

INSPECTION REPORT

Charter Training Services Ltd

28 October 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
- **learndirect** 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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Charter Training Services Ltd is a privately owned training company, with its head office in Macclesfield, and seven further sites in Cheshire, Warrington and Staffordshire. The company offers work-based learning for young people on advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, and work-based learning for adults programme, in business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation, and information and communications technology.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in information and communications technology is satisfactory. Training in business administration, management and professional, and in retailing, customer service and transportation is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of Charter Training Services Ltd is unsatisfactory.

GRADES

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

Business administration, management & professional	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	4

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- good individual support for learners
- comprehensive, well-planned development opportunities for staff
- some good networking to widen participation
- highly inclusive learning culture

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor rates of achievement on most programmes
- insufficiently detailed targets set in individual learning plans and at progress reviews
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements
- some weak internal verification practice
- insufficient monitoring of learners' and employers' understanding of equality

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed equal opportunities action plan
- wider consultation for self-assessment
- better reinforcement of induction topics
- improved staff awareness of basic skills support

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 28 days at Charter Training Services Ltd (Charter) in October 2002. They visited seven of the company's sites and 36 workplaces. They interviewed 57 clients and 21 employers, and held 38 interviews with members of Charter's staff. The inspection team reviewed a range of documents, including 49 portfolios of work, 49 individual learning plans, training materials and assessment records, policies and procedures, internal and external verification records, staffing information, statistical data, and marketing materials. They also examined the company's latest self-assessment report, which was written in November 2001.

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Charter operates from seven sites. Its head office is in Macclesfield, and it has training centres in Altrincham, Chester, Crewe, Hanley, Macclesfield, Northwich and Warrington. The company holds contracts with Cheshire and Warrington Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Staffordshire LSC and the northwest district Jobcentre Plus to provide national vocational qualification (NVQ) training in business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation, and information and communications technology (ICT). The company is no longer recruiting to its engineering programmes, and this area of learning was not inspected because of the small number of learners involved. Charter has 320 learners, 284 of them young people working towards advanced and modern apprenticeships, and 36 of them adults following work-based learning for adults programmes or the New Deal 25+ full-time education and training option.

3. Owned and managed by two directors, Charter employs 55 staff and uses five self-employed consultants on a sessional basis. Adults attend Charter's training centres for four or five days each week. Some of them attend a work placement for one day a week. Youth learners spend all their time in the workplace, where they are visited by Charter's assessors. They have the option of attending structured off-the-job learning sessions, on topics such as health and safety, at one of Charter's centres.

4. The northwest and midlands regions have between them a working population of approximately 7.5 million. Service industries account for most employment opportunities, and there has been recent growth in the manufacturing sector, especially in chemical and pharmaceutical manufacture. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in the Cheshire and Warrington LSC area was 1.9 per cent and in the Staffordshire LSC area it was 2.9 per cent. The average rate for England was 3 per cent. At the time of the 1991 census, in the Cheshire and Warrington LSC area, 1 per cent of the population was from minority ethnic groups, and in Staffordshire the proportion was 1.9 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above, was 54 per cent for Cheshire and Warrington, higher than the national average of 47.9 per cent. The proportion in Staffordshire was 45 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Learners receive very good support from Charter's staff and from their employers. They receive a satisfactory induction to their programme, although they do not always remember clearly what was covered. Assessors make frequent and useful visits to the workplace. Assessment is satisfactory, and learners produce well-organised portfolios of work containing a good range of evidence. The internal verification process is weak.

6. Achievement rates are poor. The long-term targets set for learners lack detail. Reviews of progress do not lead to the identification of clear, demanding short-term targets, and do not always involve employers. The results of initial assessment are not used to plan individual programmes of learning. Some learners make slow progress through their qualifications. Key skills are not introduced until late in learners' programmes, and evidence is not always gathered from the workplace.

New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults

7. Retention and achievement rates are adequate, and improving. Clients benefit from effective and well-planned support, with satisfactory arrangements for induction and initial assessment. They gain in confidence as they progress through their qualification. Clients receive thorough and well-structured jobsearch training, based around thoughtfully designed materials. Clients use an appropriate range of information technology (IT) resources.

8. The targets set for learners are inadequate. They lack clarity, and are insufficiently focused on the needs of the individual. There are satisfactory strategies for the provision of basic skills support, where required, although staff are not always aware of the range of resources available for this.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

9. Charter is owned and managed by two directors. They are responsible for the overall development of the company and are closely involved in operational issues. The managing director oversees strategic planning and operational management, including all administration systems, staff recruitment and development, and liaison with the LSC and other external agencies. The director of studies works as an assessor and an internal verifier. In July 2002 the company was restructured. Two operations managers now lead two separate divisions of the company. One division concentrates on work-based learning, with a team of peripatetic assessors providing training for modern apprentices. The other division concentrates on providing in-centre training for adults across the seven sites. A quality assurance manager oversees quality assurance and the implementation of action plans. The company employs 55 staff, many of whom were formerly learners with the organisation. The company also employs five consultants, one of whom provides all the training and assessment for engineering and warehousing. Charter holds the Investors in People Award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The company has a quality assurance policy and an equal opportunities policy and strategy. The company produced its first annual self-assessment report in February 1999.

STRENGTHS

- good internal communication
- comprehensive, well-planned development opportunities for staff
- strong links with community organisations to encourage wider participation
- particularly supportive approach to vulnerable and disaffected learners

WEAKNESSES

- some weak business planning
- inadequate monitoring of learners' and employers' understanding of equality
- poor access at most centres
- ineffective quality assurance arrangements
- some weak internal verification practice

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- improved recording of meetings
- more detailed equal opportunities action plan
- more images of learners from under-represented groups in publicity materials
- wider consultation for self-assessment

10. Charter's internal communication is thorough and effective. There is close

teamworking among the staff, particularly within individual centres. There are regular monthly management meetings and centre meetings which are used to review operational issues and disseminate information. There are also quarterly meetings of assessors. Informal meetings provide another useful channel of communication. Directors and senior managers are approachable and maintain regular contact with other staff. Employees are very loyal to the company and share the directors' values. Formal meetings are adequately recorded, but it is not always clear from the minutes whether the actions identified have been achieved.

11. There are good professional development opportunities for staff. Employees' development needs are identified through the formal annual appraisal system, through regular informal discussion, and through skills audits. Managers use appraisals to create a detailed training plan for each member of staff. The training needs identified are incorporated into an overall training plan for the company. This is focused on the needs of the business, but also takes account of individuals' personal development needs and aspirations. Some staff pursue relevant professional qualifications, and many attend valuable in-house courses. They are given time for these activities during their working week. Staff value the training opportunities available, and derive considerable personal and professional benefit from participating in them. The effectiveness of staff development is evaluated carefully by the individuals undertaking it, and by the company. Charter identified staff development as a strength in its self-assessment report.

12. Some aspects of the annual business planning process are weak. For 2002-03, the business plan comprises a strategic plan, two divisional plans, and contributory plans from each of the company's eight centres. One divisional plan has clear recruitment and achievement targets, based on compliance with the contractual targets set by the LSC and Jobcentre Plus. Some of these targets are over-ambitious. The other plans lack appropriate targets and are insufficiently detailed. None of the plans identifies specific responsibilities for action or resource requirements. They do not clearly state how success will be measured. None of them focuses clearly enough on improving the quality of training. The self-assessment report identifies business planning as a weakness.

13. Charter's premises and resources are satisfactory. Management information is collected systematically through two separate databases, and used appropriately to log recruitment enquiries and track the progress of learners.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

14. Charter has a clear equal opportunities strategy, an equal opportunities policy which refers to current legislation, and a grievance procedure. In recent months, the company has taken appropriate steps to improve its co-ordination of equal opportunities. Senior managers have written an equal opportunities action plan, which includes appropriate timescales. The content of the plan is satisfactory, but some of the objectives are described in very broad terms, and some of the success indicators are unclear. A centre manager has been appointed as equal opportunities and diversity officer, with responsibility for implementing the company's equal opportunities action plan. Under the direction of the quality manager, he is introducing initiatives to raise awareness of equality across the company. It is too early to say how effective these will be.

15. Charter's staff have strong links with a range of community groups. The equal opportunities and diversity officer has effective contacts with organisations which support people with dyslexia, and with groups committed to promoting racial equality. Other centre managers liaise with organisations for lone parents and local disability forums. These links are valuable, because they bring Charter's programmes to the attention of learners from disadvantaged groups, who might not otherwise access training. Senior managers at Charter have recently begun to collect and analyse equal opportunities data, and to use these to identify and target groups which are under-represented on their programmes. The company's marketing materials are clear and well presented. They all contain a statement of Charter's commitment to equality, but only a few contain positive images of learners from minority ethnic groups.

16. Charter's staff are particularly supportive in their approach to vulnerable and disaffected learners, especially those referred by Jobcentre Plus. The atmosphere in the company's training centres is welcoming and inclusive, and there is a strong focus on increasing learners' self-esteem and building their confidence. In most centres, key staff members started their careers at Charter as learners. They have first-hand knowledge of the difficulties faced by new learners, and use this effectively to put people at ease.

17. Charter does not adequately monitor learners' understanding of equal opportunities. The company's equal opportunities policy and grievance procedures are explained to learners during their induction, and are included in the induction handbook. However, learners' understanding of the issues raised is not systematically checked or reinforced. Assessors seldom discuss equal opportunities with learners during visits to the workplace. Some assessors are unsure about how to raise equal opportunities with learners. Few members of Charter's staff have received any formal training in equality of opportunity. The company's equal opportunities policy is explained to new members of staff when they join the company. This is not enough to raise their awareness of equality of opportunity. The equality and diversity officer has attended several workshops on equality and diversity. The company does not monitor equality in the workplace thoroughly enough. Employers are shown a copy of Charter's equal opportunities policy, but their understanding of this is not checked. They are not asked if they have their own policy. Equality is not discussed during reviews of learners' progress, and staff do not

formally check that learners are not being bullied or harassed. Charter does not ensure that employers understand their responsibility for equal opportunities.

18. Six of Charter's seven training centres are very difficult for people with impaired mobility to use. They are on the first floors of buildings which are not served by lifts. The company is seeking more accessible premises. Most of the learners spend all their time in the workplace and do not attend Charter's training centres.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

19. Charter's quality assurance processes are ineffective. The company's quality assurance policy outlines its overall approach to quality assurance. Quality assurance is a formal agenda item at the monthly management meetings and there have been several useful discussions on quality during the past year. Most staff understand the need for quality assurance, but they do not all understand their own part in this, and their compliance with the policies is not monitored effectively enough. Controlled documents for managing and monitoring training are issued on a compact disc to the eight centres. All staff are expected to use these approved documents but not all do. Charter is not always aware of any non-compliance. The effectiveness of the quality assurance processes is not systematically checked or evaluated. There is no formal observation of on-the-job learning.

20. Feedback is collected from learners by questionnaire after induction and when they leave their programme. The questionnaires are analysed but the data produced are not used effectively to improve the quality of training. There are no formal mechanisms for collecting employers' views about the training. There is no systematic monitoring of progress against the company's development plan. Several actions listed in the development plan are now overdue, but this has not been dealt with.

21. Internal verification is inadequately planned. Charter has a sampling plan for the last quarter of 2002, but this lacks detail, and has not yet been implemented. There is too little emphasis on increasing the consistency of assessment, and on developing the practice of assessors. Standardisation meetings at individual centres only involve small numbers of assessors. There is no standardisation between centres. Key areas of assessment practice are not discussed fully. For example, there is insufficient dissemination of information on new occupational standards. Internal verifiers observe the assessment of learners, but their feedback to assessors lacks detail about what they have done well and what might be improved. New assessors are not given enough support or monitoring. The forms used to record observations of assessment do not have room to list necessary actions, development needs or suggested improvements.

22. Charter's most recent self-assessment report was written in November 2001. Although detailed, it does not take into account the views of learners or employers. In some areas, the report overstates Charter's strengths. Although some weaknesses are accurately identified, others, for example, those in internal verification, equal opportunities and target-setting for learners, are not.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	181	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	16	4

23. Charter provides training in business administration, accounting and management at each of its seven training centres. There are 109 learners following advanced modern apprenticeships. Of these, 12 are working towards accounting qualifications, 76 towards business administration qualifications and 21 towards management qualifications. There are 71 young people on foundation modern apprenticeships, of whom 10 are in accounting and 61 are in business administration. One learner is working towards an NVQ at level 4 in accounting, and 14 adults are on longer occupational training (LOT) programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus. Two adults are on the New Deal full-time education and training option. Learners can start training at any time of the year. Most modern apprentices are recruited through Connexions or by direct enquiries from employers and learners. Adult learners are usually referred from Jobcentre Plus, although some are recruited as a result of direct advertising by Charter. The recruitment process includes an interview and initial assessment of all applicants. All learners receive an induction into the training programme either at the training centre or in the workplace. All modern apprentices are employed. They are visited in the workplace at least monthly for training and assessment. Unemployed adult learners attend the training centre daily to develop their employability skills and carry out jobsearch activities. Modern apprentices have a formal progress review every three months. There are formal reviews for adult learners every four weeks. Assessors and internal verifiers have occupational qualifications and experience.

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)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	13		82		73		73		105						
Retained*	0		0	0	20	27	32	44	47	45						
Successfully completed	0		0	0	8	11	28	38	36	34						
Still in learning	13		64	78	27	37	5	7	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																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	18		55		28		18		8						
Retained*	0		0	0	17	61	11	61	4	50						
Successfully completed	0		1	2	6	21	5	28	2	25						
Still in learning	18		40	73	11	39	2	11	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	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts			1				2		1						
Retained*			0	0			2	100	1	100						
Successfully completed			0	0			1	50	1	100						
Still in learning			1	100			0	100	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

New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults												
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	16		49		27						
Retained*	0	0	24	49	13	48						
Planned learning completed	0	0	5	10	4	15						
Gained job	0	0	13	27	9	33						
Still in training	16	100	0	0	0	0						

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

STRENGTHS

- thorough, flexible support for learners
- well-organised portfolios containing good-quality evidence from a range of sources

WEAKNESSES

- poor rates of achievement
- inadequate planning of learning
- insufficiently detailed targets set for learners

24. Charter's staff provide a high level of support for learners. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Assessors are flexible when arranging workplace visits, and respond well to the needs of learners and employers. Learners are given their assessors' mobile phone numbers and can also contact them by e-mail. They have confidence in their assessors and feel able to approach them about any difficulties. Learners understand that they can attend Charter's training centres in the evening if they need additional guidance from assessors. They value this, and take advantage of it when they need to. Learners receive good personal support. When necessary, they are referred to support agencies such as housing support units and drugs advisory services.

25. Learners' portfolios are well organised and contain good quality evidence. The work in them is of a high standard and accurately reflects learners' everyday work activities. They contain a wide range of workplace evidence, including witness statements and photographs. The quality of portfolios was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. Learners are assessed by observation in their workplace. The observations are fully documented and accurately referenced against relevant NVQ standards. Learners' background knowledge is confirmed by verbal questioning, which is well recorded. Learners understand the requirements of their NVQ and of the assessment process. The units they have completed are clearly recorded and learners have a good awareness of their progress. Assessment is thorough and adequately recorded. Induction is satisfactory. However, the topics covered during induction are only briefly reinforced during the training programme, and many learners have little recollection of them. Charter provides satisfactory resources to support learning, although the range of materials for the administration NVQ is narrow.

26. Assessors provide effective encouragement for learners to progress on to higher levels of learning. Since September 1998, 12 per cent of Charter's business administration learners have progressed from level 2 to level 3 programmes. Charter makes additional funding available to allow modern apprentices to take additional qualifications in telephone skills and IT. To date, 34 learners have gained additional qualifications. There is a wide range of good work placements, which reflect the local economy. Employers provide additional training, on topics such as manual handling and health and safety, which enhance learners' experience. Many supervisors provide good guidance and support for learners. Some learners have jobs where they can demonstrate a high level of occupational and personal skills. One learner has responsibility for a significant training budget.

27. Achievement rates are poor. Of those starting advanced modern apprenticeships in

1998, 1999 and 2000, less than half were retained and less than 40 per cent completed their qualification. Fewer of the learners who started in 2001 and 2002 have left early, but it is too early to say whether this improvement will be reflected in achievement rates. The achievement rate for foundation modern apprentices who started their programmes before 2000 is poor. Many who started since then are making slow progress. For example, one learner has completed only three NVQ units in 15 months. For some learners on advanced and foundation modern apprenticeships, key skills training does not start until late in their programme. Achievement is also poor on adult programmes. Of the 76 learners who started in 2000-01 and 2001-02, only 29 per cent gained a job, and 12 per cent completed their planned learning. None of the adults who have started programmes in 2002 have left early.

28. Training is inadequately planned. Before learners start their training, their key skills are assessed and their job role is reviewed. However, this information is not used to prepare an individual learning plan. There is insufficient initial discussion about how and when various aspects of the learning programme will be covered, or whether the training will be given by the assessor or the employer. On- and off-the-job training are satisfactory, but there are no formal, structured training plans and little linkage between workplace and NVQ activities. Some employers have a poor understanding of NVQ requirements. This limits the contribution they are able to make to the programme.

29. Target-setting for learners is weak. The long-term targets on individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed. A single target date is given for all the elements of the learning programme. The short-term targets agreed during reviews of learners' progress lack focus and clarity. For example, they refer to the need to complete a particular NVQ unit, without specifying what needs to be done to achieve this. Some of the targets set do not sufficiently challenge learners. When learners fail to achieve a target, the reasons are not discussed properly. Some clearer targets are set on assessment plans, but these are not clearly linked to the targets set at progress reviews. The progress review forms are often only completed superficially. Employers do not always participate in reviews, and, although they are invited to comment on their learners' progress, they do not always do so. Individual learning plans are not systematically updated following progress reviews, and do not reflect learners' progress towards their qualification.

Good Practice

Inspectors saw an example of particularly good use of work-based evidence. As part of his NVQ work, one accounting learner prepared and presented proposals and costings to his employer for a new database. The proposals are now being implemented with considerable benefit to learner and employer.

Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	20	3

30. Charter offers training in ICT for 15 clients on work-based learning for adults, 10 of them on LOT programmes lasting either 13 or 20 weeks, and five on a short job-focused training programme which lasts for six weeks. In addition, there are five New Deal 25+ clients on the full-time education and training option. ICT training is available in all but one of Charter’s centres. Clients work towards basic computer literacy qualifications and examination-based qualifications in IT. Clients may start their programmes at any time of the year. They are referred by Jobcentre Plus and are interviewed by Charter’s staff to identify the appropriate area of learning for them, and their current skills and learning needs. Clients spend their time working independently in one of Charter’s centres, with one-to-one help from a trainer when required. Some have work experience as part of their programme.

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

New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults										
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts			107		17				
Retained*			78	73	16	94				
Planned learning completed			20	19	7	41				
Gained job			31	29	6	35				
Still in training			20	19	0	0				

*retained clients are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their programme, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed, or who have gained employment during their time on the programme

STRENGTHS

- very good individual support for learners
- comprehensive, well-resourced jobsearch training

WEAKNESSES

- insufficiently individual targets for learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better staff awareness of learndirect basic skills support

31. There is very good individual support for clients. The ratio of clients to support staff at most centres is good, and clients have ready access to one-to-one coaching. They acquire new and relevant skills quickly. This builds their confidence and prepares them well for the workplace. Clients are aware of the progress they are making and are enthusiastic about their new skills. Instructors respond well to clients' individual needs and work closely with them to overcome any personal problems and disabilities. Many staff are former clients who have progressed into employment with Charter Training. They provide clients with positive role models who have similar backgrounds and experiences to themselves and who can empathise with, and support them. Clients are encouraged to gain a qualification. In some instances, they have been allowed to continue with their qualification beyond their planned programme of learning. There is a range of flexible learning materials available to clients, although some of these are poorly photocopied. There are satisfactory IT resources.

32. Considerable thought has been given to the planning of jobsearch. Jobsearch training takes place each day, and includes the preparation of curriculum vitae and job applications, the analysis of advertisements, and interview techniques. Sessions are well planned, and cover the development of practical, social and employability skills using well-prepared materials and suitable videos. The Internet is available from most computers in Charter's centres, and clients use this to access relevant websites. Clients can also use telephones, fax machines, and a range of newspapers and magazines. Clients value the experience they gain from jobsearch activities, and speak positively about how much more confident they feel about applying for jobs or making speculative enquires of employers. Some clients attend work experience as part of their programme. Work placements are carefully selected to meet the needs of clients, to build their confidence, and to help them improve their employability. The employers used are sensitive and supportive.

33. Retention rates on IT programmes are good, and the achievement rate is adequate. Nearly all the clients who started programmes in 2000-01 stayed for the duration of their programme, with 41 per cent completing their planned learning, and 35 per cent gaining employment. Of those who started their programme in 2001-02, 73 per cent have been retained. So far, 19 per cent have completed their planned learning, and nearly a third have a job. Eighteen per cent are still in learning, and are making good progress with their programmes. No clients have started programmes since April 2002.

34. The long-term targets set for clients are too general. Although initial assessment is thorough, the results are not always used in target-setting. The target date for achieving all the goals listed in the individual learning plans is usually the end date of the clients' programme. Clients are not given specific interim targets and encouraged to achieve them. Clients' progress is reviewed at appropriate times during the training programme, but reviews are not used to set effective short-term targets. Clients do not know how well they are progressing.

35. Clients receive a satisfactory induction to their programme, supplemented by well-written supporting materials. The barriers to each client's employability are identified, and clients are given appropriate support to overcome them. Charter's staff have access to a range of techniques to help clients improve their basic skills, including one-to-one coaching and learndirect courses. However, not all staff are aware of the learndirect courses, and their value as a resource is inconsistent.

Good Practice

When a client told a member of Charter's staff about a problem with attending an interview, the member of staff took the client there himself. As a result of the interview, the client got the job.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	103	4

36. Charter provided training for 37 advanced and 66 foundation modern apprentices. Sixty-eight of these are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in customer service, 25 towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in warehouse and distribution, and 10 towards NVQs at level 2 and 3 in retailing. All are employed. They work in a range of companies including nurseries, hairdressers, warehouses, health clubs and hotels. Learners are usually recruited directly from employers. All training and assessment, including key skills work, is carried out in the workplace by Charter’s assessors.

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)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	3		33		34		15									
Retained*	0		0	0	14	41	8	53									
Successfully completed	0		0	0	10	29	6	40									
Still in learning	3		22	67	9	26	3	20									

*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)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98		1996-97		1995-96		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	10		75		13		3									
Retained*	0		3	4	4	31	3	100									
Successfully completed	0		3	4	0	0	3	100									
Still in learning	10		52	69	4	31	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

- good support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor rates of achievement
- ineffective use of individual learning plans
- weak progress reviews
- late introduction of key skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reinforcement of induction topics
- more observed assessment in customer service
- improved occupational updating for staff

37. Charter offers learners flexible and well-organised support. Learners are given assessors' mobile telephone numbers, and their home telephone numbers, which they use frequently to request help and advice during the evening and at weekends. Learners with personal problems receive sympathetic, constructive support from their assessor, and are given every encouragement to continue with their learning programme. Most employers offer very good support to learners, giving them time away from work activities to make progress on their NVQs, or allowing them use of company computer facilities. Some learners have been strongly supported in their personal development and are now helping to train their colleagues.

38. Although highly supportive, some employers lack a clear understanding of NVQs, and how they are linked to workplace activity. Learners receive an appropriate induction from Charter, supplemented by written material. After the induction there is little reinforcement of the topics covered. Towards the end of their programme, learners are advised on opportunities for further training and career development.

39. Retention rates for modern apprentices have been mainly adequate, but achievement rates are poor. Forty-one per cent of advanced modern apprentices achieved an NVQ during the three-year period before inspection. Only 10 per cent of foundation modern apprentices did so. Some learners make slow progress towards their qualifications, and many of those still in learning ought to have finished their programmes by now.

40. Learning resources for both the area of learning and for key skills are satisfactory. Assessment practice is adequate. Although observed assessments are carried out well on the warehousing and distribution programme, they are used less systematically on the customer service programme, where written evidence predominates. Some assessors do not have up-to-date occupational experience. They are not taking sufficient action to formally update their skills and their occupational knowledge.

41. Individual learning plans are not used effectively. They lack detail and fail to reflect individual needs and experience. Many do not identify the optional and additional units learners are working towards as part of their apprenticeship framework. Target achievement dates are the same for all NVQ and key skills units. They do not take into account the learners' prior learning or achievement. Individual learning plans are not updated during progress reviews. They do not provide a clear overview of each learner's progress through their qualification. Initial assessment is adequate and leads to the provision of appropriate support where required. However, the outcome of initial assessment is not always recorded on the individual learning plan.

42. Learners progress reviews are weak. Most review records do not contain details of learners' progress towards the NVQ or key skills awards. Learners are not set appropriately challenging targets to help them progress through their programme. Employers are seldom included in the discussions, although some reviews do contain comments from employers. Individual learning plans are not always referred to during reviews to check whether progress is being made towards the target achievement dates.

43. Key skills awards form an integral part of the modern apprenticeship framework, but are not introduced until late in the programme. Some learners have been on programmes for 10 months but have only recently begun key skills work. Insufficient evidence is gathered from learners' workplaces. Few learners have yet taken key skills tests, although some have been given some coaching. In most cases, key skills are introduced as an additional requirement, often when learners have completed their NVQs. The self-assessment report identified this as a weakness.

Poor Practice

One learner is working in an environment where IT and number skills are in daily use. Although she completed her NVQ nearly a year ago, she is still working towards her key skills requirements.