

INSPECTION REPORT

Hargreaves Training Services Ltd

10 June 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 Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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 funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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 Jobcentre Plus programmes 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

Hargreaves Training Services Ltd provides government-funded work-based learning in motor vehicle engineering, lift truck driving and specialist plant and machinery operations. However, only the training in motor vehicle engineering was inspected, as the other programmes had too few learners. It trains 120 advanced modern apprentices, foundation modern apprentices, and national vocational qualification (NVQ) learners. It has three training centres, in Manchester, Barnsley and Leeds. Hargreaves Training Services Ltd also provides private training for the transport and distribution industry and acts as a subcontractor for lift truck driver training. At its Manchester training centre, Hargreaves Training Services Ltd provides lift truck driver training for up to 15 unemployed adults under a contract with Jobcentre Plus. There are no learners on this programme at present.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The leadership and management of Hargreaves Training Services Ltd are unsatisfactory, as is its approach to equal opportunities. Its quality assurance procedures are satisfactory, and so is the training it provides in motor vehicle engineering.

GRADES

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

| Engineering, technology & manufacturing | 3 |
|---|---|
| Contributory grades: | |
| Work-based learning for young people | 3 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- comprehensive internal verification arrangements
- effective monitoring of most training
- effective action to improve learners' employment rates
- good work placements
- well-planned off-the-job training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor awareness of equal opportunities by learners, staff and employers
- insufficient action to improve retention rates
- no strategy for supporting learners with additional needs
- low employer awareness of qualification requirements
- poor retention rates

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reviews to focus more on qualification progression
- better monitoring of subcontractors

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at Hargreaves Training Services Ltd (HTS) during June 2002. They examined assessment procedures, subcontracting agreements, learners' files and portfolios, the qualifications of the staff, and HTS's quality assurance and management arrangements. Inspectors visited HTS's Leeds and Barnsley training centres. They conducted interviews with 16 HTS tutors, managers and assessors and 41 learners. They visited 14 work placements. A representative sample of learners' portfolios and progress files were inspected. Inspectors observed four learning sessions, four assessments and five progress reviews.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

| | Grade 1 | Grade 2 | Grade 3 | Grade 4 | Grade 5 | Grade 6 | Grade 7 | Total |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Engineering, technology & manufacturing | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. HTS was formed in 1967 and took over responsibility for its predecessor organisation, Leeds Automotive Training Group. Leeds Automotive Training Group, had provided training for the motor industry for over 30 years. HTS has four directors who are responsible for managing the training, operations, quality assurance and finances of the organisation. The company provides government-funded work-based learning in motor vehicle engineering, lift truck driving, and specialist plant and machinery operations, for advanced and foundation modern apprentices and NVQ learners. It has three training centres, in Manchester, Barnsley and Leeds. There are 18 HTS employees directly involved in the provision, assessment and administration of the work-based learning programmes. Of these, 13 are based in Leeds, two in Manchester and three in Barnsley. Of the 120 learners currently in training, 59 are advanced and 18 are foundation modern apprentices. The other 43 learners are on NVQ programmes at levels 2 and 3. All the modern apprentices and 80 per cent of the NVQ learners are employed in local garages. HTS works closely with approximately 70 garages in the Leeds area, many of which are small independent businesses employing fewer than 10 people.

3. HTS's main training centre is in Leeds. All its administration and development staff are based at this centre, as are 80 per cent of its learners. In 2000, the population of Leeds was 717,400. As the second largest metropolitan district in the country, Leeds is one of the country's prime business, financial, manufacturing and retailing centres. The city has good transport links to the rest of the United Kingdom. Leeds has one of the largest local labour markets in the country with around 370,000 working people. It remains a major manufacturing centre, although there has been a steady decline in the number of people employed in this sector in recent years. The service sector, especially financial and business services, has grown over the same period. Other major service industries in the city include retailing, tourism and leisure, media, healthcare and telecommunications. Leeds has a large number of call centres. The growth in the service sector has meant a rise in the number of part-time and temporary positions. Approximately 22 per cent of the vacancies notified to Jobcentre Plus in Leeds are for temporary employment. The biggest employers in Leeds include mechanical engineering, printing, clothing and textiles, and furniture companies. A shift away from the use of national haulage companies to local or regionally based hauliers has led to Leeds, Barnsley and Manchester experiencing an acute shortage of drivers. Much of HTS's private training is focused on filling the skills gap in this area. The company expects to increase its government-funded work-based learning by around 6 per cent over the next year. Much of this growth will be in lift truck driver training and motor vehicle engineering.

4. At the time of the 1991 census, 5.8 per cent of the population of Leeds were from minority ethnic groups. The unemployment rate in Leeds in April 2002 was 3 per cent, slightly less than the national average of 3.1 per cent. Unemployment is much higher in the inner city than in the outer wards. Ten of the inner-city wards are included in the top

10 per cent of deprived wards in England. Many of the New Deal clients from the Leeds inner-city areas have multiple barriers to employment including criminal records, numeracy and literacy support needs, health problems, and drug and alcohol dependency. In 2001, the proportion of Leeds school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 40 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Employers are keen to provide support and encouragement to their learners. Learners' workplaces provide good opportunities for them to develop skills in a safe environment. HTS learners can telephone the company on a free assessment hotline to request an assessment in the workplace. This initiative has encouraged learners and employers to plan and organise assessments in the workplace themselves. Off-the-job training at the training centres is well structured and planned. Good training plans have been developed by HTS to ensure that tutors cover all aspects of the background knowledge requirements of the NVQ, and the key skills element of learners' apprenticeship frameworks. The standard of teaching at HTS is satisfactory. The company has worked hard with employers to promote the benefits of employing NVQ learners, rather than providing them with work experience. As a result of this, all the modern apprentices and 80 per cent of the NVQ learners on motor vehicle engineering programmes are employed.

6. Retention rates on all programmes are poor. Over the past five years, 55 per cent of learners left their programmes early without completing all the requirements of their qualification. However, of those learners who stay in training, nearly all achieve their learning goal. HTS has not done enough to find out why so many learners leave early. It has no clear action plan to resolve this problem. It has no clear strategy for supporting learners with additional literacy or numeracy needs. Communication within the organisation is good. HTS's quality assurance procedures include the direct observation of training at its main training centre. There are comprehensive internal verification arrangements, and quality assurance measures to ensure the validity of assessment and verification. However, HTS does not apply some of the quality assurance practices in all its training centres. It does not have sufficient control over the quality of training and assessment in its subcontracted training provision. There is poor monitoring of employers' equal opportunities procedures, and the awareness of equal opportunities among learners, staff and employers is low.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

7. HTS has been operating in its present form since January 2001. The organisation was founded in 1967 as Leeds Automotive Training Group. The current managing director took over in January 2001, and the organisation has been modernised and restructured. The restructuring is still in progress, and a management buyout was completed in April 2002. The managing director has overall responsibility for the company and is in charge of its day-to-day running. He is supported by a team of three other directors, responsible for finance, operations and human resources. The post of marketing director is still to be filled. Motor vehicle training takes place at the Leeds centre, which also contains the organisation's administrative offices. Lift truck training takes place at Barnsley, and the short job-focused training at the training centre in Manchester. The Manchester training centre was not inspected as the number of learners is small. The Leeds and Barnsley training centres have training centre managers, and a team of specialist instructors and assessors. Learners are trained and assessed at these training centres, or in the workplace. The organisation also has contracts with two local colleges. Most learners are employed, and the remainder take part in work experience with local companies.

8. HTS has contracts with Manchester, West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). The company has an equal opportunities policy, and policies and procedures for quality assurance. These are reviewed annually. In 1999, HTS gained the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, and it was successfully re-accredited in 2000. HTS has carried out annual self-assessment since 1998. The fourth and most recent report was produced in October 2001.

STRENGTHS

- good staff development arrangements
- effective internal communications
- effective monitoring of most training
- comprehensive internal verification arrangements
- some effective action to improve the quality of provision

WEAKNESSES

- no strategy for supporting learners with additional needs
- poor awareness of equal opportunities by learners, staff and employers
- poor monitoring of equal opportunities arrangements in the workplace
- insufficient use of data for action-planning
- insufficient action to improve retention rates
- weak quality assurance of some training arrangements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more focus on training and retention rates in the business plan
- simplified equal opportunities policy
- better monitoring of subcontractors

9. HTS carries out comprehensive staff appraisals, and has a strong commitment to the training and development of its employees. Training needs are identified at induction using a skills audit, and action plans are produced to ensure that staff are appropriately qualified to carry out their job and meet the needs of the business. Formal appraisal takes place annually and is used to plan the company's training programme. Staff complete a form to show how the training they undertake is linked to their appraisal and meets the needs of the organisation. HTS recognises that there is a need for development at all levels of the organisation, including the management team. Training opportunities are not restricted by budgetary constraints. The management team is well aware of the strengths of individual members of staff, and which areas they need to develop. However, training in basic skills and equal opportunities has not yet taken place. Staff value the appraisal, and the opportunities they are given for training. They are well qualified and occupationally competent.

10. HTS has a written communications strategy. There are regular management meetings, which are minuted. The minutes clearly show what has been discussed, and there are records following up the action taken. The operations director ensures that there is effective communication between the senior management team and those directly involved in the training process. A business plan has been produced and staff are aware of its broad aims. However, the business plan is not sufficiently focused on government-funded training or on key issues such as retention rates. There are regular team meetings, which are used to update staff and share good practice, and to monitor performance against local LSC contracts. Staff regularly report to the management team about areas that could be improved. There have recently been improvements to the canteen after staff identified this as a concern for learners. There are quarterly newsletters, and information bulletins to tell staff about developments in the company and update them on issues that affect them. There is much informal discussion within the company, with good communication at all levels. The senior management team are easily accessible to all staff.

11. There is no strategy for supporting learners with additional needs. An initial assessment is carried out before the learner joins HTS. The company has recently introduced a basic skills test. This is primarily used as a screening mechanism to ensure that learners have the necessary skills to start training. Fifty per cent of those who have recently completed the test were identified as having additional learning and support needs. There is no system of support for learners once these needs have been identified. The test results are not used to design individual learning plans. Some informal support is given to learners but this is not structured or systematic. Where there are subcontracts with local colleges, they are not followed up to ensure that all the

agreed responsibilities are met. There are meetings between HTS and college staff to discuss learners' progress and any issues arising. However, there is little documentary evidence that learning needs are identified, although this is a requirement of the agreement. Employers are not fully aware of their responsibility for supporting the learners. In one case, a learner with communication difficulties had to use the assessment telephone hotline to request an assessment. The learner was clearly not confident about doing so, but this was not picked up by HTS.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

12. HTS has an equal opportunities policy, a copy of which is given to staff and learners. However, the policy does not identify individual responsibilities. It is a legal document written in complex language. Staff are given no training on equal opportunities, although two of the managers attend an external network to increase their awareness and keep up to date with legal requirements. The staff, employers and learners have little awareness of equality of opportunity. They are unclear about their roles and responsibilities, and those of the company's managers. Some staff do not fully understand the formal complaints procedure for learners. Learners have little recall of equal opportunities being explained during their induction. A few have recently been given training in the form of a video presentation and discussion, but their understanding is still very limited. Some learners are unsure of who to go to if they have a problem.

13. HTS does not have targets for participation in training by under-represented groups. It has two women learners, two learners from minority ethnic groups and two learners with disabilities. It has no formal strategy to increase these numbers, although it has had contacts with local schools to try to broaden its range of learners.

14. There is insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. HTS's promotion of equal opportunities with employers at the start of training is inadequate. When learners start their training, the employers sign an agreement which includes a commitment to equal opportunities. However, HTS has no effective method for checking this, and no action is taken to follow it up. A three-monthly review has been introduced to confirm that an employer has an equal opportunities policy. However, this is very new and there is very little evidence of it being used. Some employers do not have equal opportunities policies, but HTS has not responded to this.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

15. HTS uses its Leeds training centre to pilot and develop new quality assurance arrangements before implementing them. The system for monitoring training has now completed its pilot stage. It has been fully implemented in Leeds and is being introduced at the other two training centres. HTS collects written feedback from learners. The feedback is analysed by the operations manager, and action is taken to remedy any weaknesses. The performance of all tutors is monitored by direct observation. This is carried out by supervisors and managers twice each year. The observations are planned in advance to ensure tutors are seen in different situations, including the workshop and background knowledge lessons. To ensure a consistent approach, all the observers are given guidance on the procedure. The observations are recorded, verbal feedback is

provided for the tutor, and the reports are used as part of the staff appraisal procedure. Managers identify staff development needs and praise good work.

16. HTS's placement officer monitors the standard of work placements and employers. This enables HTS to ensure that the employer provides an appropriate learning environment, which meets the expectations of the learners and the requirements of the learning programme. If the employer does not fully meet the requirements, HTS makes arrangements for simulated training and assessment to be carried out in its training centre. Through the monitoring process, HTS has identified that many employers have a weak commitment to training and do not fully understand the requirements of NVQ and apprenticeship qualifications. It has developed new systems, including log books, to record work activities, and an assessment hotline for learners.

17. Internal verification is good. It is planned effectively and carried out through the course of each training programme. The verification method is clearly identified for each assessor. All completed NVQ units are verified. Assessors are observed by the internal verifier at least three times a year. The verifier also carries out additional, unplanned observations and assessors can request further observations if they wish. The verifier gives good feedback to assessors, and supports their individual training needs. There are well-documented and clear records of sampling and monitoring of NVQ portfolios of evidence. This allows verification to be audited easily.

18. HTS has taken effective action to continuously improve its training. It has, through its own evaluation and using the feedback from external verifiers, improved its assessment and internal verification arrangements. HTS allows its verifiers as much time as they need to complete the quality assurance checks. It has worked hard with many employers to promote the benefits of employing NVQ learners, rather than simply providing work experience for them. As a result of this, the proportion of NVQ learners who are employed has improved from 48 per cent in 1998-99 to 80 per cent in 2001-02. HTS has an internal audit procedure for its quality assurance policy and procedures. At present, the audit arrangements do not cover all the procedures at all the training centres. However, the audits have resulted in action plans and improvements. For example the frequency of learners' progress reviews has been increased. The development of the company and its staff has been linked closely to the appraisal system, and development needs have been identified at all levels of the organisation. There are comprehensive training plans for all programmes. These ensure that tutors are trained to meet the requirements of each qualification, including key skills at all levels.

19. HTS does not use management information systematically to guide action-planning by staff or decision-making by managers. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report. HTS has good arrangements to monitor achievement rates for its LSC contract. It prepares monthly reports showing actual NVQ achievement against the local LSC's targets. It does not routinely meet these targets in engineering. Data are not used to compare the annual performance of each training programme, or to contribute to target-setting.

20. HTS has not carried out enough research into why so many learners leave programmes early. Although poor retention rates were identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, the development plan did not suggest any action to deal with this.

21. HTS's self-assessment report provided inspectors with a clear insight into the recent major restructuring of HTS. The report also identified a number of weaknesses in the company's performance. Learners contributed to the self-assessment process through their responses to a questionnaire. The comments of staff were collected during discussions with managers. Work-placement providers and subcontractors were not included in the process. HTS did not use data to evaluate the performance of different training centres, subcontractors or programmes of learning. HTS's managers have prepared a development plan to accompany the self-assessment report. However, this does not identify the actions needed to remedy all the weaknesses.

22. HTS has comprehensive policies and procedures to assure the quality of most of its training. However, some of its quality assurance systems do not extend to the activities of employers, work placement providers, subcontractors or to all its training centres. For example, HTS does not record whether a learner has completed his employer's own induction to equal opportunities, or whether the employer has an effective complaints and disciplinary procedure. HTS does not ensure that employers receive copies of learners' review forms. Employers are not always aware of their learner's progress or of the targets that have been agreed between HTS and the learner. There are no arrangements to monitor the standard of training undertaken by HTS's two subcontracted training providers. At two of HTS's training centres, monitoring staff by direct observation is not yet a routine practice. These weak quality assurance arrangements were not identified in the self-assessment report.

Good Practice

A learner with emerging health problems, which were affecting his performance, was found a more suitable placement to enable him to continue his training. He was also given further help and support to manage difficulties arising from a visual impairment. HTS's staff went out of their way to assist the learner, arrange eye tests and gain the employer's support.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

| Programmes inspected | Number of learners | Contributory grade |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Work-based learning for young people | 110 | 3 |

23. HTS offers a four-year engineering training programme in motor vehicle trades. Most learners are recruited by referral from the careers service. Potential learners are invited to HTS for an initial assessment of their basic skills and mechanical aptitude, and an interview. This is followed by an interview with a potential employer. There are currently 110 learners, of whom 20 are foundation modern apprentices, 61 are advanced modern apprentices and 29 are on NVQ programmes. Training is offered in light and heavy vehicle maintenance and repair, vehicle body repair, paint refinishing and vehicle parts operations. HTS tutors, who are all qualified assessors, carry out NVQ assessments in the workplace for the light and heavy vehicle maintenance and repair learners. These learners attend HTS's training centre for day-release training. The paint, parts and body repairs learners attend one of two local colleges for day- or block-release training and assessment. Most learners are employed. Learners' progress reviews are carried out at least every three months. Key skills training takes place with the off-the-job training programme at the HTS training centre.

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 | | 1997-98 | | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| | Number of starts | 30 | | 23 | | 33 | | 35 | | 31 | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 0 | | 1 | 3 | 5 | 14 | 9 | 29 | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 0 | | 3 | 9 | 12 | 34 | 4 | 13 | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 24 | | 16 | | 6 | 18 | 12 | 34 | 3 | 10 | | | | | | |

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

| 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 | 14 | | 15 | | 27 | | 12 | | | | | | | | | |
| Retained* | 0 | | 0 | | 3 | 11 | 1 | 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 0 | | 0 | | 3 | 11 | 1 | 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 9 | | 7 | | 4 | 15 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | | | | |

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

| Work-based learning for young people | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------|----|---------|----|-----------|----|---------|----|---------|----|---------|----|-----|---|-----|---|--|
| NVQ Training | 2001-02 | | 2000-01 | | 1999-2000 | | 1998-99 | | 1997-98 | | 1996-97 | | | | | | |
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | |
| | Number of starts | 18 | | 33 | | 18 | | 39 | | 56 | | 60 | | | | | |
| Retained* | 1 | | 5 | | 6 | 33 | 9 | 23 | 20 | 36 | 28 | 47 | | | | | |
| Successfully completed | 1 | | 3 | | 8 | 44 | 10 | 26 | 20 | 36 | 25 | 42 | | | | | |
| Still in learning | 13 | | 10 | | 1 | 6 | 4 | 10 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | | | | | |

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- effective use of a telephone hotline for assessment purposes
- well planned off-the-job training
- effective action to improve learners' employment rates
- high standard of level 3 NVQ portfolios
- good work placements

WEAKNESSES

- poor retention rates
- insufficient workplace assessment for first-year learners
- low employer awareness of qualification requirements

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reviews to focus more on qualification progression
- better resources for practical off-the-job training

24. HTS has set up a telephone hotline. This enables learners to contact their HTS assessor when they are working on jobs which could be assessed for their NVQ. HTS assessors respond quickly, and visit the workplace to carry out assessments. The hotline helps learners to take control of the assessment process, and allows assessment to be carried out on demand. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Every month, learners attend a portfolio development session in the HTS training centre. At the end of every session, each learner is given an action report. The sessions help to identify any gaps in the learners' NVQ evidence. The learners can then focus on the assessments they still need to complete in the workplace. However, not all learners attend these sessions, and when learners who are based some distance away from the HTS training centre use the hotline, the assessment opportunities have often finished before the assessor arrives.

25. Off-the-job training is well planned and structured. HTS identifies the elements of the NVQ to be covered during any particular week. Each learning session is cross-referenced to the learners' NVQ workbook. The training is planned so that it progressively develops learners' knowledge and understanding. There are frequent tests of learners' background knowledge, linked to practical demonstrations and vehicle fault diagnosis. The off-the-job training consists mainly of background knowledge, with insufficient practical content. Key skills training is introduced during the first year, and integrated with the vocational training. There are also portfolio-building sessions. The trainers produce good quality, easy-to-understand learning and teaching materials, which supplement the workbooks. Some tutors make effective use of computer presentations to provide interesting and colourful classroom learning sessions.

26. HTS has effective strategies to improve rates of employment for learners on NVQ programmes. The company works with potential employers to build their confidence in the NVQ learners, and to encourage them to take them on as employees. There has been a steady increase in the number of employed NVQ learners, from 45 per cent in 1998-99 to 80 per cent in 2001-02. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

27. The portfolios of learners undertaking level 3 NVQs are of a high standard. Each portfolio shows clear cross-referencing to the NVQ units, and they all contain very good examples of evidence compiled from the workplace. Portfolios are very well presented. Learners are encouraged by HTS's staff to take pride in the presentation of their evidence. The portfolios contain many examples of assessments that have taken place as a result of direct observation by HTS's assessors at the learners' workplace. These

direct observations are further supported by witness testimony from workplace supervisors, and by photographic evidence and job cards. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

28. Learners work in a range of motor vehicle companies from sole traders to national dealers. Most learners have access to a wide range of modern equipment and facilities at their workplace. They have excellent opportunities to develop skills at work, and in the better companies, the learners' supervisor is carefully chosen to provide the most appropriate support. Employers give learners a thorough induction into the workplace, and then continue to support them throughout their training programme. Supervisors are well qualified, with considerable occupational experience. Some have a good understanding of the NVQ programme, as they have previously achieved the qualification themselves. Supervisors are keen, and willing to pass on their knowledge to learners. HTS has a noticeboard in its training centre showing job vacancies. Where possible, HTS matches a suitable unemployed NVQ learner with an employer. Many learners are encouraged to take part in manufacturers' training courses to develop their knowledge. Learners speak highly of their employers. Relationships between learners, HTS's staff and employers are good.

29. Retention rates on all programmes are poor. Seventy-nine per cent of the 2001-02 intake of advanced modern apprentices are still in learning. Of the 2000-01 intake, 70 per cent are still in training. However, of all the learners who have started on the advanced modern apprentice programme since 1997-98, only 52 per cent are still in training or have successfully completed their qualification. Of the 68 foundation modern apprentices who have started since 1998-99, 35 per cent are still in training or have successfully completed their qualification. Of the 164 NVQ learners who have started since 1997-98, 43 per cent are still in learning or have completed their qualification. Overall, since 1997-98, of the 444 learners who have started on engineering training programmes, 55 per cent have left training early without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan. When HTS retains learners, they are usually successful. More than 90 per cent of retained learners successfully complete their learning goals. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

30. There is insufficient assessment for some learners. In their first year of training, many learners' progress is too reliant on witness testimony, and there is not enough observation or assessment in the workplace by qualified assessors. Much of the witness testimony is not cross-referenced to the NVQ requirements. Assessment is sometimes carried out when assessors visit learners to review their progress. However, the learners' post-review action plans rarely focus on their qualification, or on assessment opportunities. Some learners make slow progress towards their qualification.

31. Workplace supervisors have little understanding of NVQs or key skills. They do not know what learners do during their day-release training sessions. As a result, they are unable to make effective links between the skills developed at work and the off-the-job training. HTS has developed an information logbook to help improve employers' understanding of NVQs. However, not all employers have been issued with the

logbook. Employers are not always involved in the review process. Employers who are not involved have a very poor understanding of the qualification and assessment requirements. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Good Practice

HTS organises an annual trip to a motor racing circuit. This gives learners a chance to improve their key skills by carrying out research and completing a questionnaire. The completed questionnaire is then used as evidence for the learners' key skills portfolio.