

INSPECTION REPORT

Royal Cornwall Hospitals National Health Service Trust

29 May 2001



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

The Royal Cornwall Hospitals National Health Service Trust provides acute health care for the people of Cornwall and the Scilly Isles. The department of education, training and development offers a wide range of professional development and training options for the people employed by the NHS in Cornwall. There is a comprehensive range of NVQs in administration, management, care, catering and hospitality. Currently, 550 employees are undertaking national vocational qualifications (NVQs). There are 27 modern apprentices, all of whom are working as either health care or business administration assistants. Modern apprenticeship training is funded through a contract with the Devon and Cornwall's Local Learning and Skills Council.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the training provided for modern apprentices is satisfactory in business administration, but less than satisfactory in health care. The leadership and management of training are satisfactory.

Work-based learning for young people

All modern apprentices benefit from a well-planned, flexible programme of off-the-job training. A good proportion of apprentices complete their modern apprenticeship in business administration. Seventy per cent of those who started in 1999 were successful in gaining NVQs at level 2 and the full award in 2000. Success rates for health care modern apprentices are less satisfactory. The apprentices make slow progress towards the achievement of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework. To date, only two apprentices have successfully completed the full framework. Retention rates, however, are good. Department records for 2000 show a retention rate of 100 per cent, an improvement over the 1999 proportion of 80 per cent.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of training are satisfactory. Management functions, lines of authority and responsibility and job descriptions are clearly defined and understood within the department. The clear and effective lines of communication ensure that all staff are informed about departmental developments and have the opportunity to express their views. There are clearly stated plans for attracting more employees to study for, and achieve, NVQs and modern apprenticeships. A regular programme of staff development relates to equal opportunity issues. A quality

assurance framework provides detailed guidelines and procedures, but these are not applied sufficiently rigorously across the education, training and development department. Many reviews of apprentices' progress are thorough. Some, however, lack clear detail of what apprentices must do to make improvements or of targets against which their progress can be measured. The self-assessment report was insufficiently self-critical.

GRADES

Business administration	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Health, care & public service	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- good retention and achievement rates in business administration
- flexible patterns of study
- effective support for individual apprentices
- well-qualified, experienced and responsive training team
- effective communications across the department
- successful promotion of equal opportunities
- thoroughly documented quality assurance system

KEY WEAKNESSES

- slow achievement by health care modern apprentices
- insufficient attention to the development of key skills for health care modern apprentices
- insufficient use of work-based assessors
- poor use of individual training plans
- lack of recognition and accreditation of apprentices' prior knowledge and experience
- unsuitability of some classrooms for the groups using them
- lack of emphasis on the training process in the quality assurance framework

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- review the workload of training programme co-ordinators
- better access to computers for apprentices
- better recording of apprentices' progress

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. The purpose of the Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust's (the Trust) department of education, training and development is to support and extend the Trust's education and training strategy. The Trust's strategic plan makes explicit reference to the government's aims and policies and the national targets for education and training. The number of employees who have enrolled on modern apprenticeships has grown from 6 in 1998 to 15 in 1999 and 27 in 2000. The Trust plans to widen the scope of its vocational training still further. There are 30 full-time staff in the department. The director of human resources oversees all personnel matters including education, training and development. The head of department is primarily responsible for strategic planning. At middle management level, two heads of training, based at Truro and Bodmin respectively, are in charge of the day-to-day management of the department. The management of the modern apprenticeship programme is undertaken by two training programme co-ordinators who provide apprentices with individual personal support.

2. The Trust serves a population of approximately 500,000 people. The main hospital site is situated close to Truro town centre. Truro, with a population of approximately 56,000, is a major centre for business services in Cornwall. The county is generally rural in character and communities are scattered. In April 2001, the unemployment rate for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly stood at 3.8 per cent, compared with the rate of 2.2 per cent for the Southwest of England and 3.3 per cent for England as a whole. However, there are significant regional variations. The area surrounding Truro is one of the more prosperous in Cornwall. Unemployment is much higher in other parts of the county. Many people living in Cornwall are employed in low-paid, part-time jobs and seasonal or casual labour. Employment in the tourist industry, the largest employment sector, fluctuates seasonally. Cornwall is an economy dominated by small companies. Ninety-five per cent of firms employ fewer than 10 people. The Trust itself is a substantial employer in the Truro area. In the period 1999 - 2001, the proportion of young people staying in education after the age of 16 has been high, at 86.1 per cent, which is well above the national average of 70.7 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 52.9 per cent, compared with the national average for England of 49.2 per cent. Less than 1 per cent of the population of Cornwall are from minority ethnic groups.

THE INSPECTION

3. The inspection of the Trust was carried out by three inspectors over a total of 12 days in May 2001. They interviewed 20 apprentices, conducted 16 interviews with the Trust's staff, visited 10 workplaces, and interviewed eight workplace supervisors. They observed instruction in the classrooms, and examined a range of documents including apprentices' portfolios of evidence, apprentices' personal records, the Trust's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and reports from the awarding bodies. The inspection team studied the Trust's self-assessment report, which was produced in February 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Health, care & public service	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	14	3

4. There are 14 foundation modern apprentices in business administration. Some are also working towards a medical receptionists' qualification. Apprentices are employed by the Trust on fixed-term training contracts for 18 months. Many gain permanent employment with the Trust before they complete their modern apprenticeships. All the apprentices attend an induction programme where they find out about their course and its requirements, as well as the support services available to them. They also have a two-day induction to the national vocational qualification (NVQ) in administration at level 2. Apprentices attend 21 training sessions, known as 'study days', in the education, training and development department. The training programme covers basic computing skills, general office practices, all the requirements of the NVQ, and key skills. The 'study days' are held approximately once a fortnight over a period of nine months. The apprentices are taught by a highly qualified full-time member of the department. There are two assessors in the department, each of whom is also an internal verifier. There are also work-based assessors, who are each responsible for the assessment of one or two apprentices. Few of the work-based assessors work in the same office as the apprentices they are responsible for assessing. As well as regular contact with their training programme co-ordinator and work-based assessors, apprentices have individual meetings with the department's Truro-based training manager to review their progress, four times a year. Modern apprentices take between 12 and 18 months to complete the advanced modern apprenticeship framework. Many work towards an NVQ in information technology at level 2 as well as an NVQ in administration. All of the apprentices undertake two units of the NVQ in information technology as the additional units for their modern apprenticeship framework.

The table below shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people								
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started					10		17	
Still in training					0	0	14	82
FMA framework completed					7	70	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					7	70	5	29
Left without completing the framework					3	30	3	18

STRENGTHS

- effective off-the-job training
- good use in the workplace of ideas from training
- good retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient time for NVQ work for most apprentices
- lack of recognition and accreditation of apprentices' prior knowledge and qualifications
- poor use of individual training plans

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better access to computers in the workplace
- training in first aid and medical terminology for all apprentices
- more detailed written records of apprentices' progress
- more specific witness statements
- closer involvement of workplace supervisors in apprentices' progress reviews

5. There is a well-planned programme of 'study days', which all apprentices are expected to attend. This provides good coverage of sound office practice which would be applicable in commercial as well as public sector settings. The sessions are well taught by an experienced trainer. Training activities are set in advance and highly structured. Each apprentice is expected to work through the same units of the NVQ in the same order. The teaching effectively motivates apprentices to make good use in their daily work of new ideas they gather during sessions. Supervisors are impressed

with the way in which most apprentices make good use in their everyday work of skills and knowledge gained during their studies. Apprentices' attendance at 'study days' is recorded and closely monitored. The trainer gives strong individual support to apprentices and their progress is closely supervised. Apprentices are valued members of staff and receive good encouragement, motivation and support from their workplace supervisors. Most apprentices are offered permanent employment by the Trust before they finish their training programmes. Some departments use the training scheme as their preferred way to recruit suitable employees. One department has employed seven of its eight apprentices on permanent contracts.

6. The achievement and retention rates of business administration apprentices are good. Most apprentices complete their framework within the department's intended timescale of two years. Some apprentices make rapid progress. The number of apprentices on the programme has increased from 10 in 1999 to 17 in 2000. Three apprentices left their course early in 1999 and three left in 2000. Seventy per cent of apprentices completed their training in 1999-2000 and achieved their full qualification. The retention rate has improved to 83 per cent in 2000-01. Apprentices must complete two units of NVQ level 2 in information technology as part of their programme. Most achieved the whole NVQ, as well as the NVQ in administration.

7. Although apprentices are allocated time to attend 'study days' during working hours, most are not given sufficient time to work on their NVQs during working hours. Portfolio work is done at home, or apprentices stay on at the end of their working day to do this work. In many cases, apprentices are very busy in their daily work. They do not get the chance to reflect on what they have been doing, or to record what they have learned in the workplace. The primary learning goal of all apprentices is the foundation modern apprenticeship. Some apprentices' prior learning is poorly matched to the level of this programme. At least one apprentice is a graduate, and several have already achieved an advanced level general national vocational qualification (GNVQ). Many apprentices are not able to use computers to develop their skills in the workplace. First-aid sessions are available only to apprentices working toward the medical receptionists' or medical secretaries' qualifications. Apprentices would welcome training in medical terminology. Some training sessions are held in rooms that are too small and cluttered with computer equipment.

8. Individual training plans are not used effectively. They are used solely for contractual purposes. They are not regularly updated and apprentices do not always have their own copy. The results of progress reviews are not reflected in the plans. Witness statements are well used, but standard phrases are used too much, making it difficult for witnesses to make meaningful comments about individual apprentice's competence in the workplace. Progress reviews are carried out by two assessors from the department, who also act as internal verifiers. They rarely visit apprentices in the workplace to carry out assessments by observation. Assessment is mostly based on written evidence in portfolios. Each apprentice is allocated a work-based assessor and a workplace supervisor. Work-based assessors do not, as a rule, work in the same department as their apprentices, to avoid a conflict of roles with the workplace supervisor. This means

that work-based assessors are not sufficiently involved in apprentices' daily work, and cannot give them sufficient assessments in the workplace. Reviews of apprentices' progress do not involve the work-based assessor or the workplace supervisor. There is little liaison between the assessors, the work-based assessors and workplace supervisors to discuss apprentices' progress and achievement. Although apprentices' progress is regularly monitored and the department's assessors have detailed knowledge of the progress of each apprentice, reviews and discussions about improvements are not properly recorded. This makes it difficult, in the absence of the department's assessors, for the workplace supervisors and work-based assessors to clearly identify and act on problems which are holding back apprentices' progress.

Good Practice

One business administration apprentice learned how to produce pie charts during a 'study day' session, using data from the department in which she works. Her workplace supervisor, delighted with her newly acquired skill, has asked her to produce a series of charts to show how long patients wait for treatment, and to identify trends in waiting times over a period of months. This research will be used to identify areas for improvement.

Health, care & public service

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	13	4

9. There are 13 advanced modern apprentices in health care. All are working towards level 3 NVQs in care. They are employed as health care assistants by the Trust. Nine are permanent employees. Four have contracts by which their weekly hours of employment vary according to the amount of work there is for them to do on the hospital wards. Apprentices may join the programme at any time of the year. The training programme is planned to enable most apprentices to complete the framework in two years. The training is managed and given by one full-time training programme co-ordinator, assisted by one part-time work-based assessor and the department's training manager. All three are registered general nurses with teaching and assessors' qualifications. Apprentices attend a one-week induction programme. This is followed by a group of 10 off-the-job training sessions, called 'study days', spread over the year. Apprentices are given time off from their ward duties to attend the 'study days'. The same course of 'study days' is repeated four times each year. Apprentices who miss a 'study day' in one group of 10 can attend the same 'study day' in another group. Three of the 13 apprentices have work-based assessors who work on the wards to which the apprentices are attached as health care assistants. The full-time training programme co-ordinator and the part-time work-based assessor act as work-based assessors for the other 10 apprentices. They also internally verify all of the apprentices' work. The training programme co-ordinator gives approximately 50 per cent of the training sessions that are held in the training department.

The table below shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people								
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
	Number that started			6		5		7
Still in training			1	17	4	80	7	100
AMA framework completed			1	17	1	20	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			1	17	1	20	0	0
Left without completing the framework			4	67	1	20	0	0

STRENGTHS

- flexible points of entry to 'study days' over the year
- strong support for apprentices

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient opportunity for apprentices to develop key skills
- poor achievement rates
- slow progress of apprentices in achieving framework

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- a review of the training programme co-ordinator's workload and responsibilities
- more detailed written records of apprentices' progress
- recruitment of work-based assessors who work in the same workplace as apprentices
- a more thorough assessment and review process

10. The programme of 'study days' is well-planned. Flexible attendance arrangements, which can be negotiated individually, are particularly valued by apprentices. The ten 'study days' involve apprentices in a good range of off-the-job training activities. Assignments are well designed and vocationally relevant. There are many opportunities for apprentices to bring their skills, knowledge, experience and ideas into the classroom. Trainers use a variety of ways, which are skilfully built into the teaching, to ensure that apprentices know how well they are doing and build up their confidence. Apprentices receive appropriate training materials. Trainers and assessors are well qualified and have relevant occupational experience. Some classroom accommodation is overcrowded and can be noisy.

11. Apprentice support is well managed by the training programme co-ordinator. The commitment and enthusiasm of the co-ordinator, trainers and assessors contribute strongly to the effectiveness of the guidance and support which apprentices receive. Provision of careers advice and counselling is good. Progression opportunities for apprentices are explored regularly during discussions with the training manager and the training programme co-ordinator. There is good verbal communication between the co-ordinator and individual apprentices, but it is not often recorded. The workload and responsibilities that the co-ordinator carries are excessive.

12. The development of key skills is not given sufficient prominence. Some apprentices' key skills are weak. Key skills training is not well integrated with other aspects of the training programme. Some key skills are identified in NVQ unit specifications, but

apprentices are not always made aware they are developing them; nor is their achievement of them well recorded. Opportunities to assess apprentices' development of key skills in a relevant vocational context are not always taken. Often, workplace supervisors and apprentices show little understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework and the importance of key skills.

13. Achievement of the modern apprenticeship framework is poor. Over the past three years, 18 apprentices have started training. Of these, two have achieved the whole framework and five have achieved the NVQ in care at level 3. Four apprentices left early without a qualification in 1998, one in 1999 and two in 2000. In 2000-01, seven apprentices started the course and seven apprentices are all still in training. Retention has improved from 34 per cent to 100 per cent during the past three years. The pace of learning and assessment is slow. Although the Trust expects apprentices to complete the framework within two years, some apprentices have been on the course for nearly three years. Portfolio-building is slow. Some apprentices have not produced evidence for tasks which they carry out regularly at work. Many apprentices produce good-quality assignment work, which meets the requirements of the framework. In some cases, the work in apprentices' portfolios clearly demonstrates the progress made since the beginning of the programme. Many of the apprentices lack the motivation to complete the framework as the acquisition of additional skills and qualifications does not influence their salary.

14. Qualified assessors from the training department carry out assessment in the workplace. The training programme co-ordinator and the part-time, work-based assessor make regular assessment visits. They make detailed and helpful verbal comments on apprentices' work. The recording of apprentices' progress is often inadequate. It mainly deals with activities covered rather than the progress apprentices have made in developing the skills needed to achieve the modern apprenticeship framework. Apprentices' written comments on their own progress are often superficial and insufficiently self-critical. Action plans to improve apprentices' performance are not always specific. There is very little use of targets for improvement and achievement. Resources within the workplace are of a high standard. Apprentices work alongside a workplace supervisor when carrying out their ward duties. Few of the apprentices are assessed by work-based assessors who work on the wards where the apprentices are employed. There is little use of work-based evidence other than the assessment which is carried out by the training department's assessors visiting the wards. There is insufficient gathering of evidence of apprentices' work-based competences through direct observation by work-based assessors who are involved in the same area of work.

Good Practice

One health care assistant who works on a particularly busy ward has had to miss several 'study days' because of the demands of her work. She does not have to worry about missing a 'study day'. The rolling programme of ten 'study days' covering ten topics, means that if she misses a topic in one group of 'study days' she can catch up by attending when the topic is repeated in a later group.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**Grade 3**

15. The foundation and advanced modern apprentices are based at the Trust's Truro site. A training manager leads a team of approximately 15 trainers. Staff are appropriately qualified, both occupationally and in relation to their training roles. Lines of communication are well established. Staff meet regularly to share information. The department has a strategic and operational plan. The management-information system provides information for decision-making. There are staff development policies and procedures. There is an annual staff-appraisal system. Staff training and development are linked to the strategic aims of the department and the Trust. There is an equal opportunities policy which applies to all staff and apprentices. The Trust complies with legal requirements regarding equal opportunities and those of external agencies. There are quality assurance policies and procedures and the department meets the quality assurance requirements of its awarding bodies and the LSC. Progress reviews are carried out for LSC-funded apprentices, for whom it is a contractual requirement. There is a complaints procedure. The department seeks the views of apprentices and uses the information to make improvements. The department produced a self-assessment report in February 2001.

STRENGTHS

- effective communications
- successful promotion of equal opportunities
- well-documented quality assurance procedures
- effective arrangements for gathering the views of apprentices and staff

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient use of work-based assessors
- poor condition of some classrooms and facilities
- lack of emphasis on the training process in the quality assurance framework
- inadequate self-assessment report

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more consistent and thorough internal verification and assessment procedures
- more rigorous target-setting and action-planning
- an appropriate staffing profile for modern apprenticeship programmes
- more analytical approach to self-assessment

16. The education, training and development department has a well-established strategic planning process. A marketing team undertakes effective market research, including identifying areas of high unemployment. It organises promotional activities and makes links with schools, with the aim of attracting people to work in the hospital.

A marketing plan has been developed, which has clear links to the strategic plan. The department undertakes annual reviews of its performance against strategic objectives and operational targets. Management is open and supportive. There is a well-established management structure with clear lines of accountability. On a day-to-day basis, the department runs effectively. All staff have clear job descriptions and understand their roles. Responsibilities for implementing and monitoring policies, including those for equal opportunities and quality assurance, are clearly allocated. Communication is good within the department, with opportunities for staff to raise issues and receive information through a comprehensive schedule of team meetings. Systems for identifying the training needs of staff are well managed. Staff are provided with training which helps the Trust and the department to fulfil strategic and operational objectives. Internal training programmes are well attended.

17. The management information system covers data on finance, apprentices, courses, the deployment of staff and the use of accommodation. It produces accurate and reliable data which helps management at all levels. Managers and staff have direct access to the computerised system and can print out reports. They use these to help them plan and review, to monitor action on aspects such as equal opportunities and to help set targets. There are too few work-based assessors. Too much reliance is placed on the training programme co-ordinator and this leads to difficulties in administration of the training. There is some poor classroom accommodation which provides neither an environment favourable to learning nor adequate facilities for the apprentices.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 3**

18. The Trust promotes its commitment to equal opportunities in a clearly written statement underlining the importance of respect between all members of the Trust's community. The Trust's approach to equal opportunities is outlined in a policy framework and distributed to all staff. This covers the legal framework for equal opportunities as well as the Trust's own policy statements and aims. It outlines the responsibilities of the Trust and of staff, describes how equal opportunities will be reflected in recruitment and sets out arrangements for putting the policy into practice. The Trust effectively promotes a comprehensive set of policies relating to equality of opportunity covering gender, ethnicity, people with disabilities and personal harassment. There is a clearly worded complaints procedure and actions to resolve complaints are effective and timely. There are appropriate mechanisms for co-ordinating action and monitoring how effective it is. There is a well-publicised list of staff who can provide advice and support for apprentices and clear procedures for staff to follow when giving such help. The Trust is developing its links with the local community to extend access to a wider clientele in terms of ability, learning needs and geographical location.

19. In addition to the Trust's initiatives and training events, the department takes its own action to ensure equality of opportunity in education and training. Equal opportunities training for staff helps to raise their awareness of the issues which are involved. The department promotes equality of opportunity effectively at staff and apprentices' inductions. It offers flexible training arrangements to meet individuals' needs. The Trust identified that a low proportion of men were taking up apprenticeships and has reviewed its recruitment procedures to help remedy this. Promotional activities are carefully designed and targeted. The department evaluates their impact and effectiveness in encouraging greater participation of local people and the Trust's staff in further education and training. The training managers circulate reports on participation in training in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. They encourage other departments within the Trust to carry out studies to identify and overcome barriers to staff participation in education and training.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

20. The Trust has a well-established and comprehensive quality assurance system. The policies and procedures, which aim to cover all aspects of the Trust’s work, are clearly outlined in a quality assurance framework document issued to all staff. Some parts of the framework do not relate sufficiently closely to the training process. The framework has, for instance, failed to highlight the slow and poor achievement rates of health care apprentices. Staff actively seek out, both informally and through regular written surveys, the views of apprentices. The actions taken as a result of apprentices’ responses have led to improvements, such as flexible arrangements for attendance to enable apprentices to study at times that suit them.

21. The systems of assessment and internal verification provide a satisfactory basis for reviewing the quality of training programmes across the department. Quality assurance procedures include the setting of standards for achievement rates and a cycle of formal reviews of apprentices’ progress. The findings from surveys of apprentices views, together with assessors and verifiers’ reports and data on apprentices’ achievements are used in the review of each course. Some written records of progress reviews provide a clear picture of how apprentices are progressing. Others do not. Plans to improve apprentices’ performance are often inadequate. Action points are insufficiently specific. Many plans do not include timescales within which targets must be met. The self-assessment report did not include sufficient evaluative comments about the quality of training. Many of the judgements were not supported by sound evidence. The report lacked a thorough analysis of apprentices’ achievements and overestimated the quality of training. There was no action plan or list of priorities for action with the report.

Good Practice

A health care assistant, who is a single parent, is employed on a flexible contract where her hours of employment vary each week according to the amount of work there is for her to do on the ward. This enables her to spend more time with her family during the day. She has the same entitlement as those of her colleagues who are employed on traditional, fixed-time, contracts to undertake additional training as either a modern apprentice or NVQ trainee.