

INSPECTION REPORT

The Harington Scheme

18 November 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

THE HARINGTON SCHEME

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

The Harington Scheme is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee, based in north London. It provides foundation and horticultural work-based learning for young people and adults. Most have learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties or mental health needs. Each of the 36 learners and clients has a very individual learning programme, which includes training in the large gardens, basic skills learning, and attendance at a college or another training provider, or work experience.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the needs of those receiving it. Training in horticulture and foundation training is good. The leadership and management of the Harington Scheme are good, and its approach to equal opportunities is outstanding. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	1
Quality assurance	3

Land-based provision	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
New Deal 18-24	None
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	None

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
Life Skills	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	None

KEY STRENGTHS

- good resources for horticulture
- high standard of practical work
- highly individualised programmes which take account of learners' needs and abilities

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- good work tasters and placements
- excellent personal support for learners
- prominent promotion of equality of opportunity
- effective partnerships

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor accommodation

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more staff training regarding barriers to learning
- clearer target-setting

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of three inspectors spent 12 days at The Harington Scheme (the Scheme) in November 2002. They observed 10 learning sessions, and talked to 23 learners and clients. They interviewed the chairperson of the board of directors and 13 staff, some of them more than once. They visited one work placement and four external training sites, where they interviewed seven staff from other organisations. They looked at a wide range of documents, including learners' portfolios and folders of work, initial assessment, review and progress records, organisational procedures and policies, agreements with subcontractors, audit reports, and records of staff meetings and board meetings. They also examined the Scheme's self-assessment report, action plans, annual report and accounts.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Land-based provision	0	0	2	4	0	0	0	6
Foundation programmes	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	4
Total	0	0	5	5	0	0	0	10

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. The Scheme is a registered charity set up in 1980 to provide training in gardening for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities. It has one and a half acres of gardens in Highgate, north London. Its trading arm, Harington Gardeners, employs former learners to do gardening work. These include six employees who are on the Workstep programme with other organisations.

3. The Scheme has a staff of 22, including six Workstep employees, two learners, and four part-time staff. The general manager is employed for four days a week and reports to the chairperson of the board of directors. The nine directors serve in a voluntary capacity. The Scheme has contracts with local health authorities and social services departments, as well as with the North London Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and the London region of Jobcentre Plus.

4. There are 11 young people on Life Skills programmes and 12 on horticultural training programmes at level 1, including the two employed by the Scheme. Four of the 12 unemployed adult clients are on basic employability training programmes (BET). The other eight are on longer occupational training programmes (LOT) in horticulture, at level 1. One client is on New Deal 18-24 and is training in horticulture. Nearly all the learners and clients have a learning difficulty or disability. Most have a moderate learning difficulty. Some have mental health needs. Some exhibit challenging behaviour. Most have not gained any general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs), although a few adult clients have achieved advanced level or higher education qualifications. In the past few years, only one young learner had achieved five GCSEs at grade C or above before starting with the Scheme.

Work-based learning for young people

5. Work-based learning for young people is good. The young people benefit from highly individual programmes, matched to their particular learning need. They gain in self-confidence, and improve their literacy and numeracy, interpersonal skills and behaviour. Learners gain a range of useful practical skills, and achieve high standards of practical work.

Life Skills

6. Life Skills learners follow highly individual programmes, matched to their particular learning need. They are offered counselling and support by a life coach, who is a qualified psychotherapist. Learners can gain experience of a wide range of occupational areas by attending short taster programmes. Work experience is well planned and co-ordinated, with good communication between supervisors and the Scheme's staff. Over the past three years, approximately half the Life Skills learners have progressed into further education or training. The accommodation used for Life Skills learners is unsatisfactory, and resources are insufficiently varied.

New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults

7. The adult clients enjoy their learning environment. Most are on LOT programmes. They learn useful horticultural skills, and many also take basic skills courses. Many achieve national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 1, or nationally recognised certificates. Clients gain confidence and improve their communication skills. Seven of the 38 clients who have left in the past two years went into paid jobs. Some others took up voluntary work or progressed to further training or education. Many others suffered ill-health and are now drawing sickness benefits.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

8. The Scheme is run by a general manager, who works for four days a week, including one day off-site. She was originally appointed in January 2002 as a consultant to help the organisation prepare a strategic development plan, and took up the general manager's post in June 2002. The general manager reports to a board of nine voluntary directors, each of whom takes responsibility for a particular aspect of work, such as fund-raising. The general manager has devised new organisational procedures and policies. An operations manager is in charge of most aspects of learning and training. She liaises with the funding bodies and referral organisations, and sets up contracting arrangements with other training providers. She uses a purpose-built computer system to analyse learners' achievements. All teaching staff are qualified occupationally, or in teaching, or both. A psychotherapist is employed for three hours a week to counsel and coach the Life Skills learners. Many decisions are made in consultation with all staff and with learner representatives. Learners participate in some decision-making groups and management committees. Eight of the 22 employees are former learners employed as assistant gardeners by Harington Gardeners, which also provides work experience for current learners. Staff and learners include men and women, and come from a wide range of minority ethnic groups.

9. Although the site is in a conservation area, planning permission has been obtained to refurbish and extend the Scheme's buildings. The first phase of work is due to start in the New Year.

STRENGTHS

- excellent personal support for learners
- good involvement of learners in management decisions
- effective partnerships
- strong promotion of equal opportunities through every aspect of the Scheme's work
- inclusive and welcoming learning environment
- well-managed self-assessment and improvement

WEAKNESSES

- poor accommodation
- unsystematic observation of teaching staff

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- full implementation of new staff procedures
- clearer handouts and policy documents

10. Learners and clients are extremely well supported. Key workers are allocated to support and counsel learners individually. Further counselling by a life coach makes a crucial difference to Life Skills learners and staff. Individual help is given with problems such as financial difficulties, homelessness, depression, crime and health care. Before joining the programme, staff ensure that learners can find their way to the training centre and home again. They build learners' confidence in travelling independently by going with them to and from their homes on public transport until they are sure that they can get to the site unaided. Work placements and college courses are systematically supported. A member of staff visits the college or work placement before each learner goes there, to discuss individual needs. When learners go to the first session, the staff member is by their side to ensure that they are able to understand instructions and benefit fully from the training. Regular visits and reviews boost learners' sense of security and help resolve any issues promptly and appropriately. Learners' experience is further enriched by out of hours activities organised by staff and volunteers. These include social events, flower shows, a pantomime performed by learners, and an annual residential week of outdoor pursuits. Learners' individual schemes of training and development are designed to broaden their horizons, and a range of activities such as attendance at local gyms is effectively supported and encouraged by the staff.

11. Learners' views are sought and acted upon when management decisions are taken. They contribute to regular discussion groups and strategic committees. Sometimes they chair the meetings. They are encouraged to speak and their views are recorded. Learners are also consulted using thorough questionnaires. They are routinely quoted in reports and published material. They formulate their own code of conduct which is displayed prominently in teaching rooms.

12. The Scheme uses partnerships very effectively. Links with employers and other training providers broaden learners' experience and build their confidence. The directors, along with a group of the Scheme's supporters, volunteer their time to help learners. In particular, they run fund-raising activities. They also act as independent listeners and help the learners to fill in their feedback questionnaires. Successful and well-targeted fund-raising has meant that extra activities, resources and staff are available. Volunteers play a large part in the organisation of social activities. The Scheme offers work experience to students from local schools, including schools for young people with additional educational needs. Some of these students later enrol as learners with the Scheme. As part of their studies in learning disabilities, student nurses do their work placements at the Scheme. They provide additional support for learners and clients. The organisation maintains good links with other training providers and funding bodies. The operations manager sits on various working groups and committees, which are also attended and supported by the local LSC.

13. The Scheme's buildings are in poor condition. Cramped conditions for staff and learners detract from effective teaching and learning. There is limited access for learners with mobility difficulties as the site is steeply sloping and has uneven steps and few ramps. The Scheme has obtained planning permission for a new building. Some

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computer facilities provided for learners by subcontractors can only be reached by a steep narrow staircase.

14. Some staff procedures and policies are out of date or have not yet been drafted. The staff induction process is being reviewed. A new equal opportunities policy is being checked for its legal implications, and the staff development plan is incomplete. Some other personnel procedures are still in draft form, although there are clear targets in the strategic development plan for their completion.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 1**

15. Equality of opportunity and diversity are integral to every aspect of the Scheme's work. Learners and clients take equal opportunities seriously, and have a good understanding of acceptable and unacceptable language and behaviour. Staff frequently challenge learners for using inappropriate language, and they in turn challenge each other and the staff. Many of the learners are conscious that they are different from other people, and this has made them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in other environments. Many have tried learning elsewhere, but did not do well or left prematurely. At the Scheme they thrive, and the retention rate is good. Staff show learners respect, and encourage them to respect others. There is a high degree of individual attention even before learners and clients start the programme. Careful checks are made to ensure the suitability of the programme for learners. All learners are welcomed, provided the Scheme's staff feel confident about meeting their needs. Potential learners are well supported during their taster weeks by another learner who acts as a mentor. Initial assessment is detailed but unpressured and spread over the week. Taster periods can be extended at learners' request. Start dates are tailored to suit the learners' particular needs and circumstances. During their induction, equal opportunities is discussed extensively. It is clearly reinforced at every meeting, review or assessment. All learners meet every Friday to discuss the week, give feedback and make complaints. One staff member is present at these meetings to take notes and pass the findings to staff and managers. A learner chairs the meeting. Equal opportunities is one of the two standing agenda items. Learners gain a good understanding of equal opportunities issues. They understand their rights, their responsibilities and how to make a complaint, and they know it is alright to make a complaint.

16. Learners' views are listened to, and taken into account when making management decisions. The Scheme's equal opportunities committee comprises six learner representatives and two members of staff. This committee is effective. It developed and drafted the rules governing behaviour at the Scheme. It also provides training for other learners in appropriate behaviour and language. It conducted a survey on learners' understanding of the signs displayed throughout the site. As a result, some signs were amended or simplified. The committee drafted the equal opportunities statement. This is simple, clear and easily understood. All learners are given a copy, and a copy is displayed prominently at the Scheme's premises.

17. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda item at staff and management meetings. These meetings frequently consider possible improvements. Data analysis showed a fall last year in the number of female clients and learners. Staff produced well-designed publicity materials and in-house displays. There are now more female learners. A management group is currently updating the equal opportunities policy to take full account of the implications of recent legislation.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

18. The Scheme has made many significant improvements to its structures, processes and policies during the past year. This followed thorough and self-critical self-assessment, and the employment of a consultant to identify positive and effective ways to change. There is a good strategic development plan with well-defined goals and objectives. The plan includes many small incremental changes and feasible, practical measures for improvement. Significant improvements were made in a short time. Communication arrangements and teamwork and morale are now good among staff and learners. New systems, procedures and standards have been developed. The training provision has been improved and expanded, and new areas of training are being explored following analysis of learners' preferences and choices. Retention and achievement rates have improved. The financial position of the Scheme has been improved.

19. The Scheme's monitoring procedures are unsystematic. Although many new procedures, plans and policies have been developed, not all have been implemented. There is an informal system for observation of learning, but it does not assess performance objectively or indicate precise areas for improvement.

20. Handouts and policies are poorly laid out. Some inappropriately complex language is used. The fonts used are too small and there are too many words on each page.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Land-based provision

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	12	2
New Deal 18-24	1	None
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	7	None

21. The 21 learners on the Scheme's horticultural programme include 12 on work-based learning programmes for young people, eight on LOT programmes and one on New Deal 18-24. All learners are registered for an NVQ in amenity horticulture. Some are working towards the whole qualification, others towards units of the NVQ and an entry level horticultural skills certificate. The Scheme's own staff assess the learners' skills and knowledge against the NVQ standards, and internally verify the assessment. They provide off-the-job training at the Scheme's premises. On-the-job training takes place in the Scheme's or other local gardens. The Scheme carries out contract gardening work locally, mainly through its trading arm, Harington Gardeners.

22. Learners are usually referred by Jobcentre Plus or Connexions. Following a taster week, which includes a basic skills assessment, they are enrolled on to the most appropriate programme. An individual learning plan is prepared. Progress reviews take place every eight weeks. Goals are set for the learners at their progress reviews and these are followed up at the next review.

STRENGTHS

- good resources
- wide range of supplementary skills learned
- good personal development
- high standard of practical work
- good retention rate
- inspiring staff

WEAKNESSES

- inappropriately high qualification targets for some learners
- dull jobsearch sessions

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better internal verification
- more training to help staff understand complex barriers to learning
- clearer target-setting at reviews

23. The Scheme is well equipped with good quality gardening tools. The one and a half acres of gardens provide ample space and accommodate a good-sized greenhouse and two poly-tunnels. There is a wide range of plants in the gardens, including mature fruit and decorative trees, shrubs and herbaceous borders. The Scheme has recently taken over an allotment to increase the area available for growing crops. Most learners have periods of work experience with Harington Gardeners. These give them access to a wide range of learning opportunities and a chance to be assessed against the qualification standards. Many of the learners go on to sheltered employment with the Scheme at the end of their programme.

24. Although the main qualifications offered are in horticulture, the programme encompasses a wide range of personal development and other skills. Learners take part in a residential outdoor pursuits week in Devon. This helps build their confidence and teamworking. They are also taught conservation skills and woodwork. Three learners attend a local college to do a short course in woodwork. They apply these skills by making items such as bird boxes and small window boxes. Many activities are designed to increase the learners' personal development. There is a football team and a pop group. At the annual general meeting, a prominent local citizen presents certificates to all learners and gives out awards for 'Trainee of the year' and 'Trainee who made most progress'. Learners often speak at the Scheme's annual general meeting. There are regular meetings of learners, and learners are represented on most of the Scheme's committees. All these activities help improve the learners' interpersonal and communication skills.

25. Learners are helped to attain a high standard of practical skills by the good quality teaching. The Scheme has two major plant sales each year. In the spring, the Scheme sells bedding plants produced on site, and later in the year it sells hanging baskets. All the plants are of good quality and produced by the learners. The Scheme enters many plants and flower arrangements in local horticultural society shows. These often win cups and certificates for their high standard. The Scheme entered a stand at the Chelsea Flower Show in 2001. Although a professional designer designed this, the learners were fully involved in the construction and maintenance of the stand, thereby increasing their teamwork and other skills. The stand was awarded a silver medal at the show, indicating a very high standard.

26. The retention rate is generally good, and for the past three years, around two-thirds of all learners have been retained for the full duration of their programme. Of the 11 clients aged over 25 who enrolled last year, seven are still in training. Three of the four who left are now drawing sickness benefit.

27. All the horticultural training staff are highly committed both to horticulture and the learners' development. They inspire learners to reach high standards, and act as excellent role models. Most of the staff are relatively new and bring a wide range of horticultural and other experience to the scheme. Although they have qualifications both in horticulture and teaching, most have had little training in working with people with severe barriers to learning.

28. In order to obtain funding for the younger learners, the Scheme has had to register them for an NVQ. Level 1 of the NVQ is too difficult for most of the learners. Many have particular difficulty with reading, writing and retaining theoretical information. To comply with funding body regulations, all the learning plans include a full NVQ, even though the training staff have set more realistic targets of one or more units of the NVQ and/or a lower level horticultural skills test. In a few cases, even the achievement of one unit of the NVQ at level 1 is an unrealistically ambitious target.

29. The Scheme's jobsearch sessions are dull. The older clients find them uninspiring and of very little use in finding employment. Jobsearch materials are poorly presented and not appropriate for these learners. There is insufficient focus in jobsearch sessions on the progression routes available to the clients, and little emphasis on their individual needs.

30. Two new internal verifiers have been appointed following problems with internal verification. They have introduced a new internal verification procedure, which has been commended by the external verifier. However, the internal verifiers have not yet checked the portfolios of all the learners, particularly those who were registered with the awarding body more than eight months ago.

31. Staff review learners' progress at least once every eight weeks. They set the learners targets, and follow them up at the next review. The targets are not sufficiently precise. Staff do not set specific time limits, or check learners' progress between reviews.

Good Practice

Staff use produce from the gardens and allotment to make simple meals at lunchtime with the learners. This helps learners make the link between the plants they have been growing and the food they eat. It also encourages them to try new cooking skills. During the inspection, the learners made leek and potato soup for one lunch. Later in the day some learners asked if they could dig some leeks and potatoes for themselves so that they could make some soup at home. Their request was granted.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Life Skills	11	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	4	None

32. Most Life Skills learners are referred to the course either from statutory organisations, like care homes or youth offending teams, or by the Connexions service in Tottenham or Barnet. People on BET are referred by Central or North London Jobcentre Plus. Each learner has an individual learning plan. Some would like to work in horticulture, others have another employment objective, or are unsure of what type of work they want, or are not ready for work. They are taught in small groups, sometimes alongside learners on the horticultural programme. Most Life Skills teaching is carried out by the Life Skills co-ordinator and the basic skills tutor. Learners' first week comprises induction and an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy, interpersonal skills and behaviour, employment aspirations and any personal circumstances which may affect their learning. Staff then draft a learning plan with the learner. This includes learning objectives and a timetable for learning. Some learners have work placements or attend training offered by other providers as part of their course. Staff are familiar with the national basic skills curriculum. Much of the Life Skills course concentrates on skills needed for employment, and leads to a certificate awarded by a national awarding body.

STRENGTHS

- highly individualised programmes which take account of learners' needs and abilities
- good counselling service
- good personal development
- good arrangements to experience vocational training
- good work placements
- good rates of progression to further training or education

WEAKNESSES

- too many interruptions to learning sessions
- insufficiently varied range of learning materials

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed recording of learners' achievements
- greater links between basic skills tuition and vocational skills
- greater emphasis in learning sessions on learners' oral communication skills

33. Each learner's learning plan matches their particular needs and ability. Some learners attend basic skills sessions. Some are integrated with learners on other programmes. What each one learns, and where and when they learn, depends on their particular mix of ability, vocational interest and aspiration. Some are based at the Scheme's site in Highgate. Others spend part of their programme with one or more other training providers, or at a work placement. Each learner's programme is reviewed at least once every four weeks and amended if necessary.

34. The Scheme provides a good counselling scheme for learners. Many have profound learning, social or personal needs. The Scheme employs a life coach, who is a qualified psychotherapist. In their first week of training, each Life Skills learner meets the life coach. The life coach encourages the learners to talk about any problems in their personal life which may affect their learning, and then meets them weekly to discuss each step needed. This counselling helps many learners stay on the programme, resolve difficult issues in their life, or understand and control their anger. The Scheme's confidentiality arrangements are effective. Learners trust the life coach, and know their confidence will not be breached. Teaching staff also encourage the learners, developing their confidence and their understanding of appropriate behaviour.

35. The Scheme offers learners the opportunity to try out a wide range of vocational training or education. Apart from horticulture, these programmes are given by other training providers. One offers learners experience in carpentry or painting and decorating, or classes in childcare. Arrangements are suitably flexible, so learning opportunities can be set up at short notice. Some learners attend a college course in information technology. These short taster programmes are usually for a week. If the learners want to extend the taster or continue in that area of learning, the Scheme's staff arrange this. The Scheme has good service level agreements and good working relationships with its subcontractors. In some cases, learners discover they are suited to the area of learning but not the training provider. In these cases, the Scheme's staff help them find a suitable provider.

36. Learners' work experience is well planned. The Scheme briefs employers' staff well about their responsibilities and about the types of activities that might suit the learners. Workplace supervisors provide a good range of tasks, enabling the learners to gain new skills. The Scheme's staff monitor learners' progress thoroughly. With the involvement of the learners and their workplace supervisors, the Scheme's staff gradually increase the hours of work experience. Learners become accustomed to the demands of employers. Their attendance and attitude to work improve. Supervisors are calm and

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patient, and deal well with any conflicts. There are work placements in a range of occupational areas, including motor vehicle engineering and childcare, as well as horticulture.

37. Over the past three years, around half the Life Skills learners have progressed to further education or training. These learners face severe barriers to education and this is a good rate of progression. Some others were prevented from progressing by health problems. Three of the five clients who completed the BET programme in the past year, achieved a qualification in horticulture or in basic skills.

38. Two of the three rooms used for training are also used by learners during their breaks. Staff or learners using the tea-making facilities or collecting their belongings, interrupt many learning sessions. Learners and teachers have their concentration disturbed to the detriment of learning.

39. The range of resources used in learning sessions is insufficiently varied. There are not enough computers. In some sessions, teachers rely too much on hand-outs. Some teachers write on the board for learners to copy, but do not check whether they can read or understand the words written. There is little use of television or video, or of books with pictures and simple text. The teaching is, however, all satisfactory or better. Teachers do not always encourage learners to discuss what they have learned. Learners are unsure how the basic skills they learn in the training rooms relate to their work.

40. Learners are set tasks and their achievement is recorded. However, records of specific attainments are not always detailed enough.