

INSPECTION REPORT

South West Durham Training Ltd

19 February 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

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

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learnirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

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

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

South West Durham Training Ltd is a group training company with registered charity status. It is located on the Newton Aycliffe Industrial Park, five miles north of Darlington. It provides training in business administration and engineering for learners across the northeast of England.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, training in business administration and engineering is good, as is the leadership and management of the company.

GRADES

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

Business administration, management & professional	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- good management of training
- good recruitment strategy
- good promotion and monitoring of health and safety
- good retention rates
- well-resourced training centre
- highly supportive employers
- good off-the-job training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient business planning
- poor monitoring and promotion of equal opportunities to employers
- ineffective management information systems

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more involvement by South West Durham Training Ltd in planning on-the-job training

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at South West Durham Training Ltd (SWDT) in February 2002. They visited 34 workplaces and interviewed 63 learners and 37 workplace supervisors. Forty interviews of SWDT staff took place, and reviews, assessments and learning sessions were observed. A range of documentary evidence was examined, including learners' portfolios and records, review documents, assessment records, external verifiers' reports, minutes of meetings, plans, policies and procedures. The current self-assessment report was produced in December 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	2	4	3	0	0	0	9
Business administration, management & professional	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	0	4	4	3	0	0	0	11

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. SWDT is a group company limited by guarantee. It is a registered charity with over 170 member companies across the northeast region, most of them engineering and machining employers. SWDT is based on the Newton Aycliffe Industrial Park, about five miles north of Darlington. The company began in 1967 as a small training company for engineering apprentices. It now employs 40 full-time staff and provides training for over 500 learners in engineering and business administration. SWDT also offers a variety of courses for commercial clients. Learners are given off-the-job training, which takes place at the training centre in their first year on the training programme and at local colleges in subsequent years. Currently, SWDT has contracts with the three local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs), County Durham, North Yorkshire and Tees Valley. Most learners are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3, either on modern apprenticeships or other work-based learning programmes. There are 465 modern apprentices and 47 young people on other work-based learning programmes.

3. The 1991 census showed the population of Darlington as 99,600. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups was 1.4 per cent in Darlington, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. Eighty per cent of Darlington's employment is in the service sector and 19.8 per cent in production and construction. The unemployment rate in Darlington in October 2001 was 4 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.9 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at Grade C or above was 47.2 per cent in Darlington, compared with 42.8 per cent in the northeast region, and the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

4. In engineering, retention rates are improving with increasing numbers of learners remaining on the training programme. There is good achievement of the NVQ at level 2 but learner progress is slow on the NVQ at level 3. In business administration, although retention rates are high, achievement rates are poor for the NVQ training programmes. In 1998-99, the achievement rate for the NVQ training programme was 39 per cent. In 1999-2000, NVQ achievement was 37 per cent and in 2000-01 the rate was 38 per cent.

5. There is a well-resourced training centre for the engineering training programme. Learners have access to equipment of industrial standard. Employers provide good learner support and have good working relationships with the training provider's staff. Induction is thorough with good emphasis on health and safety and learners' welfare. There is good off-the-job training and learners develop a good range of relevant basic skills. Learners are not always given the relevant documents or standards until late in their training programme. There is insufficient integration of key skills training and assessment in the work place. There is an effective employment strategy in business administration and the training provider has good working relationships with a wide range of local employers. Individual learning plans are good, and well informed by the results of the initial assessment. Learner support is good both during and after the training programme.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

6. SWDT has a voluntary board of directors who determine the overall policies of the company. It consists of six representatives chosen from the 170 member companies. The general manager is in charge of the day-to-day running of the company, and is responsible for health and safety and equal opportunities. Two senior managers are in charge of the operational management of training. The workshop manager has a team of 18 instructors for off-the-job engineering training on the NVQ at level 2. The training manager is responsible for work-based learning and related subcontracts and has a team of 15 training officers. The duties of training officers include approval of work placements and learners' progress reviews. Other staff include a quality assurance co-ordinator, a training and marketing promotions officer, finance staff and course administrators. A training officer co-ordinates key skills qualifications. Some off-the-job training is subcontracted to three local colleges of further education. SWDT was accredited with the Investors in People standard in 1998 and was successfully re-accredited in 2001. Investors in People is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

STRENGTHS

- effective internal and external communication
- good recruitment strategies
- good staff development and appraisal
- effective promotion and monitoring of health and safety
- detailed and thorough equal opportunities policies and procedures
- effective use of learner and employer surveys
- regular monitoring of off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient business planning
- poor monitoring and promotion of equal opportunities to employers
- ineffective management information systems

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reinforcement of equal opportunities in progress reviews
- more effective sharing of good practice
- more detailed self-assessment report

7. There is effective communication between learners, staff, employers and external agencies, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. There are good working relationships with employers. Staff are kept well informed and have regular

discussions with their managers. The general manager, workshop manager and training managers meet each week to evaluate training activities. Senior managers have monthly meetings with instructors and training officers. These meetings are well attended and are recorded in sufficient detail. They set appropriate targets and responsibilities for actions and these are circulated to all relevant staff. An engineering task group, consisting of the main engineering subcontractor, representatives from employers and the training manager, meets every six to eight weeks. This group discusses local initiatives and industry needs in order to direct the training programmes and identify which NVQs employers can provide. In addition, the training manager has monthly NVQ partnership meetings with the subcontractor to discuss the provision of training, course development and learners' progress.

8. SWDT has good recruitment strategies. A website gives the history and profile of the company and describes the training opportunities. Potential learners can select their area of interest and get information on NVQ training programmes. They can also make an on-line course application. Brochures and pre-paid post cards are sent to careers offices, schools, libraries, and community and leisure centres to encourage potential learners to train with SWDT.

9. The company has well-established links with schools in the region. Pupils are sent to SWDT every two weeks to work on practical assignments for their technology studies. There is also an annual applied technology day in which up to 12 local schools take part. A group of pupils from each school work as a team and are assisted by learners from SWDT. They produce an engineering component using a variety of skills, and write a report on the project. Every year, the company has an open day and careers fair, for parents and potential learners, at which local engineering companies set up stands and demonstrate their products. All the workshops and departments have demonstrations and 'hands on' facilities. SWDT provides free transport and refreshment for schools at these events. Every year, the company recognises and celebrates learners' success with a formal prize-giving day. These activities have been successful in encouraging students into engineering; and meeting the needs of industry.

10. Some learners are not employed when they start their NVQ training programme. SWDT works with learners to identify potential employers and supports them in their search for employment. This is very successful. Some learners with other training providers, who did not have an employer or work placement, approached SWDT and were subsequently placed with a suitable employer.

11. There is good staff development and appraisal. Formal staff appraisals are scheduled annually, in addition to informal discussions every six months with line managers. The results of appraisal are used effectively to identify individual training needs. Job descriptions are clear and staff understand their roles and responsibilities. Instructors from SWDT spend a week with a major employer and follow a structured workplace training programme. This is effective in updating their industrial skills and knowledge. In return, workplace supervisors attend SWDT's training centre to improve their understanding of NVQ training programmes and training methods. A number of

staff have been sent on courses in equality of opportunity, mentor training, key skills and health and safety, and some have been helped to gain NVQs and degrees.

12. SWDT is very effective in promoting health and safety to learners and employers. Many staff are qualified health and safety officers and others have attended appropriate training courses. There are thorough procedures for the approval of workplaces. Employers are given a comprehensive health and safety information pack, which includes guidance on policies, insurance liability, risk assessment and manual handling. Before learners are placed with employers, qualified health and safety staff visit workplaces to make sure they comply with legislation. If employers do not have health and safety policies and procedures, a SWDT safety officer helps to develop them. Training officers monitor health and safety in the workplace when they carry out learner progress reviews or assessment. Details of the results of monitoring are clearly recorded. Information is kept on insurance liability expiry dates.

13. The learners induction to the NVQ training programmes includes a comprehensive health and safety training day. Learners unable to attend the health and safety training are able to attend any of the commercial health and safety training courses. Each learner is given a handbook with information on health and safety. Before they start in their workplace, learners can use a computer software package on health and safety to remind them of their responsibilities. The continual promotion and monitoring of health and safety has been successful in raising and maintaining learners' awareness of relevant issues.

14. SWDT is a member of the Durham and North Yorkshire health and safety group and works closely with the local factory inspector. These strong links ensure that staff are always updated on changes in legislation and practice. Training staff are effective in maintaining a safe working environment for learners in the training centre. This is clear from the excellent safety record, with no accidents reported in the past seven years.

15. SWDT does not have an effective business plan. The aims and objectives are no more than general statements. There is no target-setting and no method for measuring the impact of change or assessing whether aims and objectives are being met.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

16. SWDT has a comprehensive and detailed equal opportunities policy which is updated to comply with current legislation. There is a range of supporting policies including those for appeals, grievance, anti-harassment and bullying. The company is an active member of a consortium, organised by the local LSC, to develop equal opportunities awareness through a range of educational initiatives. SWDT actively promotes employment and training opportunities to all groups in the local population.

17. Staff have a good understanding of equal opportunities. All staff are given training to develop their understanding of equal opportunities and how to implement it in everyday working practice. An equal opportunities officer has recently been appointed, responsible for promoting and monitoring equal opportunities both in the company and with employers.

18. SWDT does not make its standards for equal opportunities sufficiently clear to employers. Staff visit employers to ensure they have a current and acceptable equal opportunities policy, but the implementation of this policy is not effectively monitored. The new equal opportunities officer acknowledges this as an area for development and an appropriate action plan is being developed.

19. Information on equality of opportunity is given to learners during their induction. They take part in discussions to increase their awareness of the issues. There is, however, insufficient reinforcement of equal opportunities as learners progress through their training programme.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

20. SWDT has a well-established quality assurance system. It covers recruitment and selection of learners, arrangements for work placements, learners' induction, health and safety, training, assessment and verification, progress monitoring and progress reviews. There are written arrangements for when learners leave or transfer to another training programme. Internal audits are carried out regularly to ensure that procedures are followed.

21. SWDT uses surveys to collect feedback from employers and learners, often in the form of questionnaires. Responses are analysed and action plans are devised to improve training and the learners' experience. This has led to changes in procedures and training and to improved learner and employer satisfaction. In addition, there are regular employer forums, and learners raise issues of concern at their tutorials.

22. SWDT regularly monitors off-the-job training. Trainers and assessors are observed at work by the training managers and senior workplace supervisors. Verbal and written feedback is given to the trainers and assessors to help them improve their performance.

23. There are no targets set for achievement rates. Achievement rates have not been monitored. No strategy has been implemented to improve the number of learners achieving their qualifications. Insufficient attention is paid to ensure that learners complete all the requirements of their training programmes within appropriate timescales.

24. There are many procedures to ensure good provision throughout the training programmes. However, staff often initiate good working practices in isolation. There are no procedures to ensure that good practice is shared and communicated throughout the company.

25. The self-assessment report is based upon contributions from many staff. Many strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors were also identified in the self-assessment report. The report was, however, insufficiently detailed and did not adequately reflect the training provision.

Good Practice

The key skills co-ordinator effectively encourages employers to become more involved in learners' key skills training. One engineering employer has developed a work-based assignment, which can contribute towards the key skills units.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	434	2

26. There are 434 learners on work-based learning programmes in engineering. There are 372 advanced modern apprentices and 27 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 4. There are also 35 learners on other work-based learning programmes working towards NVQs at levels 1 and 2. Learners attend a one-week induction at SWDT's training centre in the first week of their training programme, followed by workplace and college inductions. Most learners attend the training centre during their first year and work towards an NVQ at level 2. Learners specialise in a wide range of engineering skills including electrical, machining, fitting, maintenance, tool making, instrumentation, production, fabrication and welding and technical services. All advanced modern apprentices are employed. Learners on other work-based learning programmes are found employment during their training programme. Learners attend local colleges for one day each week to complete their vocational qualifications. Most learners follow craft or national certificate programmes. Learners can undertake further qualifications and progress to higher national certificate level. Work-based mentors and workplace supervisors provide on-the-job training. SWDT staff carry out most assessments in the workplace. Some companies have qualified work-based assessors. Training officers manage the everyday support for learners and carry out progress reviews every 8 to 12 weeks. Copies of review documents are issued to employers. Learner's successes are celebrated at an annual prize-giving day.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people														
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	100		154		121		206						
Retained	0		6		15		20							
Successfully completed	0		6		15		20							
Still in learning	94		110		72		96							

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	40		29		105		55									
Retained	12		22		86	82	46	84									
Successfully completed	12		22		86	82	46	84									
Still in learning	23		2		1	1	1	2									

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	24		87		37		54									
Retained	0		73	84	32	86	46	85									
Successfully completed	0		41	47	19	51	23	43									
Still in learning	21		9	10	5	14	0	0									

STRENGTHS

- increasing number of learners remaining on training programme
- good achievement of NVQ at level 2
- well-resourced training centre
- highly supportive employers
- thorough induction processes
- good off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- slow learner progress of NVQ at level 3
- insufficient integration of key skills training and assessment in the workplace

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more consistency in progress review process
- more involvement by SWDT in planning on-the-job training

27. There are good retention rates in all training programmes and good achievement rates for NVQ at level 2. Over the past four years, the proportion of learners remaining on NVQ training programmes averaged 85 per cent. During the same period, the foundation modern apprenticeship programmes averaged 83 per cent and the advanced modern apprenticeship programmes averaged 60 per cent. The achievement of NVQ at level 2 in the apprenticeship training programmes averaged 74 per cent and in the advanced modern apprenticeship training programme has ranged from 89 per cent to 99 per cent over the past four years. On other NVQ programmes, achievement over the same period has increased from 55 per cent to 63 per cent.

28. There are excellent resources in the training centre, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Learners have good access to equipment of a good industrial standard. This includes specialist computer numerical control (CNC) machinery, up-to-date welding equipment and automated engineering measuring equipment. The resources are highly regarded by local engineering companies, which send their staff to SWDT for training and to update their skills.

29. Employers provide good support to both the technical and the personal development of learners, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Employers regularly provide equipment, components and projects for use in the training centre. There are good working relationships between employers and SWDT's staff. Any concerns raised during the training programme are effectively dealt with. Employers are involved in deciding learners' off-the-job training programmes. Employers provide additional training such as abrasive wheel training and lift truck driving. Many employers are actively involved in the planning of on-the-job training. In most cases, training plans are well structured and meet both employers' and learners' needs. However, the training is sometimes planned without the involvement of SWDT and is not consistently linked to the requirements of the NVQ and apprenticeship framework. SWDT acknowledges this as an area for improvement and is developing a clear strategy to effectively plan on-the-job training. Learners are encouraged to gain a wide variety of engineering experience within their company and work in different departments for set periods. There is guidance and supervision provided by qualified and appropriately experienced engineering supervisors. Learners are advised to keep a logbook of the work they have carried out. Employers will also rearrange production schedules to give learners experience of particular engineering tasks.

30. The induction process is thorough and well recorded. There is a good emphasis on health and safety and learners' welfare. Learners' understanding of issues discussed

during the induction is confirmed in the early stages of the training programme by the use of questionnaires. In most cases, there is also a thorough employer induction. Most learners receive additional information, in particular on health and safety, as they move between departments during their training programme.

31. There is good-off-the-job training. Most learners attend the training centre for one year. The practical training is focused on developing a good range of basic skills including milling, turning and grinding, welding and electrical skills. Learners are able to develop skills at a pace most suited to their individual learning needs. Each learner is aware of the training and assessment plan for each skill. Knowledge is assessed through a series of short tests under examination conditions. The training programme develops good relevant skills and understanding for the workplace. All the trainers at the training centre have extensive relevant industrial experience. Most hold qualifications in teaching or training, in addition to assessor and verifier qualifications.

32. There is slow learner progress of level 3 NVQ, a weakness acknowledged in earlier self-assessment reports. Learners are not always given the relevant documents or NVQ standards until late in their training programme. Assessment is satisfactory, but is carried out late in the training programme and in some cases within three months of the planned completion date. Not all of the activities carried out by learners in the workplace allow for the required range of competences to be demonstrated in the time available.

33. There is insufficient integration of key skills training and assessment in the workplace, a weakness acknowledged in the self-assessment report. There are currently plans in place to remedy this weakness. Many learners complete all the key skills elements at level 2 during their off-the-job training. When key skills units are completed in the workplace it is often late in the apprenticeship. Learners do not understand how to relate key skills units to work-based tasks. Some employers have initiated work-based key skills projects but these are in the early stages of development. Learners have access to the training centre in the evenings to help them complete their information technology (IT) key skills units.

34. Progress reviews are regular and frequent. However, the targets set for learners are not always clear and learners' comments are not always recorded on the review documents.

Good Practice

An employed learner required specific additional training to enable him to be more effective in the workplace. The learner joined a commercial training session and achieved the qualification with no charge to the learner or employer.

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	78	2

35. There are 78 learners on work-based learning programmes in business administration. There are 36 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2, 19 of whom are employed and the remaining 17 in work placements. Thirty learners are advanced modern apprentices, all of whom are employed, working towards NVQs at level 3. There are 12 learners on other work-based learning programmes, nine of whom are employed and three are in work placements. Many learners in work placements move on to permanent employment. There are three full-time staff involved in the business administration training programmes. They visit workplaces to provide training, guidance and support, and to observe learners at work and plan and carry out assessments. They also carry out regular progress reviews, in the workplace. These activities are recorded and involve the workplace supervisors where appropriate. The three staff all hold adviser and assessor qualifications, and two are qualified internal verifiers. The third is working towards the internal verifier qualification. Learners are given key skills training off the job on one day each month at the training centre, provided under subcontract by a tutor from a local college. Other training is given on the job by workplace trainers or workplace supervisors. Any additional background knowledge required is provided by the visiting assessor in the workplace.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	10		38		21		30								
Retained	1		6		13	62	20	67								
Successfully completed	1		4		11	52	18	60								
Still in learning	7		23		0	0	0	0								

Work-based learning for young people																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	36		45		29		1									
Retained	0		28		26	90	1	100									
Successfully completed	0		28		19	66	1	100									
Still in learning	25		11		0	0	0	0									

Work-based learning for young people																	
NVQ Training	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	18		8		27		36									
Retained	1		3	38	22	81	25	69									
Successfully completed	1		3	38	10	37	14	39									
Still in learning	11		1	12	0	0	0	0									

STRENGTHS

- effective employment strategy
- good links with employers
- good individual learning programmes
- good learner support during and after the training programme

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates on NVQ training programmes

36. There is an effective employment strategy and the training provider has good working relationships with a wide range of local employers and previous learners. Many of the workplace supervisors were trained by the training provider. The company acts as a recruitment agency for employers. Learners are usually found employment soon after they begin their training. Where a change of workplace is necessary, alternative employment is quickly arranged. If necessary, learners are given temporary work placements in the company's own offices until a new job is found for them. Most learners continue in employment at the end of their training programme. New employment is successfully found by the training provider for those learners who do not

continue in employment at the end of their training programme.

37. There are good links with employers. The training provider has a good knowledge of the work carried out by all its employers. Workplaces are very good. Employers are generally large companies which provide good learner support. They provide learners with good work experience in administrative work with job rotation, planned work experience and company training programmes.

38. There are good individual learning programmes. Results of initial assessment are used by the training officers to help the learners choose which NVQ level they can work towards. The learners' age, GCSE results, maturity and any previous work experience are all taken into account. Individual learners can convert to level 3 NVQs after a short time working on the level 2 NVQ. Initial assessment also enables the training provider to effectively match learners to job vacancies. Induction, which is carried out for one week off the job, is thorough. Learners entering a training programme individually receive a short induction and attend the next full induction programme. Modern apprentices routinely work for a basic health and safety certificate and an additional NVQ unit as part of their apprenticeship framework. Learners are also encouraged to gain customer service NVQs or college-based qualifications, where appropriate, to improve employability.

39. There is good support for learners up to and after the completion of their training programmes. Training officers visit learners in the workplace at least monthly, or more regularly if necessary, to advise them on the work for their NVQs and to carefully plan assessments with them. Action plans are developed and recorded in detail. Learners keep copies of these documents in their portfolios of evidence. Training officers meet learners and workplace supervisors together on quarterly review visits. There is a detailed checklist for progress reviews and the comments of learners and workplace supervisors are recorded. The training provider routinely contributes to supporting learners who overrun the funding period for achieving the framework. It extends the original individual learning plan and provides additional support, training and guidance to help learners achieve the qualification. This support is not funded by the LSC.

40. The three business administration training officers are well qualified and experienced. Learners in this occupational area have access to their own IT training room. It has business standard computers running a range of business software and networked through a server. Key skills training is normally carried out at the training centre once a month on a day release basis. If learners are unable to attend these training sessions, they can attend an out-of-hours key skills drop-in centre on two evenings each week.

41. Portfolios are well structured and well presented. Learners compile and keep their own portfolios. Units are assessed and signed off as they are completed. Internal verification is good but, until very recently, there has been no interim internal verification. However, the training centre co-ordinator has responded to an action written by the external verifier and has developed a procedure for interim as well as for

final internal verification. It is too early to assess its full effect.

42. Although retention rates are high across all business administration programmes, there are poor achievement rates for the NVQ training programmes. In 1998-99, the achievement rate for the NVQ training programme was 39 per cent. In 1999-2000, NVQ achievement was 37 per cent and in 2000-01 the rate was 38 per cent.

Good Practice

As part of their induction, all learners are trained in basic first aid to the appointed person level, and receive a certificate of competence.

A foundation modern apprentice who has partly completed her level 2 NVQ has, in order to meet her employer's needs, decided to defer completion and to work instead towards the Association of Accounting Technicians award. The training provider does not provide this award but has continued to support the learner with advice and assessment in completing her level 2 when she is ready.