thames Gateway) Ltd provides engineering apprenticeships and Train to Gain.

Provider	SSA 2 nd tier	No of Apprentices	No of Advanced Apprentices	No of Train to Gain learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
Prospects	Aero	12	10		Y
	Electrical	22	22		
	Welding	5	6	5 (Level 3)	

	Mechanical	5	12	31	
	FLT			9	
	Eng Maintenance			1 (Level 3)	
Thurrock and Basildon College	Electrical	1	54		
	Motor mechanics	58			
	Taxi, Chauffeurs			29	

Strengths

- Good overall success rates
- Good off-the-job training
- Good links with employers
- Successful initiatives to increase participation
- Excellent strategic leadership at Prospects College
- Good operational management of the training centre at Prospects College

Areas for improvement

- Some slow progress by learners on NVQ programmes at Level 2
- Insufficient promotion of skills for life programmes to Train to Gain learners
- Insufficient quality monitoring in the workplace

Achievement and standards

57. Overall success rates are good. In 2005/06 and 2006/07 overall success rates for advanced apprentices were 70% and 76% respectively, compared with national rates of 48% and 66%. In the same years, overall success rates for apprentices were 82% and 70% compared with national rates of 50% and 62%. The success rate for learners on Train to Gain programmes is very high, at 100%. At Thurrock and Basildon College, overall success rates for advanced apprentices have risen from below the national rate in 2006/07 to the high rate in 2007/08 of 91% for a cohort of 11 learners. For apprentices they have risen from 0% in 2005/06 and 2006/07 to a satisfactory rate of 65% in 2007/08.
58. Some learners doing Level 3 NVQ courses make slow progress. Timely success rates for advanced apprentices at Prospects College are low, at 45% in 2006/07 and 41% in 2007/08.
59. Apprentices at Prospects College develop good hand and machining skills during their off-the-job training. The Thurrock and Basildon College inspection identified that the standard of learners' practical work was good and that learners demonstrated good skills.

Quality of provision

60. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Off-the-job training is good. Prospects' accommodation provides extensive resources for fitting, machining, welding and electrical installation. Classrooms are well furnished. Practical training sessions are delivered well, by experienced and skilled instructors. Learners are

given clear guidance on tasks and good quality teaching and learning aids are used well. The assessment of practical workshop skills at Thurrock and Basildon College was judged to be good.

61. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed on entry. If required, specialist staff give additional support to learners. Learners at the training centre also have access to a range of specialist learning aids. Progress reviews in the workplace occur every six weeks and are generally satisfactory. Many workplace supervisors play some part in learners' reviews, but others are absent and do not contribute to the setting of training or assessment targets.
62. Assessment at Level 3 places too much reliance on the production of written reports by learners. Assessors make insufficient use of direct observation of learners in the workplace. In a small number of companies, workplace supervisors are not adequately involved in planning learners' programmes or in their assessment. The inspection of Thurrock and Basildon College also identified insufficient assessment by observation in the workplace. For motor vehicle apprentices at Thurrock and Basildon College, the inspection found progress reviews to be ineffective. The recent significant improvement in success rates at Thurrock and Basildon College has coincided with increased monitoring of learners' progress.
63. Opportunities to improve their literacy and numeracy skills are insufficiently well promoted to Train to Gain learners. Assessors in the workplace provide additional support to learners where possible. In some cases they use ingenious assessment methods to circumvent learners' literacy difficulties. However, these arrangements do not improve learners' literacy or numeracy skills.
64. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners are good. Prospects College has particularly good links with employers and offers them valued assistance in the recruitment and selection of candidates for apprenticeships. Communications are effective. Staff take prompt and effective action in response to employers' needs or concerns. For example, Prospects College recently developed new programmes to meet the needs of employers in the aero-industry. The inspection of Thurrock and Basildon College judged that communications with apprentices' managers were insufficiently well developed. College staff have taken action to improve this aspect of provision.
65. Guidance and support for learners are good. Prospects places particular emphasis on learner support arrangements and on health and safety during practical sessions at induction. It provides good support for learners with disabilities and additional learning needs. It has introduced a successful range of initiatives, such as good role models and case studies, to promote positive images of engineering training. It makes effective use of its training centre to provide engineering programmes for 14 to 16 year old school pupils. A Saturday morning club for young engineers is used well to promote careers in engineering. Staff at Thurrock and Basildon College work well with other providers to meet the needs of learners from under-represented groups.
66. Apprentices receive satisfactory information and advice. Most have a good understanding of the requirements of their programme. Train to Gain learners receive sound information and advice sessions at three stages of their programme.

Leadership and management

67. Leadership and management of provision are good. Senior managers at Prospects College provide excellent strategic leadership for the development and improvement of provision. The annual strategic plan is well designed and communicated effectively to staff. The chief executive builds very good links with key agencies to pursue its strategy on widening participation. Prospects College has made significant investments in staffing, buildings and equipment to enhance learners' experience. The training centre is well managed. Learners' attendance, punctuality and behaviour is monitored closely. Values of mutual respect are well promoted among staff and learners.
68. Quality improvement processes gather a wealth of evidence from data analysis, observation of teaching, audits, views of learners and employers. This evidence is used well to improve provision. However, Prospects College carries out insufficient quality monitoring in the workplace. Internal verification is generally satisfactory but does not include sufficient observation of assessment in the workplace. Other key aspects of learners' programmes are not observed sufficiently.
69. Provision is particularly effective in widening participation. Prospects works hard to promote provision to under-represented groups and has been successful in increasing the proportion of females on engineering programmes. Providers use data well, and monitor provision effectively, to ensure that its policies on equality and diversity are effective. Learners' awareness of their rights and responsibilities is satisfactory. They are fairly treated and receive good support to meet their individual needs. However, monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is not adequately structured. It relies too heavily on learners' responses during progress reviews. The inspection of Thurrock and Basildon College judged that quality assurance arrangements did not adequately ensure consistency in assessment, individual learning plans and course review. Arrangements are in place for safeguarding young and vulnerable adults.

Construction, planning and the built environment

Good: Grade 2

Context

70. Construction training is offered by two NOVA partnership members, Prospects College and Thurrock and Basildon College. Most provision is delivered by Prospects College, and this was the focus of the inspection visit, although the data quoted relates to all provision. At the time of inspection there were 216 learners. Of these, 207 were apprentices and nine were advanced apprentices. All but one are male. Sixty apprentices are on programme-led apprenticeships and the remainder are employed. Learners are recruited from a variety of routes. Some are referred by other agencies, and have social and educational barriers to learning. Off-the-job training is carried out at one of Prospects College's three sites, or for learners from Thurrock and Basildon College, at the college.

Provider	SSA 2 nd tier	No of Apprentices	No of Advanced Apprentices	No of Train to Gain learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
Prospects	Brick	44	0	0	Y
	Wood Occupations	94	9	0	
	Painting and decorating	12	0	0	
	Plumbing	26	0	0	
Thurrock and Basildon College	Wood Occupations	31	0	0	

Strengths

- Good off-the-job practical training
- Good learning environment and resources
- Good development of learners skills
- Particularly effective actions to include learners with social barriers
- Excellent support for learners
- Good links with employers and other stakeholders

Areas for improvement

- Poor retention and achievement in plumbing
- Slow progress by some learners
- Poor learner awareness of equality of opportunity

Achievement and standards

71. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners develop good practical skills which are valued by employers. Learners' skills are developed both on- and off-the-job. Employers support apprentices very effectively and help them to gain a wide range of experience on their construction sites. Apprentices have a good understanding of theory.
72. Apprenticeship framework success rates are satisfactory at 64% in 2007/08. These have increased significantly each year for the last three years. Success rates for advanced apprentices are 100% in 2007/08 for a cohort of four learners. Most learners currently on programme are making satisfactory progress. However, some learners miss many opportunities for collecting good NVQ evidence, and make slow progress towards completing their qualification.
73. There have been no successes to date in plumbing. Of the 10 learners who joined in 2007, six are still on programme. Although these learners have passed the planned end date for their programmes, they have now almost achieved their awards.

74. Attendance for learners is very good. Attendance is closely monitored, and non-attendance is very quickly tackled. Learners develop a positive approach to work, and employers speak highly of the attitude and maturity of their apprentices.

Quality of provision

75. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Off-the-job theory and practical sessions are good, and enjoyed by learners. Training is well planned and delivered. Resources at the two Prospects College's sites are excellent. They are well equipped, have adequate tools and work space and the standard of housekeeping is good. Resources at employers are also excellent. Learners work on good construction sites, and use a wide range of tools and equipment that meet high industrial standards. Learners speak very positively about the resources available to them.
76. Assessment practice is good. Assessors are thorough, and make good use of questioning to assess learners' theoretical knowledge. Many learners collect useful photographic evidence of their competence. However, they are not sufficiently encouraged to use this, or to collect other relevant NVQ evidence to improve their progress.
77. Employers support learners very well and are kept informed of their learners' progress. Prospects promotes good health and safety practices in the workplace and in the training centres. It regularly monitors employers' health and safety processes and standards. Health and safety matters are discussed properly with learners at each progress review.
78. The range of work available to apprentices is appropriate to the NVQ requirements. In situations where employers are unable to provide an area of experience relevant to a particular aspect of the NVQ, alternative arrangements are made with other employers. Prospects makes considerable efforts to find construction sites and employers to meet apprentices' needs.
79. Progress reviews are satisfactory. Although they are planned to take place every 13 weeks, most learners are reviewed more frequently. Reviews are thorough and records are detailed. However, timescales recorded in learners' individual plans are determined by the funding period rather than their individual needs and abilities. Despite the clear focus of the review being their progress, some learners do not meet the targets set for them.
80. Programmes and activities to meet the needs of learners are good. Many learners arrive with social and educational barriers to learning. Much effort is made to help learners overcome these barriers and to extend provision to learners who would not otherwise participate.
81. Support for learners is excellent and highly effective in enabling their social inclusion. All apprentices have an initial assessment, using a variety of assessment methods, to identify any additional learning support needs. Prospects uses the results well to determine the level of course offered and to plan a programme of individual support. Approximately 30% of the apprentices receive additional support, and many of these have social barriers that impact on their learning. The supportive culture of the organisation is effective in enabling these learners to participate. For example, some learners were identified as having a lack of confidence and motivation. These were each paired with learning mentors and appropriate action taken to help these learners progress. All subsequently achieved their framework and are now employed.

82. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. Learners receive appropriate information about employment rights and responsibilities. The induction includes good coverage of health and safety. Learners receive satisfactory information, advice and guidance. Most learners have a good understanding of why they are on the programme and the benefits it brings.

Leadership and management

83. Leadership and management of provision are good. Prospects has very good quality improvement arrangements. Self-assessment is thorough and accurate. Managers and staff are highly responsive to the need for change and much effort is focused on improving the quality of provision. Identified areas for improvement are tackled effectively. Provision has improved considerably each year for the last three years. Strategic management is excellent. Prospects carries out frequent observations of off-the-job teaching and learning and provides constructive feedback to staff to help them improve.
84. Tutors are well qualified and have, or are working towards appropriate teaching qualifications. Staff awareness of the progress that learners are making is good. Assessment and training is well planned. Individual learning plans are complete and regularly updated. Managers monitor learners progress carefully, but some learners make slow progress. They have introduced a number of initiatives to improve success rates for learners. These have had a positive impact, and success rates have improved considerably over the last three years.
85. Prospects uses data well to monitor the impact of its equality and diversity policies and procedures. Learners receive appropriate information about equality and diversity during their induction. Learners feel protected from bullying and harassment. They are provided with good support to meet their individual needs and to help them overcome barriers to participation. However, equality of opportunity is not well covered at learners' review. Discussions lack sufficient depth and content. Apprentices have poor recollection of equality and diversity matters.

Information and communication technology

Good: Grade 2

Context

86. Training in information and communications technology (ICT) is offered on behalf of the consortia by ITEC, which is based in Basildon, Essex. ITEC employs 15 members of staff including a chief executive, a general manager, a business development manager and a career and training co-ordinator. There are seven trainers and assessors.

87. At the time of inspection, 27 apprentices, aged 16 to 18 and 11 aged 19+, study on the IT Practitioner course at Level 2. Eight advanced apprentices aged 16 to 18 and 24 aged 19+ are on the IT professional Level 3 course. Two apprentices aged 16 to 18 are on the IT User programme Level 2 and two at Level 3. There are 37 learners on Train to Gain studying City and Guilds (CGLI) E-Quals IT Diploma for Users and 14 learners on a pre-apprenticeship programme leading to the CGLI IT Diploma for Practitioners.

Strengths

- Good overall success rates
- Good development of workplace skills
- Good teaching and learning resources
- Strong links with employers
- Good management of provision at ITEC

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of individual learning plans to plan learning

Achievement and standards

88. Learners' achievements and standards are good. Overall success rates for the seven advanced apprentices in 2007/08 were 86% and for the larger group of Level 2 apprentices were 70%. However, only 11% of advanced apprentices completed their programmes when they were expected to do so. Additional teaching and revision sessions have now been introduced to help these learners pass their tests at the first attempt, and so complete their course more quickly. Retention is satisfactory. Initially retention on Train to Gain programmes was poor. ITEC has made changes to these courses and retention is now satisfactory. No Train to Gain learners have yet reached the end of their course.
89. Learners develop good workplace skills. They benefit from the use of appropriate and up-to-date equipment and are expected to behave as employees when attending the centre. Learners become more confident and enthusiastic as they learn faster and more effective ways of carrying out their job roles. Staff at the centre provide effective help with any technical problems learners may have when they are at work. Employers report good gains in information technology (IT) skills, self-esteem, confidence and self-reliance in learners, as well as significant improvements in organisational effectiveness. They give learners additional responsibilities and promotion as their skills and confidence improve. Learners on the pre-apprenticeship course leading to the CGLI IT Diploma for Practitioners are prepared well for their apprenticeships and for the workplace. They are required to dress appropriately for office work and to adopt the behaviour of employees. The course is particularly beneficial for young school leavers.
90. Progression is satisfactory with apprentices frequently progressing from Level 2 to Level 3. Learners' work is of a satisfactory standard.

Quality of provision

91. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Tutors' subject knowledge is very good. They make effective use of good resources for teaching and learning in the centre. Equipment is well maintained and regularly upgraded.

Membership of the Essex Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for ICT Solutions has enabled the centre to become very well equipped with industry standard workstations and furniture that promotes safe working practices. Teaching rooms have good facilities. In the better teaching sessions, tutors make good use of interactive whiteboards and data projection facilities. However, in the poorer sessions teaching and learning methods are insufficiently varied and the pace of learning is too slow. Learners' assessment is satisfactory.

92. ITEC makes insufficient use of individual learning plans to plan learning. Individual learning plans are not always completed thoroughly. Very little use is made of them to plan programmes of learning particularly on Train to Gain provision. Learners are not always aware of when they may expect to complete their programmes. Centre staff carry out regular reviews of learners' progress but although employers usually attend these reviews, assessors do not. Assessors complete records of learners' progress but are not fully involved in planning their learning. They make insufficient use of communications technology to aid the assessment and review process.
93. ITEC's arrangements for meeting the needs and interests of learners are good. Strong links with employers ensure that both employers' and learners' individual needs are particularly well met. Many employers were previously learners at ITEC. Their understanding of the requirements and demands of the programme is good, and they provide very effective support for learners. Some employers have used ITEC for staff training and recruitment for many years. Employers are fully involved in learners' reviews.
94. Support and guidance for learners is good. Tutors are very accessible. They provide beneficial additional help for learners with ICT problems at work. Flexible arrangements for provision are successful in enabling Train to Gain learners to attend off-the-job session at different times to meet their needs. Sessions are held during the working day and in the evening to maximise opportunities for learners to attend classes. Learners who miss sessions can attend at alternative times to help them make faster progress. Learners receive satisfactory information, advice and guidance on their courses and career progression.

Leadership and management

95. Leadership and management of provision are good. Communications at ITEC are very effective. There are frequent meetings between managers and assessors to review learners' progress and set targets. Staff meetings are regular and well attended. A well established appraisal process is used effectively to encourage staff to develop and improve their specialist ICT skills. Managers constantly review the training ITEC offers to ensure that employers' and learners' needs are met. They work hard to ensure that the centre provides a realistic working environment for learners. Managers ensure that the pre-apprenticeship provision prepares school leavers thoroughly for employment.
96. ITEC's self-assessment process is particularly effective. Preparation of the self-assessment report is very inclusive. Learners' views are regularly collected and used to make judgements about the quality of provision. Strengths and areas for improvement are correctly identified and action planning is effective in bringing about change quickly. ITEC continuously reviews the programmes it offers to ensure that employers' needs and external requirements are met effectively. The teaching and learning observation

programme is systematically planned. However, there is insufficient recording of the action tutors should take to improve and not all tutors have a teaching qualification.

97. ITEC uses data well to monitor the recruitment and achievement of learners from different groups and takes action to rectify imbalances. Learners receive good support to enable them to progress. Their progress reviews include checks on learners' understanding of equality and diversity and these are satisfactory. New promotional literature and application forms are being used to target under-represented groups. These have already been successful in attracting females to participate in programmes at the ITEC centre. Three per cent of apprentices and 12% of Train to Gain learners are from minority ethnic groups. However, staff have not had the opportunity to attend recent specialised training in equality and diversity. Arrangements for monitoring health and safety are satisfactory. The centre has qualified health and safety officers who visit new employers to check their suitability.

Retailing and wholesaling

Good: Grade 2

Context

98. Four consortia members offer provision in retailing and warehousing. Lifeskills Solutions and Crown College do not have independent contracts with the LSC in Essex. Inspectors visited both these consortia members and took account of previous inspection findings for Central Training Ltd and Thurrock and Basildon College in arriving at judgements on provision. All learners are employed in retail outlets from small shops to large department stores, selling in a wide range of retail sectors including fashions, pets, health foods and supermarkets.

Provider	SSA Second tier	No. of Apprentices	No. of Advanced Apprentices	No. of Train to Gain	Visited on inspection Y/N
Crown	Retailing and wholesaling	48	11	20	Y
Lifeskills Solutions	Retailing and wholesaling	33	39	56	Y
Central Training Ltd	Retailing and wholesaling			7	N
Thurrock and Basildon College	Retailing and wholesaling			1	N

Strengths

- Very good development of work-based skills
- Good one-to-one coaching
- Good development of programmes to meet employers' needs
- Good management of the programme

Areas for improvement

- Slow progress by some learners
- Poor assessment planning for some learners

Achievement and standards

99. Learners develop very good job skills. They work and gain experience in a wide range of retail outlets. Many are returning to training after a gap of several years and the acquisition of these skills has a positive impact in their personal lives. Following training and assessment learners increase their knowledge of retail operations and have a better understanding of their own work roles. They fulfil more demanding roles for their employers. For example, some learners at Level 2 have been given the responsibility of cashing up the day's takings and locking the store for the night. In larger department stores learners have been given the responsibility of running a concession.
100. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Overall success rates are satisfactory. On advanced apprenticeships, overall success rates rose from 45% in 2005/06 to 68% in 2006/07. However, they fell to 36% in 2007/08. Overall success rates for apprenticeships have risen from 68% in 2005/06 to 75% in 2007/08. Train to Gain success rates are high at 100% for the six learners completing their programmes in 2007/08.
101. Some learners make slow progress on their programmes. Timely success rates on advanced apprenticeships declined to 14% in 2007/08 though for apprenticeships have risen slightly to 33%. On Train to Gain only 50% of learners complete their programmes by the planned end date. This area for improvement was recognised in the self-assessment report and steps have been taken to improve learners' progress across all programmes. The timely completion rate of programmes has improved in the current year. Learners are now making satisfactory or better progress towards their qualification and the standard of work in their portfolios is generally good.

Quality of provision

102. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Most training is provided by assessors, using effective individual coaching sessions in the workplace to develop their skills and knowledge. At an early stage in their programmes, assessors give learners good explanations of the standards that they are expected to meet. They explain very thoroughly how learners should gather and present evidence of their competence. Learners are successfully encouraged to read the standards and cross reference their evidence to appropriate criteria before presenting it for assessment. They develop very effective independent learning skills. For example, they make good use of events that may be difficult for assessors to observe, such as dealing with customer complaints or customer credit card refusal to present evidence of their competence against the standard required. They write about the incident and obtain written confirmation from their managers to testify to the accuracy of the event. Arrangements for literacy and numeracy support are satisfactory.
103. Arrangements for assessment are satisfactory overall. Assessors visit learners every two weeks and more frequently if necessary. A variety of assessment methods are used and portfolios contain a suitable range of evidence. However, a small number of assessments are poorly planned. They try to cover too much at a single visit. Learners' action plans are sometimes insufficiently specific about the evidence required to cover outstanding areas of the NVQ.

104. Learners' progress reviews are satisfactory. The best reviews are detailed, and provide a clear indication of what learners have achieved and what they need to do to progress further. However, others provide insufficient information for learners. Some assessors make insufficient use of individual learning plans to review learners' progress reviews.
105. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners are good. Consortium members have developed a good range of programmes to meet employers' and learners' needs. For example, assessors from Lifeskills Solutions have adapted or designed workbooks to help learners make good use of their employers' in-house training in assessment for their NVQ. Employers make good use of the training and assessment provided for employees to help identify future supervisors and managers for their organisations. Employers speak very highly of the consortium members with which they work.
106. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Initial assessment is satisfactory and includes an initial interview, as well as assessment tests of learners' literacy and numeracy skills. Assessors take appropriate steps to accredit learners' prior learning. Consortium members provide effective additional support to assist learners with specific and identified needs.

Leadership and management

107. Leadership and management of provision are good. Managers provide clear, strategic direction for the development of provision. Partner staff are well qualified with a good range of occupational experience. Partners have improved the monitoring and management of staff to improve performance. For example, at Crown College assessors are informally monitored every week and have a formal monitoring meeting with their manager each month. Partners make good use of data to monitor learners' performance and manage staff performance. They have a good understanding of the improvements needed in provision. Internal and external communications are effective. Staff meet regularly to review progress and to discuss areas for development. The consortia have developed good networks of employers, many of whom have been participating for many years. The support provided by consortia managers, for the development of provision, is good. Partner's self-assessment is systematic and thorough. It accurately identifies strengths and areas for improvement in provision.
108. Learners have a good awareness of their rights and responsibilities and understand how to make a complaint, if necessary. They are provided with effective support to enable them to progress. Partners take effective action to monitor the implementation of their equality and diversity procedures. For example, Lifeskills uses an equality and diversity group to monitor the promotion of equality of opportunity and ensure that it is well promoted. Partners use data well to monitor provision and identify areas for improvement in the recruitment and achievement of different groups of learners. Assessors regularly discuss equality of opportunity with learners during visits to the workplace.

Hairdressing

Good: Grade 2

Context

109. Within the NOVA Partnership, hairdressing apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships are offered by J&E Training, Central Training Group and Thurrock and Basildon College. Some on- and off-the-job training is subcontracted to the Paul Falltrick Academy. The three partners work with a total of 500 salons in Essex. Over a quarter of the learners on apprenticeship programmes are male.

Provider	SSA 2 nd level tier	No of Apprentices	No of Advanced Apprentices	No of Train to Gain learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
J&E Training	Hairdressing	328	60		Y
Central Training Group	Hairdressing	297			Y
Thurrock & Basildon College	Hairdressing	34			N

Strengths

- High standards of practical work
- Good development of ICT at J&E Training
- Good individual support for literacy and numeracy
- Particularly effective links with employers
- Good development of quality assurance arrangements

Areas for improvement

- Ineffective arrangements for the delivery of key skills
- Incomplete development of teaching and learning strategies

Achievement and standards

110. Achievements and standards are satisfactory overall. Learners develop particularly high standards of practical work while on their programmes. They demonstrate advanced techniques in hairdressing at competitions, shows and seminars. Their work is displayed professionally at providers' premises to demonstrate their skills to clients and as good examples to which learners may aspire.

111. Overall success rates in hairdressing are satisfactory. Overall success rates in 2007/08 were 59% and just below the national average of 64%. Timely success rates have improved over a three year period and were 46% in 2007/08. Key skills pass rates have been poor in recent years. Partners have paid careful attention to improving retention on the programme and to increasing key skills pass rates to improve overall success rates. Strategies to improve retention and achievement were noted as a strength in Central Training's inspection report in 2006. Key skills pass rates have improved recently, as has the retention of learners.

Quality of provision

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112. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning is satisfactory. The development of ICT and its use at J&E is good. J&E makes effective use of its interactive whiteboard during practical training sessions at its training room. It provides similar facilities for its subcontractor. Learners make good use of the computers at J&E to develop their writing skills and confidence. Its website encourages learners to use ICT by providing an area where they may exchange information with one another and view salon vacancies. Training co-ordinators make good use of laptop computers during individual training sessions with learners. The use of information technology to aid learning was also identified as a strength in the 2007 inspection report for Thurrock and Basildon College. Teaching and learning at Central Training was judged to be satisfactory at its inspection in 2006.
113. Assessors visit learners at work every two weeks. In addition to coaching learners to develop their practical skills, they provide very good access to assessment and support learners' progress effectively. Learners are employed in good salons with up-to-date facilities and equipment. In-salon assessors are available for many learners.
114. On- and off-the-job training at J&E is well planned and particularly effective in developing learners' hairdressing skills. Learning resources are good. However, J&E uses an incomplete range of teaching and learning strategies for teaching theory. Lesson plans have insufficient detail on how learning will take place. Most theory lessons are carried out on an individual basis in the workplace. Learners have too few opportunities to exchange information and ideas with their peers during their theory training, or to work in groups.
115. The delivery of key skills in recent years has been ineffective. Learners have made slow progress in the completion of their awards. Partners have taken action to rectify this problem and key skills are now better integrated with provision of hairdressing training. Learners' understanding and achievements have improved. Most learners now complete key skills in the first year of their training.
116. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners are good. Partners have particularly good links with employers. Communications with employers are good, and employers appreciate the support they are given. They make good use of the diverse range of training seminars offered by J&E to help develop learners' skill and knowledge. They have a good understanding of their role in training and motivating learners.
117. Partners offer a wide range of enrichment activities to learners. Leading international hairstylists are used well to promote the industry to learners. Hairdressing competitions are effective in developing learners' good practical skills and confidence. A formal gala dinner and achievement ceremony is held each year to celebrate learners' success and to motivate learners to succeed in the industry. Catwalk collections and photographic sessions are used effectively to develop learners' creative talents. Educational seminars are offered at partners' salons to support learners' and meet employers' individual needs.
118. Guidance and support are good. Learners receive particularly good support to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. A learning support tutor works on an individual basis with those learners who need support. Learners' development is linked carefully to the needs of their vocational qualification. They have a good understanding of the relevance of these skills in the hairdressing industry and enjoy their development sessions. Their reading, writing and application of number skills improve as a result of the support they

receive. Assessors make frequent visits to learners and are responsive and accessible. Employers have a good understanding of their role in training and motivating learners and provide good support and access to training and assessment.

Leadership and management

119. The management of hairdressing provision is good. NOVA has introduced good quality assurance arrangements which are used well by partners to improve the quality of training in hairdressing and which are beginning to have impact on retention of learners and their success rates. The observation of teaching and learning is established and has improved the quality of teaching and learning. Staff have regular reviews and a good programme of continuous professional development to keep them up-to-date with their qualifications and skills. They are regularly involved in the review and evaluation of provision. They hold useful monthly meetings to identify learners who are at risk of leaving and arrange additional support to help keep them on programme. Induction has been improved to prepare learners more successfully for progression to advanced apprenticeships. J&E's self-assessment report was thorough and broadly accurate. Self-assessment at Central Training is similarly thorough. Internal verification is satisfactory. Leadership and management at Central Training was judged to be good at its inspection in 2006.
120. Learners at J&E are given good information on equality and diversity at induction. This is reinforced in their handbooks. Their understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work is satisfactory. Particularly good support is provided for learners with literacy and numeracy needs. Learners have good opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities that extend their knowledge of hairdressing and the careers it offers. However, employers' understanding of equality of opportunity is not reinforced sufficiently.

Employability training

Good: Grade 2

Context

121. There are eight training providers in the NOVA Consortium offering a wide range of E2E training opportunities. Most provision is within the greater Southend area although a centre has recently been opened in Grays. There are 254 learners currently on these programmes. Within the consortium, two small providers offer specialist programmes for learners with greater support needs, one being within a special school and the other within a housing project for young homeless people. Two providers offer specific vocational training in construction trades including brickwork, painting and decorating, plastering and carpentry. Other providers offer a wide range of progression routes with some training linked to work experience placements. Learners have the opportunity to gain specific vocational qualifications and awards including health and safety others linked to personal and social effectiveness. All providers offer literacy and numeracy support and many learners achieve Level 1 in one or both.

Provider	No of E2E learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
Badgehurst Training Ltd	5	Y

Central Training Academy	8	N
Crown College	70	Y
The NOVA Thurrock Centre (Crown and Lifeskills)	45	Y
Lifeskills Solutions	81	N
Prospects College	29	Y
Southend YMCA	16	Y
St Nicholas E2E centre	0	N

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning
- Very good resources
- High level of specialist support
- Very effective consortium management

Areas for improvement

- Key objectives not sufficiently matched to learners personal and social needs

Achievement and standards

122. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. Overall progression rates for the consortium have improved. During the year 2007/08, 808 learners left the programme. Of these, 66% progressed into further training, education or employment compared with 58% in the previous year. During this period 78 learners were transferred from E2E to a Level 1 foundation learning tier pre-apprenticeship pathway, where it was felt that their aspirations towards an apprenticeship would be better met. This transfer is not included in positive outcome rates for E2E. The two specialist providers, St Nicholas E2E centre and Southend YMCA, have low progression rates. The learners they serve have particularly complex needs.
123. Learners improve their social and personal skills while on their programmes. Many develop good practical skills in construction and other trades during their planned work experience. Most learners produce good quality work both in practical sessions and in their portfolio-building.
124. Many learners achieve a range of qualifications and awards in preparation for employment such as key skills, basic construction, literacy and numeracy and a range of personal effectiveness awards.
125. Attendance is generally good at most centres and between 70 to 80%. At Prospects and Southend YMCA attendance rates exceed 80%. Providers appreciate the importance of this aspect of their programmes and have good strategies in place to maintain and improve both attendance and timekeeping.

Quality of provision

126. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Of the five observed lessons four were good and one was satisfactory. Lessons are well planned. Good quality, relevant, learning materials are used to support learning. Tutors make very effective use of activity based learning and a range of techniques are used to involve and motivate learners. During lessons, tutors and learners make good use of the interactive

whiteboards and computers in most classrooms. Learners' progress is closely monitored. They produce good quality portfolios of their work.

127. Resources and accommodation across the consortium are very good. Classrooms are well equipped with very good access to computers and other electronic devices. Classrooms are well decorated with suitable furniture and storage facilities for learning resources and learners' work. Practical workshops contain modern tools and machinery that learners would encounter in industry. All equipment and accommodation is maintained to a very high standard. Learners respect and appreciate the high standard of resources and accommodation provided for them.
128. Programmes and activities meet the needs and interest of learners satisfactorily. Partners offer a wide range of general and vocationally specific provision to learners. At some centres, learners who are undecided about their career path take part in taster sessions in a variety of industrial and commercial settings. Other specialist providers offer specific construction training leading to apprenticeships and employment in the industry. Two partners work with learners with a particularly wide range of support needs and who require significant help. Most provision is in the greater Southend region. The consortium has recently opened centres in other areas and is committed to increasing provision across the region. However, learners in some areas have insufficient opportunity to take part in work experience.
129. Learners' key objectives are not sufficiently matched to their personal and social needs. Tutors make insufficient use of learners' six-week initial assessment period to accurately identify learners' barriers to progress or to develop an individual programme for their training. Learners' key objectives place insufficient emphasis on their personal and social development. The learning plans that result are not used as the basis for progress reviews and are generally not updated to take account of any changes in learners' circumstances. Tutors are highly responsive to learners' needs when they arise, but the review process does not help learners and tutors to plan for additional support or development of learners. The review process is not sufficiently effective in enabling learners to reach their goals and potential.
130. Guidance and support for learners are good. Many learners have multiple social and personal barriers to participation in training or employment. They include ex-offenders, school non-attenders, those with learning or behavioural difficulties or with a history of drug or alcohol abuse. Learners receive a high level of specialist support to help them fulfil their potential. Specialist staff and key workers are available at each centre to provide effective help with, for example, problems of homelessness or financial matters. They also use a wide range of specialist external agencies to support learners. These include agencies specialising in supporting people with drug and alcohol dependency, youth offending, mental health problems, counselling services and Connexions Personal Advisors.

Leadership and management

131. Leadership and management of provision are good. Leadership by managers at NOVA is good and the network of E2E partners is managed effectively. Partners work together closely and share good practice. They hold regular meetings which are led by the partners themselves rather than the NOVA team. Partners recognise and appreciate the support, advice and guidance given by the NOVA team. In particular, smaller partners in the consortium, with fewer resources for quality monitoring, have benefited from

NOVA's effective quality improvement procedures. NOVA arranges training events for specific aspects of E2E provision based on needs identified by partners where new procedures or practices need to be introduced.

132. Communication and teamwork in partner organisations is good. Collaborative activity is strong, particularly at the NOVA Thurrock centre, which is shared by partners. Partners' self-assessment processes are thorough and detailed and accurately identify strengths and areas for improvement in provision.
133. Partners adopt a culture of continuing programme development and plans include a commitment to increasing provision to cater for young people not in education, employment or training. The consortium has ensured that staff have a good understanding of requirements relating to child protection, *Every Child Matters outcomes* and the promotion of equality and diversity. The network of providers is effective in enabling access to provision for a wide range of learners with differing needs. Many learners have multiple barriers to participation and support is effective in enabling them to progress.

Business, administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

134. A total of nine partners in the NOVA Partnership and Thames Gateway consortium offer work-based learning programmes in business administration (BA), team leading (TL), accounts (Acc), customer service (CS), contact centre (CC), sales (S) and telesales (T). Of these, 196 learners are on Train to Gain programmes, 180 learners are on apprenticeship programmes and 44 learners on advanced apprenticeship programmes. Learners are employed. Most training and assessment is carried out on-the-job.

Provider	Subject	No of apprentices	No of advanced apprentices	No of Train to Gain learners	Visited on inspection Y/N
Badgehurst Training Ltd	BA, CS	2	6	0	N
Central Training Group	BA, TL, CS	41	2	9	Y
Crown College	BA, CS	35	10	38	Y
Eden Training	TL, CS	4	0	0	N
Lifeskills Solutions	BA, CS, S, T	86	16	65	Y
Southend Adult and Community College	TLM, BA, CS	0	0	23	N
South East Essex College	BA, Acc, CS, S,	0	0	28	N
SEEVIC	CS, Acc	0	0	7	N
Thurrock and Basildon College	BA, Acc, CS, CC,	12	10	26	N

Strengths

- Good overall success rates in 2007/08
- Good development of learners' skills and confidence
- Very productive links with employers
- Particularly good support for learners
- Good operational management

Areas for improvement

- Poor target-setting for some learners
- Inadequate recording of some reviews

Achievement and standards

135. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates in 2007/08 are good. Success rates for business administration learners on Train to Gain programmes are very high at 100%, although some learners make slow progress on these programmes, with timely success rates of 58%. Overall success rates for learners on business, administration and law apprenticeships have risen over the three year period since 2005/06 and were 74% in 2007/08, comfortably above the national rate of 63%. Overall success rates for advanced apprenticeships in business, administration and law have also risen over the same period. For the 21 learners who completed in 2007/08, they were 76%, well above national rates for the period. Timely success rates for advanced apprentices and apprentices have also improved and in 2007/08 were satisfactory at 57% and 63% respectively.
136. Learners develop particularly good skills and confidence while on the programme. Employers and supervisors are highly satisfied with the skills learners gain during their training. For example, during one observation a learner displayed very good skills in dealing with telephone calls, unexpected visitors and the consequences of a power cut.

Quality of provision

137. The quality of provision is good. Teaching and learning are good. Learners work-placements in customer service and business administration are particularly good. They provide ample opportunities for learners to develop their skills, demonstrate their competence at work and gather evidence for their portfolios. Assessors incorporate good coaching and assessment activities into learners' performance of their duties at work. Store-based sales statistics are used well to measure the positive impact of coaching on learners' performance.
138. Learners use a good variety of evidence in their portfolios to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding. Key skills support is delivered effectively and these skills are valued by learners. However, arrangements for the identification of learners' language and literacy needs are not sufficiently developed for those learners whose first language is not English.
139. The targets set at some learners' progress reviews are insufficiently specific. Short term targets are not always set and records do not give sufficient guidance on how learners might progress. Assessors deal effectively with the needs and concerns of learners, but do not record this in sufficient detail. Planned learning or assessment activities and

assessor visits are not always recorded on learners review documents. In some cases the written comments on review records are illegible.

140. Arrangements to meet the needs and interests of learners are good. Programmes are well planned and enable learners to progress to qualifications at higher levels. For example, learners move successfully from E2E to apprenticeships, or from apprenticeship to advanced apprenticeships. One learner has progressed to a qualification at Level 4. Many learners are promoted to more responsible positions as they progress through their courses. Several Train to Gain learners who have completed their programmes have gained the confidence to start other courses.
141. Partners have very productive working links with employers. They give employers helpful guidance to ensure that they play a full part in learners' training. For example, a good employer pack developed by Crown College provides clear information and support for employers. At Lifeskills Solutions work with local transport and security companies is successfully extending provision to many learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Train to Gain has a significant impact on the skills and confidence of many learners.

142. Guidance and support for learners are particularly good. Prospective learners are given helpful information to guide their choice and level of programme. Partners have good referral arrangements which enable learners' choices to be accommodated successfully. Several learners have challenging job roles and domestic circumstances. Assessors respond quickly to individual needs, changing appointment times or using email to provide rapid responses to questions and submitted evidence. If confidentiality is important, assessors are highly responsive and supportive. They make good use of external agencies such as pregnancy advisory services and child protection agencies. Their support is effective in minimising risk to learners and in enabling them to remain on programme.
143. Learners' supervisors provide good support. Many supervisors have previously obtained qualifications with consortia partners and have a good understanding of the demands of learners' programmes. They allow adequate time for coaching and assessment and for learners to attend additional support activities. If learners progress to supervisory levels they actively seek opportunities to provide work based tasks that enable these skills to be demonstrated.

Leadership and management

144. Leadership and management are good. Operational management is particularly good. Resources are well managed. Staff have suitable work loads and are properly monitored. Quality improvement processes are effective. Internal verifiers observe assessment and coaching sessions and provide good feedback to improve assessors' practice and stimulate their professional development. Regular staff meetings are used effectively to discuss provision in detail, to share good practice and to monitor overall targets. Lifeskills makes effective use of external assessors to quality assure its provision. Partners make good use of the consortia as a source of advice and guidance. The consortia provide good specialist help for partners and are successful in facilitating the sharing of good practice between partner members. Partners' arrangements for identifying and meeting learners' literacy, numeracy and language learning needs are satisfactory. Their self-assessment processes are satisfactory, involve staff appropriately and the findings accurate.
145. Partners promote equality and diversity effectively. They use data well to monitor the performance of different groups and set targets for improvement. Crown College successfully meets the targets it sets for widening the participation of under-represented groups. Learners are treated fairly and provided with good individual support, to enable learners to achieve. During progress reviews, assessors carry out regular checks of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and their rights and responsibilities in employment. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of these concepts.