

INSPECTION REPORT

NVQUK.COM Limited

17 July 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

NVQUK.COM Limited is a privately owned training company which provides work-based training for young people. The company was formed in April 2000 and is at a relatively early stage in its development. At the time of the inspection, there were 112 apprentices, of whom 65 were foundation modern apprentices, and 47 were advanced modern apprentices. Of the total, 13 were training in business administration, 44 in health and social care, 34 in hospitality, and 21 in customer service. All of the apprentices have employed status.

Overall judgement

The quality of the training in business administration, customer service, health care, and hospitality is satisfactory. Leadership and management is less than satisfactory. The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it.

Work-based learning for young people

All apprentices have good, specific short-term targets. Apprentices in business administration have a good understanding of the qualifications that they are working towards and are regularly assessed while they are at work. Good use is made of work-based assessors to support those working in customer service. Hospitality and care apprentices have an extensive range of opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge while they are at work. Some gain qualifications in addition to those in their apprenticeship framework. There is no effective initial assessment of learning needs in any area of training. The vast majority of apprentices begin key skills training after they have completed a significant proportion of their training. In some cases, this has delayed their progress. It is too early to make firm judgements about retention and achievement rates.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of NVQUK.COM Limited are less than satisfactory. Many of the systems that are required for the organisation to function effectively are still being developed and refined. There are no arrangements to quality assure some important aspects of the training programme. Internal verification is improving, but is still applied inconsistently in the different areas of training. Other than in the care sector, apprentices do not have sufficient knowledge of equal opportunities. Arrangements for formal feedback from employers and apprentices are weak. There is a clear sense of direction shared by directors, staff, and the employers with whom the company works. Prompt action is taken to resolve difficulties that affect the

quality of training.

GRADES

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Health, social care & public services	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- strong emphasis on meeting the needs of apprentices and employers
- good ratio of work-based assessors to apprentices
- good use of target-setting for apprentices
- good opportunities for skills development
- frequent and effective assessments in care and administration

KEY WEAKNESSES

- late introduction of key skills training
- inadequate initial assessments
- weak quality assurance in some areas
- insufficient understanding of equal opportunities by staff and assessors
- inconsistent internal verifications
- insufficient knowledge of some apprenticeship frameworks

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more formal employers' feedback
- better use of individual training plans
- develop trainees' feedback arrangements
- carry out staff appraisal and training systems
- greater access to training materials for apprentices
- increase employers' involvement in progress reviews

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. NVQUK.COM Limited (NVQUK) was established in April 2001. The company's head office is in Bray-On-Thames in Berkshire. The two directors and the administrator are based in this office. There are six other staff, five of whom are part time and one full time. The company provides training for the employees of a small number of large organisations, most of whom are in the health care sector. Examples include, National Health Service trusts and groups of private care homes. The training offered is in business administration, customer service, health care, and hospitality. All of the training is provided on employers' premises. NVQUK also provides training for other employees of the same companies on a commercial basis.

2. Apprentices are based across a large geographical area, ranging from Humberside in the Northeast, through the Midlands and the fringes of London, to Dorchester in the Southwest. Their training is funded through contracts with the Hertfordshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the National Contracting Service (NCS). Prior to 2001, NVQUK also held a subcontract to train the employees of a large national employer, who contracted with a training and enterprise council. From April 2001, these apprentices have been transferred on to the NVQUK contract, resulting in a substantial increase in the numbers in training. The numbers shown for the period 2000-01 in this report do not include these numbers. Claimant unemployment in England stood at 3 per cent in July 2001. Minority ethnic groups are estimated on average to make up 6.2 per cent of the population of England. An average of 49.2 per cent of the young people who took general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations in the summer of 2000, achieved five or more passes at grade A* to C.

THE INSPECTION

3. The inspection of NVQUK took place in July 2001. The inspection was carried out by five inspectors who each spent four days on inspection activities. Prior to the inspection they analysed NVQUK's self-assessment report. During the inspection period, inspectors visited 22 workplaces and interviewed 35 apprentices and 17 workplace supervisors and employers. In addition, they interviewed six NVQUK staff. Inspectors examined apprentices' portfolios and other records relating to their training and assessment. The company's plans, policies, verification records, and records of meetings were also reviewed.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Health, social care & public services	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	13	3

4. The administration programme is relatively new. There are 13 business administration trainees at the time of the inspection. Of these, one is an administration foundation modern apprentice and two are accounting advanced modern apprentices. The remaining apprentices are administration advanced modern apprentices. They are all employed in the health care professions. Their employers offer them the opportunity of joining the programme. There is a team of four project managers who visit apprentices in the workplace, on average once every four weeks, to provide training and assessment. Two of these are working towards their assessor qualifications. NVQUK gives all apprentices an induction in the workplace. All training takes place at work.

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

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							2		0
Still in training							1	50	0	0
FMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework							1	50	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							19		0
Still in training							12	63	0	0
AMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed							1	5	0	0
Left without completing the framework							7	37	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good understanding of qualifications and assessments by apprentices
- clear and effective action-planning
- good use of assessors' observation

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient planned training
- late introduction of key skills assessment
- no systematic initial assessments
- poor staff and assessors understanding of apprenticeship frameworks

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- greater involvement of workplace supervisors
- more flexible and planned approach to assessors' questioning
- provide materials to support training

5. Apprentices are encouraged from an early stage to work closely with the NVQ criteria. They quickly develop a broad understanding of how they can meet the evidence requirements. They are confident in suggesting how they can demonstrate their own competence and accurately reference their evidence against the NVQ standards. Project managers and work-based assessors have good occupational backgrounds in administrative management and effectively support apprentices in the workplace. Apprentices are able to identify any barriers to assessment and create good opportunities to overcome these. Most workplace supervisors take a keen interest in the NVQ. They spend time in reviewing the standards required and the evidence collected by apprentices. This helps the apprentices to understand their own qualifications. Some supervisors are less involved and play a minor part in supporting their apprentices, especially during progress reviews with assessors. The internal verifier also spends time with apprentices when monitoring the quality of assessment practice.

6. Assessors visit apprentices regularly and review progress on each occasion. Achievements are clearly recorded. Specific action plans are agreed for the next visit. These make it clear to apprentices what they need to do and what they can expect to achieve by the next progress review. This was highlighted as a strength in the self-assessment report. Apprentices are very aware of their achievements and the progress that they are making. Targets are openly agreed with them and some have designed their own timetables to ensure that they meet their deadlines. This approach has been highly effective in compensating for some slow progress earlier in the programme. Apprentices are now expected to achieve one unit each month and are making better progress towards achieving their qualifications. The target-setting process is an effective way of monitoring progress and of encouraging achievement. In general, apprentices' progress and retention rates are satisfactory.

7. NVQUK emphasises observation as the most effective assessment tool. Assessors frequently use observation as the main method of judging apprentices' competence. Some less-experienced assessors are being mentored well to follow this practice. Observation records are clear and concise. They are relevant to the NVQ standards and are accurately referenced to the qualification requirements. This is helping apprentices to compile good portfolios of evidence that are not over-reliant on paper evidence.

8. There is insufficient planned teaching or training. Apprentices learn primarily through experiences at work and by being supervised and supported by more experienced colleagues. Most have attended some form of commercial training arranged by their employers. This is not used to contribute to the evidence needed for the NVQ framework. Individual training plans lack detail about how and where training will take place. Employers do not contribute effectively to individual training plans. Project managers react to training needs by giving appropriate guidance when it is required. Apprentices are given a set of questions to which they must give written answers. The questions are given indiscriminately, regardless of whether apprentices have already demonstrated their understanding. They are not given any information or training materials to help them research the answers. Apprentices' responses are based on their understanding of their own working environment, which does not always reflect the depth and variety of knowledge needed in the industry as a whole. NVQUK recognised the need to plan training more effectively in their self-assessment report.

9. Most administration apprentices have been on the programme for over 12 months. Most have started to work on key skills training only recently and are making good progress, although none have any formal achievements. Some, who have been on the programme for a year, are still waiting to start key skills training. Assessors have little experience with key skills and none have key skills qualifications themselves. Neither key skills nor basic skills are initially assessed when apprentices join the programme. The process of initial assessment is incomplete and is not systematically applied or thoroughly recorded. This lack of initial assessment was recognised as a weakness in the self-assessment report. NVQUK informally assess apprentices suitability for the NVQ, based largely on the scope of the apprentices' job roles. Any previous training is also taken into account.

10. Assessors are unaware of the additional units required to complete the advanced modern apprenticeship. They have been working with out-of-date information from a time when these additional units were not necessary. Some apprentices believe that they are nearing completion of their apprenticeship when, in fact, they have further to go than they realise.

Good Practice

One employer has recognised that their apprentices do not always find time to work on their qualifications during normal working hours. The employer now pays the apprentices if they have to stay late at work, or if they have to prepare their portfolios at home during the evenings.

Poor Practice

Two apprentices are working towards their accounting advanced modern apprenticeship. NVQUK are not formally approved by an awarding body to deliver this qualification. This means that there is no guarantee that apprentices will receive their certificates when they have achieved their qualification.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	21	3

11. NVQUK offers modern apprenticeship training in customer service, leading to qualifications in customer service at levels 2 and 3. Apprentices may join the programme at any time. All recruitment is through employers and all apprentices are employed. There are 15 foundation modern apprentices, working towards NVOs at level 2 and six advanced modern apprentices working towards NVOs at level 3. All inductions take place in the workplace. NVQUK employs three project managers who are trainers and assessors. NVQUK project managers visit apprentices at least once a month for assessments and the progress reviews. All of these are occupationally competent and appropriately qualified. There are also work-based assessors. There is one main internal verifier who is supported by another internal verifier.

This table show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							1		0
Still in training							0	0	0	0
FMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
NVO level 2 completed							1	100	0	0
Left without completing the framework							1	100	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							4		0
Still in training							0	0	0	0
AMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
NVO level 2 completed							2	50	0	0
Left without completing the framework							4	100	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good ratio of work-based assessors to apprentices
- effective short-term target-setting
- good employer understanding of NVQs

WEAKNESSES

- some inconsistent assessment practices
- no systematic initial assessments
- poor understanding by apprentices and assessors of apprenticeship framework
- late start to key skills training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more resource materials to support knowledge and understanding
- reinforce apprentices' understanding of induction topics
- copies of individual training plans to be given to apprentices

12. Extensive use is made of work-based assessors. This is identified in the NVQUK's self-assessment report. NVQUK allocates a work-based assessor to each apprentice. At the time of the inspection, there were six work-based assessors in this occupational area. This represents an unusually good ratio of assessors to apprentices for this area of training and is appreciated by apprentices. This, together with the good support provided by NVQUK project managers, enables apprentices to make good progress. Project managers visit frequently and establish good working relationships with apprentices and their employers. Although no apprentice has completed their NVQ framework as yet, satisfactory progress is being made towards the completion of NVQs. Retention rates are satisfactory.

13. Effective short-term target-setting provides apprentices with a clear understanding of what they have to do before the next visit. Details of agreed actions, including plans for assessment, are recorded on the progress review record. Apprentices work hard to meet their targets. When agreed actions have not been completed, additional support and advice is provided. The targets are then carried forward to the next progress review. NVQUK has a target for apprentices to complete one unit of their qualification per month. Assessors and apprentices are working effectively together to meet these challenging targets. Portfolios are generally of a satisfactory standard. Most assessors encourage apprentices to collect a very varied range of evidence, while some others mainly focus on observations, written answers to set questions, and candidate statements.

14. Training is provided by the employer. Some apprentices attend specific courses arranged by their employers. Others receive their training through one-to-one sessions with their supervisors, or through coaching from other colleagues. Employers have a

good understanding of the NVQ process and some employers have achieved an NVQ themselves. This helps them to provide effective and informed support. Employers encourage employees to take on the role of work-based assessor, NVQUK has provided some useful guidance to help with this work. Assessment is available as and when apprentices need it. Employers are very supportive and ensure that apprentices are in job roles that will enable them to generate sufficient evidence for their NVQ. Employers are able to confirm that improvements have been made to customer service as a direct result of apprentices working towards customer service NVQs.

15. There are some inconsistencies in assessment practices which affect small numbers of apprentices. Some completed observations do not have sufficient detail and do not record sufficient information to support claims of competence. In one case, the required range of statements had not been covered, even though the unit had been signed off as completed. Evidence generated by apprentices is not always signed by the apprentice to confirm authenticity. There is no confirmation by assessors that the answers given to written questions meet the required standards. Apprentices are not provided with any specific training materials. They either research the answers to questions themselves or use the expertise available to them in their workplace. There is some confusion among assessors about the use of candidate statements and witness testimonies. Not all assessors use the providers' documentation for detailed assessment planning.

16. Initial assessment establishes the suitability of the apprentice for the planned job role, but there is no structured assessment of basic skills, key skills, or vocational skills. This weakness was identified in the NVQUK's self-assessment report. All apprentices receive an induction in the workplace, which consists mainly of completing paperwork. Apprentices do not always have a full recollection of topics covered during the induction. During the induction, there is some initial comparison of the apprentices' job against the NVQ standards to ensure that the apprentice can generate sufficient evidence from job activities. A small number of apprentices have been in their current job role for some time when they begin training, or have relevant prior learning. There is not enough accreditation of their experience and prior learning to speed their progress.

17. There is poor understanding of apprenticeship framework requirements. All apprentices are aware of the requirement to achieve an NVQ and have some understanding of the need to complete key skills training. However, not all are aware of the need to achieve additional units as required by the apprenticeship framework. Some assessors are also unaware of this requirement. Details of agreed additional units that the apprentices will need to take should be recorded in their individual training plans. This has not been happening and apprentices are not given a copy of their training plans. NVQUK is aware of this weakness and is in the process of making available information packs on the NVQ framework requirements.

18. Work on key skills training has started late. Apprentices working at NVQ levels 2 and 3 are required to complete a work-based project on customer service. These projects encourage the apprentice to reference evidence generated to both the NVQ and key skills. This late start hinders the progress of trainees in completing the

apprenticeship framework. Although NVQUK is aware of the late start to key skills training, this was not identified in their self-assessment report.

Good Practice

NVQUK makes arrangements for work-based assessors to work towards the appropriate assessor qualifications. This arrangement is done at no financial cost to the employer.

Poor Practice

An apprentice has recently been registered to undertake an NVQ in customer service and is registered to the new standards. Although assessors have been issued with copies of the new standards, they have not yet received any guidance and/or training on the assessment requirements of the new standards.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	34	3

19. NVQUK supply modern apprenticeship training programmes to employees of one organisation. When potential apprentices are identified, NVQUK staff visit the workplace to discuss the details of the training programme. Currently there are 34 apprentices. Twelve are on an advanced modern apprenticeship course in either food preparation and cooking, kitchen supervision, restaurant supervision, or multi-skills supervision. Of the 22 foundation modern apprentices, 20 are working towards the quick service award and two are on food preparation and cooking. The apprentices are employed at 20 different catering operations within hospitals, colleges, and a school. Locations include Southampton, Sheffield, Cambridge, London, Leicester and Oxford. There are two full-time and two part-time project managers who act as trainers and assessors. These staff have substantial occupational experience. In addition, 15 apprentices are supported by a work-based assessor. Some of the assessors are not yet qualified. Initially, the apprentice is visited by the project manager and given an induction into the programme. Subsequently, they are visited at least every three to four weeks, in order to review their progress. These visits concentrate on the NVQ training. Initial assessment consists of an informal discussion to identify the appropriate type and level of training. Training is mostly on-the-job and employer-led. This is supplemented by additional training to meet the apprentices' needs as and when identified throughout the programme. Twenty-seven of those still in training have only started since April 2001 and it is too early to make any judgements on retention and achievement rates.

These tables show 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		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							5		0
Still in training							1	20	0	0
FMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework							4	80	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started							12		0	0
Still in training							6	50	0	0
AMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed							2	17	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed							1	8	0	0
Left without completing the framework							6	50	0	0

STRENGTHS

- excellent development of skills and knowledge in the workplace
- effective short-term action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient initial assessments
- late start to key skills training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of the progress review process
- wider-ranging and clearer assessment practices
- review support for unqualified assessors
- ensure apprentices' understanding of induction content
- provide apprentices with individual training plans

20. The apprentices are working in good locations. They develop good skills and knowledge while on their training programmes. Much of this is delivered on-the-job by their supervisor or manager through informal one-to-one coaching. In some places, the apprentices will also work through the employers' own training programmes which include competences such as: customer contact, use of equipment, food preparation and other work routines. In addition, employers provide off-the-job training courses in health and safety and food hygiene. In some organisations, apprentices receive additional training, such as the use of chemicals. NVQUK staff use their own substantial knowledge and experience to provide additional training and also refer apprentices to appropriate support books. Employers confirm that apprentices substantially improve their skills and knowledge while on the training programme. When an apprentice's job is unable to provide evidence for all the NVQ unit requirements, the employer will buy in specific products and adjust the menu accordingly, in order to provide a relevant training opportunity. In one location, the manager arranged for the apprentice to work in a butchers' shop to learn skills such as boning which could not be covered in his

existing job.

21. Every time that a project manager visits an apprentice, a progress review and action plan is completed. This was identified as a strength through self-assessment. The progress review records progress to date in the NVQ programme. It identifies achievements made and actions required. For instance, this could be planning to observe an apprentice at work, preparing some answers to questions, completing candidate statements or arranging witness testimonies. The progress reviews help the apprentice understand their training programme and progress to date, as well as providing motivation. Progress reviews do not cover the issues of equal opportunities. Neither do they record apprentices' or employers' comments. Although the documents provide useful information on progress, this information is not always passed on to the appropriate workplace manager.

22. There is no structured approach to initial assessment, a weakness identified in self-assessment. The existing informal process of discussion does not identify the apprentices' level of basic and key skills. There is no thorough method to ensure that apprentices' jobs will meet all of the NVQ unit requirements. One apprentice changed course several times for this reason. This resulted in delayed progress. Potential barriers in training may not be identified until a particular section of the NVQ is reached.

23. NVQUK has been slow to plan for key skills assessment and integrate it into the programme. It has generally been left to the end of the programme. Staff have little experience and training in key skills training. There has, however, been recent action to improve this and progress is being made. Apprentices, together with their project manager, are identifying opportunities to collect the evidence needed. In one workplace, for example, the apprentice is using an analysis of customer comment cards as the evidence source.

24. Although much of the assessment activity is satisfactory, there are some areas which need to be improved. Candidate statements are referred to as witness testimonies. Employers' training programmes could be used more as evidence of apprentices' knowledge and understanding. There is some good assessment of knowledge by oral questioning. But there is also an inflexible use of written question and answer records for all units, despite the availability of other evidence. In some cases, there is not enough evidence to show that the apprentice is competent. In one portfolio, there was just one observation for each unit. There is a need for a clearer distinction between training and assessment activities. Training and the assessment of competences sometimes take place during the same visit, and are recorded on the same evidence sheet. NVQUK has identified a weakness with staffing resources in this area, and action has been taken to recruit additional personnel. Some work-based assessors have expressed a need for more support. They are struggling to complete their assessor award. In one case, an assessor has still to achieve their qualifications 16 months after starting to assess.

25. The induction procedure covers all the appropriate information, but could be further

improved. There is too much information in too short a space of time, making it difficult for the apprentice to fully understand all aspects of the programme. They are not given copies of their individual training plans. Although there is some evidence of updating, for example, unit achievement dates, the training plans are not used to record all relevant activity.

Health, social care & public services

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	44	3

26. The 44 apprentices in this occupational area are working towards NVQs in care of the elderly. There are 18 advanced modern apprentices and 26 foundation modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Three of the apprentices are men. All are employed in residential homes, residential homes for the elderly or hospitals. They work shifts, but younger apprentices do not work at night. Apprentices are employed before their employers approach NVQUK for training. Induction takes place in the workplace. All training is on-the-job or in the workplace. Some training is provided by the NVQUK's project managers, who act as trainers and assessors, some by the employers. The project managers carry out much of the assessment, and all workplaces have work-based assessors. Internal verification is frequent, often after each unit of the qualification. There are two qualified internal verifiers who are also occupationally qualified and one who is working towards the award. Retention rates are satisfactory.

These tables show 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		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							3		0
Still in training							1	33	0	0
FMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework							2	67	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							20		0
Still in training							7	35	0	0
AMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed							3	15	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed							3	15	0	0
Left without completing the framework							13	65	0	0

STRENGTHS

- particularly good rates of progress
- many additional training opportunities at the workplace
- well-timed and effective assessments
- good individual support for apprentices

WEAKNESSES

- late introduction of key skills training
- no structured initial assessments
- no established systems for training support

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- some progress reviews to involve employers or workplace supervisors
- more structured arrangements to notify employers of apprentices' progress
- trainers and employers to receive copies of individual training plans

27. The apprentices make good progress in completing units of their qualifications. They are confident about the portfolio-building process. Challenging, but achievable targets are set for unit completion during the frequent visits by the project managers. This helps to keep apprentices motivated and aware of their progress. Employers are usually aware of apprentices' progress, but through informal means. NVQUK is taking steps to make the process more formal. Project managers are aware of the reasons for apprentices leaving the programme early and carry out exit interviews.

28. Employers are committed to training and supportive of the training programme. Training is planned effectively. NVQ units are linked to apprentices' job roles. Where there is not a complete match between the work tasks and the NVQ requirements, alternative arrangements are made. Much of the training is delivered on-the-job. Training may be in small groups or on a one-to-one basis. The project manager negotiates with the employers to ensure that there are no gaps in training. Employers provide good additional training opportunities at the workplace. They offer training courses such as stroke rehabilitation, care of vulnerable adults, back care and palliative care. The majority of employers release apprentices for this training, depending upon the shift patterns, and a small number of employers pay staff if they attend in their off-duty time. Employers are also prepared to make changes to the apprentices' work tasks to meet the requirements of the NVQ. There are good resources for learning in most of the workplaces. These include, well-equipped training rooms in some homes, as well as books, specialist pamphlets, demonstration equipment and videos which apprentices may borrow. They value the advice and resources provided by the qualified staff in the workplace. Apprentices are encouraged to acquire their own resources. Some make use of the Internet. NVQUK's project managers and the work-based assessors are occupationally qualified and have current industry experience. They are either qualified

to assess or are working towards the necessary qualification.

29. Pastoral support for apprentices is good, as identified in the self-assessment report. The progress review system is frequent, supportive and effective. The project managers use fortnightly reviews to monitor progress, provide support and advice, and to negotiate with employers if necessary. The project managers respond quickly to requests from apprentices and their support is appreciated. Progress reviews rarely involve the employers. Induction by NVQUK takes place in small groups in the workplace. This is followed by an individual induction lasting up to one and a half hours. These introduce the apprentices to NVQUK, the NVQ and the assessment process. Employers provide an extensive induction into the workplace, in some cases lasting for the first three months. Supervision, mentoring and staff development reviews are offered by most employers.

30. Apprentice progress reviews are also used to identify assessment opportunities and to determine the forms of assessment to be used. These can be varied to meet the needs of individuals. Those who are less confident about writing may opt to answer questions verbally, with the assessors recording the answers. Assessment is frequent and responsive to the needs of the apprentices and employers. The frequency helps to keep apprentices motivated. There is effective liaison between the project managers and the work-based assessors to support assessment in particularly sensitive care settings. Apprentices have a good understanding of the assessment process and how it affects their own progress. They develop the confidence to negotiate with the work-based assessors and their colleagues, to ensure that evidence is recorded. Apprentices are unsure about the individual training plans. For example, they are not sure when various parts of their training will be completed. They and their employers would benefit from receiving copies.

31. Although NVQUK has devised a system for training and assessment in key skills, it has not yet been fully introduced. Some apprentices have received an initial briefing pack, but have not yet started to work. There is some confusion among some apprentices as to when they should be undertaking key skills. They see it as something to be added when they are close to completing the occupational NVQ. Some apprentices are not enthusiastic about this process. The late start to key skills is affecting apprentices' abilities to complete their apprenticeship frameworks.

32. There is no systematic initial assessment to identify training support needs or levels of basic skills or key skills. The project managers use the individual induction to identify where apprentices may have difficulties in meeting the NVQ requirements in terms of the assessment process. Where there are doubts, they take appropriate steps to modify the assessment process. However, some difficulties related to weaknesses in basic skills emerge later in the training and affect the confidence of some apprentices. The lack of systematic assessment affects the provision of additional learning support where necessary. Project managers are effective in providing personal support for apprentices but there is no formal system for providing training support.

Good Practice

One residential home has introduced an NVQ diary. All apprentices' progress review dates are booked in it so that other apprentices and employers know when NVQUK's project manager is visiting the home. This gives any of them the opportunity to have additional information and support between the fortnightly progress review meetings. The diary is also used to record loans of resources and can be used to leave messages for the project manager.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

33. NVQUK has two directors. One is designated as the managing director, the other is primarily responsible for sales and marketing. The two other full-time members of staff are the administrator and a project manager who acts as the trainer and assessor for a group of apprentices. There are five other part-time project managers who work from their homes throughout England. NVQUK has an equal opportunities policy. The managing director is responsible for updating the policy and ensuring that it is carried out. There is some formal quality assurance, but no written quality assurance policy. Standard documentation is used for internal verification. The managing director is also the lead internal verifier. NVQUK completed its first self-assessment report in June 2001.

STRENGTHS

- good communications between directors and project managers
- strong emphasis on apprentices' and employers' satisfaction
- decisive actions to remedy problems with training and assessment

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient systematic quality assurance in some areas
- no formal feedback from employers
- inconsistent internal verification
- poor apprentices' understanding of equality of opportunity
- inadequate management of equality of opportunity

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- update the business plan
- carry out staff appraisal arrangements
- develop a plan for staff training
- more flexible management-information systems
- more effective apprentices' feedback system

34. The management arrangements of NVQUK have changed significantly. Originally, the company recruited an operations manager to deal with the day-to-day management of the training and assessment work. This arrangement proved unsuccessful and, as a result, the two directors have become much more closely involved in working with apprentices and employers. This has led to significant improvements in training and assessments. While staffing problems have been dealt with effectively and apprentices now make better progress, the time that the directors have available to develop and administer NVQUK is severely limited. The directors are highly experienced and skilled in the health care sector, but lack in-depth experience of the provision of training. Some of the systems required to manage this aspect of the business are incomplete. The self-

assessment report took account of these points.

35. NVQUK's first priority is meeting the needs of apprentices and their employers. There is a clear sense of purpose which is shared by all staff and also the employers involved. Most of the work is in the health care sector which helps the development of shared values. There are frequent and effective communications between the directors and the project managers. The group of verifiers and assessors have met three times during the past year. They discuss new developments and receive advice from the directors on the improvement of their training and assessment practice. Meetings between the managing director and individual project managers help to ensure that there is a consistent approach to portfolio-building and that there is feedback on apprentices' progress. Project managers are well supported, despite the fact that they are home-based. Apprentices and project managers have clear short-term targets. In general, NVQUK expects each apprentice to complete an average of one unit of their qualification each month. Progress is monitored by the managing director. There are clear expectations as to the amount of time that project managers should devote to individual apprentices. There are no specific targets for apprentices' retention rates.

36. The original business plan has not been updated and there is no plan that clearly sets out the priorities for the immediate future. Cash flow and expenditure are carefully monitored. NVQUK plans to appraise the performance of each member of staff on an annual basis. The arrangements for doing this have not been finalised. Some staff training needs have been identified through discussion. Training in health and safety and internal verification has been arranged. There is no overall company training plan.

37. Information about apprentices and their achievements is collected systematically and stored on a database. The units of qualifications achieved by apprentices are recorded on this system. Summaries of their progress working with a particular assessor, or with a specific employer can easily be compiled. Directors use this information to monitor progress across the training programme. Information about apprentices who have left in previous years is stored separately. It is difficult to extract information about their achievements. The self-assessment report recognises the need to develop the management-information systems.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

38. NVQUK has a basic, written equal opportunities policy. It does not refer to current legislation and does not elaborate on the different forms of discrimination and harassment. A copy of the policy is given to apprentices during their induction. It is mentioned to most apprentices only briefly and they get little useful information about equality of opportunity. Care apprentices have a more detailed induction. Equality is not generally discussed further with apprentices unless it forms part of the NVQ that they are working towards. However, care assessors do explore equality issues during progress reviews although this is not effectively recorded. Apprentices generally have a low awareness of their rights and responsibilities. They do not fully understand what equality of opportunity means to them and how they can be protected. NVQUK checks that employers have an equal opportunities policy, but they do not keep copies or review the adequacy of these arrangements. There are basic written policies for appeals and complaints. These are explained to apprentices at induction, but they do not fully understand the implications.

39. NVQUK has employed someone from a minority ethnic group in the past, but current advertisements for assessors do not include any messages about welcoming applicants from diverse backgrounds. Managers have taken positive action in challenging prejudice and unacceptable behaviour. NVQUK has apprentices from different minority groups. It does not directly recruit apprentices as this is done by their employers. Data are collected on equal opportunities and recorded on a database. There is little statistical analysis of this data. There has been no specific staff training about equality of opportunity. There is no management action plan aimed at taking the initiative in promoting equality of opportunity in a structured way.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

40. Quality assurance arrangements are being established as the company develops. For example, all progress review forms completed by apprentices are returned to the head office and checked by the administrator. Progress with NVQ units is collected from these forms and any issues relating to welfare or training are reported to the managing director. Quality assurance arrangements are incomplete. Checklists confirm that apprentices receive an induction, but there are no checks as to its quality or effectiveness. Reasons for leaving training are recorded in apprentices' files, but there is no analysis to detect any trends. The initial assessment of apprentices is not systematic.

41. Internal verification is inconsistent across the different areas of training. There is no policy or overview which outlines all of the arrangements. Currently, each unit of a qualification completed by an apprentice is internally verified. There is no overall annual sampling schedule for internal verification activities. In health care there is a plan to ensure that internal verification covers the range of methods used by the assessor. This type of monitoring is not applied systematically in other sectors. Although assessors and verifiers meet, there is little detailed discussion to help assessors standardise their assessment practice. Judgements made by some unqualified assessors are not being endorsed by qualified colleagues. The self-assessment report underestimated the weaknesses in internal verification.

42. Apprentices' feedback was collected for the first time in May 2001 by means of a postal questionnaire. The response rate was low at around 30 per cent. Apprentices rate the training and support they receive against a simple scale. There is no space for individual comments. The responses that have been received are very positive and have been used to inform the self-assessment report. There are no formal arrangements to collect feedback from the employers at individual workplaces. The sales and marketing director maintains regular contact with the head offices of the major companies and informal feedback is collected both in this way and through the project managers' visits to different workplaces.

43. The managing director takes overall responsibility for the self-assessment process. All staff contribute their views, either through discussion or through the completion of a questionnaire. The results of feedback from apprentices are also used. The resulting self-assessment report is thorough, self-critical and covers all of the aspects of the Common Inspection Framework in some detail. There are clear links between the statements made and a portfolio of supporting evidence. The report lacks an overall summary of strengths and weaknesses for each area of training. The development plan resulting from self-assessment accurately identifies and prioritises a manageable number of key actions required to further improve the training.

Good Practice

Staff have completed a questionnaire to establish their knowledge and confidence in key skills training. The results have been used to plan the types of support that will be provided.