

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Northumberland Guidance Company Limited**

**16 September 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

Northumberland Guidance Company Limited is a private limited company which operates from sites in Cramlington, Morpeth, Alnwick, Amble, Blyth, Ashington, Hexham, and Berwick. It offers training for clients on New Deal 18-24, New Deal 25+ and Programme Centres. This includes Jobcentre Plus funded careers guidance for the Gateway, jobsearch support through the Programme Centres, and two-week Gateway to Work courses for New Deal 18-24 and New Deal 25+ clients. Additionally, all clients are encouraged to learn essential skills to help them find work.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The leadership and management of Northumberland Guidance Company Limited, and its approach to equality of opportunity and quality assurance are satisfactory. The foundation programmes are good.

### GRADES

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

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	None
Programme Centres	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- good progress by clients in the development of work behaviours
- good training in jobsearch
- lively and effective training programmes
- effective links with partnership organisations
- good employment practices for equality of opportunity

**KEY WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate support for clients with poor basic skills
- insufficiently focused strategic planning
- inadequate resources in most training centres
- poor implementation of some quality assurance procedures
- incomplete policies and procedures for equal opportunities

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more effective marketing to employers
- better recording of clients' progress

## THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days with Northumberland Guidance Company Limited (NGCL) in September 2002. They interviewed 35 clients, and held 46 meetings with NGCL's staff. They interviewed one subcontractor. Inspectors visited five guidance and jobsearch centres and interviewed three employers. They examined 116 clients' files which included action plans and progress reviews. Nine learning sessions were observed and graded. A range of evidence was examined, including training materials, the company's policies and procedures, staff records, minutes of meetings and action plans. Inspectors' referred to the first self-assessment report, which was produced in August 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Foundation programmes	1	2	3	3	0	0	0	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. NGCL was established in 1993 as a private limited company which is jointly owned by Northumberland County Council and Northumberland Training and Enterprise Council. The current board of directors is in the process of buying out the original shareholders. NGCL also runs the county careers service contract and aims to give a county-wide advice and guidance service for adults through commercial programmes, and a variety of initiatives funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) or Jobcentre Plus. The company contracts with the northern region of Jobcentre Plus to run Gateway, Gateway to Work, and jobsearch programmes for New Deal 18-24 and New Deal 25+ clients and Programme Centres. At the time of inspection, there were 215 clients doing jobsearch activities, 20 clients on New Deal 18-24 and one on New Deal 25+ attending Gateway to Work courses. Clients are offered training in foundation programmes and all are unemployed. The number of clients in training varies markedly over the year. In 2000-01, NGCL exceeded its annual target of 718 clients by nearly 150. In the same period, there were only 250 Gateway referrals against a target of 550. Training in Gateway to Work is operated at four training centres for a maximum of 100 clients a month. The 2001-02 total was 609 clients.

3. Northumberland is generally a rural county and the lack of public transport between many of the towns and villages is a significant problem for many unemployed people. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in the county was 3.9 per cent, compared with 5.9 per cent in the Northeast and 3 per cent nationally. The company operates in eight training centres, and the unemployment rates across these locations vary considerably. In the district of Blyth, the rate is 6.2 per cent, while in Berwick on Tweed the rate is only 2.7 per cent. The public service sector is the largest employer in the county, employing 34 per cent of the workforce, compared with 26 per cent nationally. Tourism accounted for 13 per cent of the county's employees in 1999, notably above the national average of 9 per cent. Over 80 per cent of employers in the county have a workforce of less than 10 people. Less than 1 per cent of the population in Northumberland are from minority ethnic groups. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in Northumberland was 49 per cent, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally.

## **Programme Centres**

4. The summary judgements apply to New Deal 18-24, New Deal 25+ and Programme Centres. Clients on foundation programmes make good progress into work. Twenty-six per cent of clients aged 18 to 24, and 40 per cent aged over 25 on Gateway to Work courses gain a job within 13 weeks of finishing their course. On the jobsearch programme, 37 per cent move into employment. Clients are highly satisfied with their training which helps them produce a good curriculum vitae and perform more effectively in interviews. The jobsearch training is effective and staff make good use of their knowledge of the local labour market and understanding of the barriers to work encountered by their clients. Some of the jobsearch leaders are good role models to the older clients, 38 per cent of whom are over 45. The Gateway to Work programme offers lively opportunities for clients to discuss their own prejudices and allows them to appreciate the importance of accurate information in the formation of opinions. Clients have access to good careers guidance. Careers staff ensure that clients are well prepared for job interviews and make them aware of the full range of job opportunities. There is a narrow range of training techniques and clients are expected to absorb too much information through listening. There are no opportunities to practise after demonstrations of techniques. There are shortcomings in resources at most of the training centres. Several rooms are too small and in some centres, there are too few computers and telephones. Many of the rooms are poorly decorated and do not have stimulating wall displays. There is inadequate support for clients' literacy and numeracy needs. Many clients have low levels of literacy and numeracy, but there is no training to raise the staffs' awareness.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

5. NGCL has 124 staff. The managing director has responsibility for running the company, which is divided into three divisions including careers services, recruitment and outsourcing activities, and guidance and training. The guidance and training division incorporates Jobcentre Plus provision and there are 24 staff working directly on Jobcentre Plus programmes. The manager of the adult provision has operational responsibility for the Jobcentre Plus provision, which is offered at eight training centres throughout Northumberland. The training centres are grouped into two areas, each with a co-ordinator, but each centre does not offer every training programme. Occupationally specific training, such as the information technology (IT) and team building elements of the Gateway to Work programme, are subcontracted to local training providers. The company uses partner organisations, and the full range of its own services, to support its clients and staff. The company has an overall business plan for 2002-03, with a draft business plan for 2003-04. An equal opportunities in employment policy statement was prepared in 1997. NGCL is accredited with an international quality assurance standard, and the Investors in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. Neither of these standards cover Jobcentre Plus provision, although the company is working to apply these standards across all the divisions. A national standard for guidance services was achieved in 2000. The company completed its first self-assessment report in August 2002, in preparation for inspection.

### STRENGTHS

- effective links with partnership organisations
- particularly good internal communications
- effective appraisal system
- efficient management of resources
- good employment practices for equal opportunities
- positive promotion of equal opportunities to clients

### WEAKNESSES

- insufficiently focused strategic planning
- inadequate use of management information to monitor and support clients
- incomplete policies and procedures for equal opportunities
- insufficiently thorough self-assessment process
- poor implementation of some quality assurance procedures

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more effective marketing to employers
- better recording of meetings and action points
- better access for clients with restricted mobility

6. The company links extensively and effectively with partner organisations for the benefit of clients. The company leads a county-wide information, advice and guidance partnership for adults with 193 members. Additionally, the company co-ordinates the Northumberland New Deal Gateway partnership, which offers most of the Gateway Services and New Deal provision across the county. The basic skills assessment centre is a member of the Northumberland New Deal Gateway partnership and staff from Jobcentre Plus attend meetings on a regular basis. NGCL works hard with partners to encourage effective collaboration which will benefit clients. For example, there is a comprehensive directory for clients showing all regional training providers of support and training. These directories are distributed widely and updated regularly. NGCL has diversified considerably over the past six years and uses the services from its other divisions to benefit clients. For example, staff in the careers service regularly meet with Gateway to Work and jobsearch staff to ensure a continuity of service. The company's recruitment agency also works with jobsearch centre staff to find employment for clients. Local employers give talks, hold mock interviews and offer work placement opportunities for clients. However, there is no marketing strategy to encourage employers' involvement.

7. There is particularly good internal communications between the company's staff. Regular use is made of informal methods of communication as the most appropriate way to update staff across a wide geographical area. Formal meetings are scheduled for centre co-ordinators, centre teams and for staff working on Gateway to Work and jobsearch programmes. Staff attend a wide cross-section of meetings. Managers work hard to ensure that outcomes from senior management meetings are shared at all the company's meetings. Meetings are used to share information and good practice. At an annual conference, all staff can discuss the company's performance and business objectives. Agenda are precise and the minutes of meetings are circulated widely. However, some of the minutes lack detail, and action points and deadlines are insufficiently precise.

8. NGCL manages its resources efficiently. There is thorough monitoring of financial, staffing, accommodation and IT resources at senior management and board meetings. Gateway to Work and jobsearch staff work on both training programmes and there are plans to further develop the adult training. Additional resources are used flexibly between training centres to improve the learning environment, and to meet changes in demand and individual client's need. For example, the company gained additional funding to purchase laptop computers. The company reviews public transport routes and travel expenses for clients when planning its training.

9. Appraisal systems are effective and result in additional training for staff. All staff are appraised each year and have a good understanding of their own job responsibilities and those of managers. There is training for staff on how the appraisal system works and guidelines on preparing for appraisal. Appeal and confidentiality agreements are built into the process. The appraisal includes a review of job descriptions and workload. There is an assessment of performance, barriers to performance, and a training needs analysis. Identified training needs are measured against the company's annual business objectives and priorities. Staff assess their own contribution to these objectives. Essential tasks for the year are agreed for individual staff.

10. There is insufficient focus on the Jobcentre Plus provision in the strategic plan. NGCL's business plan has a commercial focus and does not clearly identify strategic objectives for jobsearch and Gateway programmes. Managers and staff do not have measurable objectives to set a clear direction and strategy for improving services to clients. The development plan is short-term. The company does not set its own targets for improvement and works to Jobcentre Plus targets only. Data on targets are discussed at senior management meetings, but are not analysed to use as a basis for strategic planning.

11. There is inadequate use of management information to monitor and support clients. There are three separate databases which record details of clients on the jobsearch and Gateway programmes for contractual requirements. A fourth database is used to record additional information on clients, such as basic skills needs. However, there is no link between the databases and data are not cross-referenced or analysed. The company does not collect data on the number of Gateway clients progressing into Gateway to Work programmes. There is insufficient management information available for an effective analysis of clients' profiles, their progress and trends in performance. Information on clients from each centre, is not recorded in the databases. There are no standard procedures for recording information on clients. NGCL's staff have no access to the databases and rely on staff at the main office to extract data and information on their behalf. Staff are given insufficient information on clients who have basic skills or other support needs. There is no formal analysis of clients' retention and achievement rates. NGCL is trying out a new database, which will cover all of their needs and will be accessible to all training centres.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 3**

12. Clients are clearly briefed on equal opportunities at their induction. Trainers ensure that equality features strongly in early discussions on barriers to employment. Clients take part in activities which encourage them to consider how to overcome these barriers, and how they can avoid inappropriate behaviour. Stereotyping is challenged in discussion. Information on equal opportunities is prominently displayed in training centres and clients have a good understanding of the complaints procedure, and their own responsibilities. The procedure for handling complaints and compliments is thorough. There have been no complaints, but many compliments in the past year. Staff are sensitive to the clients' social problems and work with other agencies to give support when required. Trainers discuss clients' additional needs with subcontractors, particularly those carrying out team-building exercises. NGCL has gained additional funding to offer training programmes for particularly disaffected clients. There are few clients from minority ethnic groups, but this reflects the county. Three of the eight training centres have poor access for clients with restricted mobility.

13. The company has good employment practices. The recruitment procedure gives a strong priority to meeting the needs of people who have disabilities. Equal opportunities training is mandatory for all staff who carry out selection interviews. The procedures are strictly followed, and the company has made special arrangements to accommodate staff who have a hearing impairment, by the fitting of induction loops. However, the equal opportunities in employment policy has not been updated for five years and makes no reference to recent legislation. Flexible arrangements are made to accommodate the needs of staff who have family and social responsibilities. There is an independent counselling service for staff who have personal problems. Health and safety consultants have reviewed the working practices, and this has led to improvements in personal safety, particularly for female staff.

14. Policies and procedures on equality of opportunity are incomplete. The policy for equal opportunities in the careers service is now seven years old and is out of date. It is used inappropriately in the work of the adult services division and makes no reference to the problems facing clients and staff in a group training environment. However, staff have little knowledge of the existing policies. There has been insufficient staff training on equality of opportunity, except for a briefing on disabilities discrimination. The self-assessment report identified the need for better staff training. The adult services development plan recognises the need for a more dynamic approach to equal opportunities, but there are no precise targets. One member of staff has responsibility for problems relating to disability. There are inadequate monitoring arrangements for staff training and for the development of training materials. Some data on the gender and ethnic mix of clients are presented each year to the management board, but there is limited routine analysis of data.

## Quality assurance

## Contributory grade 3

15. Two of the staff have specific responsibility for quality assurance. NGCL is accredited with a national standard for quality assurance, but this accreditation does not include Jobcentre Plus. However, the company is working towards applying some of the systems to its Jobsearch and Gateway programmes. All staff are trained on quality assurance systems at induction, and each centre has a copy of the company's systems. NGCL carries out an annual quality assurance review and quality assurance is a standing agenda item for senior management meetings.

16. The self-assessment report is insufficiently thorough. Staff, employers and clients are insufficiently involved in producing the self-assessment report. The report does not clearly identify strengths and weaknesses, which can be linked to the development plan. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

17. Although quality assurance procedures have not been tailored to meet the needs of clients, jobsearch and Gateway programmes are successful in preparing clients for work. Clients are highly satisfied with the quality of their training. The jobsearch training is relevant and effective in teaching clients how to improve their employment prospects. Clients make good progress in acquiring the skills needed to gain a job. Jobsearch staff have a good knowledge of the local employment opportunities.

18. There is poor implementation of some quality assurance procedures. The company does not have sufficient systems to assure the quality of its training activities. For example, there is no system for the observation of staff interviewing and teaching and guidance in the centres. Feedback from clients is sought from Gateway to Work and jobsearch clients and this is often accompanied by a summary of comments by staff. However, there are no mechanisms to communicate these findings back to the Gateway clients. Systems for collecting feedback from the training centres are unreliable and there is an over-reliance on informal methods. Some of the feedback cannot be analysed effectively. For example, some of the feedback reports show satisfaction as a proportion of the total. There is no recording and analysis of clients' feedback. Results are not used to improve the quality of the training, nor are they used as a basis for action-planning. Some staff and subcontractors are not sufficiently aware of the company's quality assurance systems.

### Good Practice

*NGCL recently held a day with Jobcentre Plus staff to review the quality of its training. The outcomes of the day were used to draw up a joint action plan.*

*Staff are asked to discuss their approach to equality of opportunity during their annual appraisal.*

### Poor Practice

*A subcontractor who offers training for NGCL collected feedback from clients for his own employer. This information was not requested by or fed back to NGCL.*

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Foundation programmes

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 18-24	20	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	1	None
Programme Centres	215	2

19. NGCL offers Jobcentre Plus funded careers guidance for the Gateway, jobsearch support through the Programme Centres, and a two week Gateway to Work course for New Deal 18-24 and New Deal 25+. At the time of the inspection, there were 236 clients, of whom 215 are undertaking jobsearch activities in the Programme Centres, 20 are on New Deal 18-24, and one is on New Deal 25+ attending Gateway to Work courses. All clients are unemployed. Careers guidance takes place by appointment at whichever centre is convenient for the client, and lasts for one hour. Clients aged between 18 and 24 are referred by their New Deal personal adviser and move on to one of the Gateway to Work courses which are offered at four training centres. Jobsearch training and support takes place in seven training centres, and clients usually attend for approximately five hours each week for up to 13 weeks, although most clients stay for eight or nine weeks. Clients can attend any number of modules to suit their individual needs. Clients on Gateway to Work programmes have two-days' work experience, one day of information and communications technology (ICT) training and one day of team building, in addition to the standard programme which is required by Jobcentre Plus. Most staff work on jobsearch programmes and on Gateway to Work training. Careers guidance is given by five staff. The completion figures shown in the tables only apply to clients on Gateway to Work, as those who attend for careers guidance, do so for one day only. Progression into work is only measured and recorded for Gateway to Work clients.

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

<b>New Deal 18-24</b>										
<b>New Deal 18-24</b>	<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>		<b>2000-01</b>		<b>1999-2000</b>		<b>1998-99</b>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	45		708		606		75		
Retained*	19	42	593	84	486	80	63	84		
Planned learning completed	0	0	497	70	464	77	63	84		
Gained job	0	0	146	21	197	33	35	47		
Still in training	20	44	0	0	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

<b>New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults</b>										
<b>New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults</b>	<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>		<b>2000-01</b>		<b>1999-2000</b>		<b>1998-99</b>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	1		148		55				
Retained*	0	0	143	97	52	95				
Planned learning completed	0	0	33	22	41	75				
Gained job	0	0	12	8	3	5				
Still in training	1	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

<b>Programme Centres</b>										
<b>Programme Centres</b>	<b>2002-03</b>		<b>2001-02</b>		<b>2000-01</b>		<b>1999-2000</b>		<b>1998-99</b>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	23		851						
Planned learning completed	0	0	0	0						
Gained job	0	0	321	38						
Still in training	23	100	192	23						

## **STRENGTHS**

- good progress by clients in the development of work behaviours
- good training in jobsearch
- lively and effective training programmes
- good careers guidance

## **WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate resources in most training centres
- inadequate support for clients with poor basic skills

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better presentation of learning materials
- better recording of clients' progress
- fuller range of training techniques

20. Clients make good progress in the development of work behaviours before applying for work. They become more aware of their previous skills and how they are related to an employer. They become more confident in using the Internet, writing letters and presenting themselves. They are able to produce a well-presented curriculum vitae, which identifies the full range of their skills and experience. The amount of clients gaining employment encourages others to persevere in their jobsearch activities. A satisfactory number of clients progress into work, despite the restricted number of local jobs available and difficulties with travel in parts of the region. Twenty-six per cent of clients aged 18 to 24, and 40 per cent aged over 25 on Gateway to Work courses gain a job within 13 weeks of finishing their course. On the jobsearch programme, 37 per cent of clients move into employment. Retention rates on New Deal are good.

21. Clients on the Gateway to Work and jobsearch programmes are highly satisfied with their training. They are treated with respect and the younger people comment that they are treated as adults. They value the support and help given to them by the staff. The friendly atmosphere encourages clients to work together and support each other.

22. The jobsearch training is effective in helping clients to improve their employment prospects. Jobsearch staff have a good knowledge of the local labour market and a sound understanding of the barriers to employment encountered by their clients. They provide a welcoming atmosphere where clients feel comfortable and confident to work. Some of the jobsearch leaders are good role models to the older clients. Thirty-eight per

cent of the clients are over 45. The induction gives clients detailed information on what they can expect to achieve and an individual learning plan is agreed at the end of the induction process. Jobsearch leaders mostly work on an individual basis with clients to help them identify their relevant skills and experience for their curriculum vitae. Clients search for suitable job opportunities in newspapers, vacancy lists from public-sector employers and through the Internet. Staff teach clients good jobsearch skills by demonstrating effective ways of finding and reading vacancy information, writing speculative letters and supporting statements, and how to present themselves at interviews. In one training centre, clients searched on the Internet for details of the companies they were applying to and used this information in their speculative letters and applications. They also discovered how to use the information in a job interview. Clients are encouraged to work independently and to develop their IT skills by attending local learndirect or community education classes. NGCL's staff have good links with employers and are working to improve them further. They visit employers to identify the jobs available in their company and the requirements, including the recruitment criteria. The links have, in some cases, come through clients gaining employment with a company, after sending a speculative letter. One employer has recruited four more clients from the jobsearch programme by using this method.

23. The Gateway to Work training programme for 18-24 year olds is particularly lively and challenging. As a group, the clients explore the advantages and disadvantages of finding employment and also take part in team-building activities. They take part in discussions which challenge their prejudices. Staff are skilled in challenging poor attitudes. Clients understand the importance of producing a good curriculum vitae, and make use of IT facilities and support from training staff to achieve this. They attend two days of work experience and many are subsequently employed through their work placement.

24. Clients are given good careers guidance. The guidance interview is thorough and focuses on clients' short- and long-term employment goals. It provides clients with a comprehensive range of relevant and up-to-date brochures and information leaflets. Clients are encouraged to identify their existing skills and abilities, and to explore how they match the requirements of particular jobs. The guidance worker and the client discuss suitable study and training opportunities. This discussion covers the range of education and training providers, the financial commitments from the client and the support which may be needed. Guidance workers emphasise the importance of, and opportunities for, local voluntary work. Clients who are unsure about what they want to do, can use interactive computer software to help them in their decision-making. Career guidance workers across the organisation share information through an e-mail group.

25. There are inadequate resources at most of the training centres. Several rooms are too small and in one centre, access to all other rooms is only possible through the jobsearch room. There are too few computers to allow access to the Internet for jobsearch, and insufficient telephones for contacting employers. Many of the rooms are poorly decorated and do not have stimulating wall displays. There are some good training materials which have been produced recently, but much of the other material is

poor. All staff make use of the Internet for training materials and most are satisfied with the training resources available. Some of the recent publications for adult guidance are not available. Gateway to Work and jobsearch staff are strongly committed to their own professional development. Guidance staff are well-qualified and experienced.

26. There is inadequate support for clients' literacy and numeracy needs. Many of the clients have poor levels of literacy and numeracy and some have received a basic skills assessment by Jobcentre Plus. However, the company is rarely given clear information on clients' literacy and numeracy levels, even when they have been assessed. Some of the staff try to help clients by reading material aloud or by writing words on flipcharts to help with spelling. However, these staff are not suitably trained, and there is no training planned to raise the awareness of staff. Referrals are made by some staff to local literacy and numeracy providers. NGCL has identified the need for literacy and numeracy support from qualified staff in the self-assessment report and has gained additional funding to provide it. There is an effective mentoring service which is used by a large proportion of clients on Gateway to Work.

27. The overall quality of training is good, but there is an insufficient range of training methods used. Few staff are trained as teachers. Effective systems have been developed at one training centre for the recording of clients' progress, but they are not implemented at all training centres as yet.

#### **Good Practice**

*Clients are encouraged to take up a range of locally available study and training, including distance learning such as learndirect and the Open University. For example, one older client is now attending an IT class at the local college, is working on an Open University course, and is doing voluntary work in the grounds of a local hospital while applying for work.*