

INSPECTION REPORT

Partnership for Learning

25 June 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING

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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning 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

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.

INSPECTION REPORT

Partnership for Learning

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Partnership for Learning (Pfl) is a registered charity and a private company limited by guarantee, which is located on a single site in Speke, Merseyside. Pfl was created to provide a good-quality shared training facility that responded to local needs and to help attract more businesses to the Merseyside region. The organisation has a contract with Merseyside Learning and Skills Council for the engineering training programme and assured responsibility for this in August 2002, after the demise of the previous provider. Pfl is involved in a range of other training, education and business development activities in the region.

2. The engineering training staff team transferred to Pfl in August 2002. The team now includes one training co-ordinator, two tutor/assessors and one part-time, work-based assessor. The business support manager leads the team. Other administration and financial management services are provided by Pfl. About half of the modern apprentices are employed by two large multinational car manufacturing companies. Most of the other modern apprentices are employed in 17 other local companies and a few are placed pending job offers. Two local colleges are used for off-the-job training. At the time of the inspection there were 55 funded learners, of whom 47 are involved in advanced modern apprenticeships.

3. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of the population in the Greater Merseyside area from minority ethnic groups is 2 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. In May 2003, the unemployment rate in Merseyside was 4.3 per cent, compared with 2.6 per cent nationally. In 2003, the proportion of school leavers in Greater Merseyside achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education at grade C or above was 43 per cent, compared with 49 per cent nationally.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

4. Pfl provides training for 55 learners on work-based learning programmes in engineering. The main employers are two large multinational car manufacturing companies. Seventeen other engineering employers are also involved. Forty-seven learners are working towards advanced modern apprenticeships and eight are working towards foundation modern apprenticeships. Advanced modern apprenticeships are planned for completion in 42 months and foundation modern apprenticeships are planned for completion in 21 months. Learners receive off-the-job training from one of the two subcontractors used. Patterns of attendance vary and include block release and day release. Most of the learners train in production engineering, and the remainder are employed in maintenance, design, installation, and commissioning and engineering services. Learners also have the opportunity to acquire additional units and qualifications. All learners receive a five-day induction, followed by a further induction at

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work. Learners are visited in the workplace every one to three weeks. There are three qualified assessors, two of whom are qualified internal verifiers. Progress reviews are carried out in the workplace every 12 weeks.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learner interviews	14
Number of staff interviews	11
Number of employer interviews	8
Number of subcontractor interviews	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	11
Number of partner/external agency interviews	2

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, Pfl's leadership and management, quality assurance and the quality of its engineering training provision are good. Pfl's equal opportunities arrangements are satisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. **Retention rates on the modern apprenticeships are very good.** Since 2001, when Pfl assumed responsibility for the training programme, 94 per cent of learners who started have remained in training.

7. **Progress and achievement rates are good.** Twenty out of the 22 advanced modern apprentices in training from 2000-01 have completed the national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2, the technical certificate, and key skills.
8. **Learners achieve additional qualifications during their training programmes.** Many of them progress to higher level qualifications.

Quality of education and training

9. **Engineering modern apprentices achieve a high standard of vocational skills.** They produce good work during well-organised on- and off-the-job training, the standards of which are good.
10. **PfL uses staff resources very effectively.** Its well-qualified and experienced staff support the learners. Learners benefit from very supportive employer training arrangements at work and the good contribution by off-the-job training staff at college.
11. **Learners benefit from using good-quality technical equipment and technology at work and at college.** PfL's training centre is well equipped with classroom facilities, study areas and computer-based learning resources.
12. Initial assessment is satisfactory. The monitoring of training and reviews of learners' progress are satisfactory. Assessment is satisfactory.
13. **There is some insufficient planning of training.** A few learners' training programmes in some of the smaller companies do not integrate the on- and off-the-job training elements effectively.
14. **Some assessment and review activities are not sufficiently well recorded.** PfL's assessors do not record their observations sufficiently well.

Leadership and management

15. **Managers at PfL set clear direction for the organisation, which focuses on the quality of training.** Learners have a written charter which clearly states the high standards of training and conditions that they can expect.
16. **Learners benefit from good management of training.** Managers maintain a strong focus on learners' progress and achievement.
17. **PfL's operational management of its subcontractors is very effective and supports the learners' progress and achievement.** PfL clearly specifies expectations and works constructively with its subcontractors to achieve them.
18. **Strong partnerships with industry and other external bodies enable PfL to provide good-quality learning opportunities and resources.** PfL is involved in a wide range of

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activities and collaborative work to promote and provide vocational training and lifelong learning.

19. **Very effective use of stakeholders' feedback has led to Pfl improving programmes for learners.** Learners take part in formal and informal surveys to identify their views and ideas about how to improve their training.

20. **Good use of self-assessment is made to improve the quality of training.** Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process.

21. Pfl's commitment to equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. Learners are treated fairly, dealt with as individuals, understand their rights and responsibilities, and are well supported by staff.

22. Pfl's promotional and marketing activity to widen participation in engineering is insufficient. There are too few applications for modern apprenticeships from ethnic minority groups and disadvantaged members of the community.

23. **Some of the quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently systematic.** Some quality checks are not recorded effectively.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear direction and values set for high performance
- good management of training
- very effective operational management of subcontractors
- strong partnerships with industry and other external bodies
- very effective use of stakeholders' feedback
- good use of self-assessment to support continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient activity to widen the participation in learning of learners from under-represented groups
- insufficiently systematic quality assurance arrangements

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- very good retention levels and good achievement rates
- good development of vocational skills
- good progress to higher qualifications and achievement of additional qualifications
- very effective use of resources to support learners
- good management of change in the engineering programme

Weaknesses

- some insufficient planning of training
- some insufficient recording of assessment and review activities

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING:

- they enjoy the free training and coming to work
- the interesting, practical training and good range of work
- good support and guidance
- good teaching at college and at work
- regular workplace visits by tutors
- good working relationships with tutors
- good opportunities to progress through recognised qualifications
- that there have been no problems since Pfl took over the training programme
- its good management and organisation
- good tools and availability of resources, such as information technology
- the number of visits and progress meetings
- the team-building exercises and activities

WHAT LEARNERS THINK PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING COULD IMPROVE:

- the poor planning of some assignments at college
- the clarity of the structure of the NVQ in the tool room
- 'the relevance of some optional units to my qualification'
- the key skills programme

KEY CHALLENGES FOR PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING:

- continue to develop the high standard of training to cover all learners and employers, including small companies
- increase the amount of activity and further develop the strategy to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups in the engineering training programme
- further improve the quality assurance arrangements

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- clear direction and values set for high performance
- good management of training
- very effective operational management of subcontractors
- strong partnerships with industry and other external bodies
- very effective use of stakeholders' feedback
- good use of self-assessment to support continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- insufficient activity to widen the participation in learning of learners from under-represented groups
- insufficiently systematic quality assurance arrangements

24. Managers at Pfl set clear direction for the organisation, which focuses on the quality of training and learners' achievements. Pfl has an appropriate and well-publicised mission and strategy to provide good-quality training with a strong focus on the learner. The strategy is supported by highly relevant values, which are reflected in the way that the staff provide training and work with the learners. Staff and learners are clear about Pfl's aims and its methods of work.

25. Learners are all introduced to and given a learners' charter, which clearly states the high standards of training and conditions that they can expect. Learners and staff use the charter as a vehicle for review and improvement, and improvements to the learners' experience have been brought about in this way. This strength was identified in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report.

26. Learners benefit from good management of training. There has been minimal disruption to the learners' experience during a period of significant change in the recent past. Pfl has sustained high retention levels and good progress and achievement rates. Learners make good progress and benefit from a broad range of additional training opportunities which are planned into their programmes. Pfl has good arrangements to involve staff and learners in the development of the programme. The organisation has arrangements for providing training in literacy, numeracy and language skills, although there is no current requirement to do so. A member of staff is qualified to assess and provide training in literacy, numeracy and language skills.

27. Pfl's managers maintain good contact with the employers. Internal communications and management reporting systems work well. Managers maintain a strong focus on

learners' progress and achievement, and they reward and celebrate learners' achievements regularly at well-organised events that receive a high profile in companies and in the wider community. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

28. The organisation's operational management of its subcontractors is very effective and supports learners' progress and achievement. Pfl clearly specifies expectations and works constructively with its subcontractors to achieve them. It has effective working relationships with its subcontractors and holds regular and well-managed meetings with them to discuss their learners' progress and welfare, identifying any problems and take appropriate actions.

29. Pfl effectively includes subcontractors in its quality assurance arrangements. Pfl's staff are involved in observations of training provided by subcontractors. Induction for modern apprentices is well integrated, with good involvement by subcontractors. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

30. Strong partnerships with industry and other external bodies enable Pfl to provide good-quality learning opportunities and resources. Pfl is involved in a good range of activities and collaborative work to promote and provide vocational training and lifelong learning. Pfl has extensive contact with employers and provides a wide range of training with them. The organisation has a good appreciation of the skill needs of its area and communicates well with its principal strategic partners about its future strategy. Feedback from partners provides supporting evidence that Pfl is achieving a good understanding and shared commitment to the economic regeneration and skills training strategy for the area with its partners.

31. Pfl works closely with the education business partnership and other networks to provide relevant vocational education and training opportunities for primary and secondary school pupils, and teachers. Pfl has a high level of involvement in planning for vocationally relevant education and modern apprenticeships to be made available in the schools and colleges in the area. Pfl supports local community initiatives and information facilities to increase access to training and education. This strength was described in the self-assessment report and other Pfl reports.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

32. Pfl's approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. The organisation has a clear commitment to equality of opportunity and widening participation in training. The comprehensive equal opportunities policy, statement of values and strategic objectives confirms this commitment. Staff training and development effectively supports the commitment. Learners are treated fairly, dealt with as individuals, understand their rights and responsibilities, and are well supported by staff. However, there are insufficient written guidelines and formal procedures for staff to fully implement the policy in the context of work-based learning. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

33. Pfl's commitment to equality of opportunity clearly impacts positively on the

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learners. There is an appropriate induction and regular reviews of learners' understanding of equal opportunities. The learners' charter includes highly appropriate statements and standards supporting the provision of fair and equal treatment. Learners are encouraged and do review their experience against the charter. They are able to raise issues and express their views through well-organised learners' forums. Learners are well informed about the formal complaints procedure.

34. There is insufficient effective activity to widen the participation in the engineering programme of learners from under-represented groups. Pfl's mission, strategic objectives and values give a strong focus on equality and widening the community's participation in learning. There is a lot of good activity with schools, community development agencies and other local organisations to provide information, training and to encourage wider participation. However, the direct impact of this on widening participation in the engineering programmes in the short term has been minimal. Some selection practices do not support widening participation. While the organisation carries out the appropriate monitoring of applications and entrants to modern apprenticeship training, it receives too few applications for modern apprenticeship training from minority ethnic groups and disadvantaged members of the community. Pfl recognises this weakness and has set targets but these have not yet been achieved.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

35. Quality assurance is good overall. Pfl's very effective use of stakeholders' feedback has led to improvements in its programmes for learners. Learners take part in formal and informal surveys to identify their views and ideas about how to improve their training. The organisation holds learners' forums at which they identify issues and take actions to improve their experience. For example, in one company the modern apprentices were critical of the amount of time spent on certain blocks of training. Pfl listened to their views and made changes to the scheduling of the training programme, which enabled the learners to become competent more effectively. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Pfl systematically collects employers' views and those of other stakeholders, analyses them appropriately and identifies actions where necessary. Parents are also consulted and a recent open day effectively attracted a good number of parents who were able to share their views and ideas with Pfl about the training programme.

36. Pfl makes good use of self-assessment to improve the quality of training. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. There are regular reviews and Pfl encourages staff to put forward their views and ideas. Staff are well motivated and value the opportunity to improve the way they do things. Information from other stakeholders is brought into these reviews. Self-assessment is a regular feature of the staff's team activity and has resulted in staff being well informed about the standards required for work-based learning. The organisation updates the self-assessment report regularly and it is a good and accurate reflection of the situation at Pfl. Most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were identified by Pfl in the report. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

37. Pfl has a documented quality assurance system with an appropriate policy statement, which it reviews regularly. A range of training processes and procedures are contained in the Pfl quality assurance manual and documents are subject to quality control. Staff are familiar with these systems and use them. They are involved in an effective internal audit process to check that procedures are implemented to the required standard. Internal verification is satisfactory.

38. Some of the quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently systematic. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. For example, Pfl's staff regularly scrutinise the quality of training on the job and review this element with employers. However, this is not formally recorded and the quality assurance arrangements do not clearly state the requirements for this aspect of training. In another case, the criteria used for observing staff carrying out activities with learners, such as reviews or progress meetings, are not clear. The procedure for quarterly reviews is inappropriate.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	55	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- very good retention levels and good achievement rates
- good development of vocational skills
- good progress to higher qualifications and achievement of additional qualifications
- very effective use of resources to support learners
- good management of change in the engineering programme

Weaknesses

- some insufficient planning of training
- some insufficient recording of assessment and review activities

Achievement and standards

39. Retention levels on the modern apprenticeships are very good. Progress and achievement rates are also good. Since 2001, when PfL assumed responsibility for the training programme, 94 per cent of the learners who started have remained in training. Learners on modern apprenticeships are progressing well and have good skills and a range of relevant evidence to support their progress. Twenty out of the 22 advanced modern apprentices who remain in training from 2000-01 have completed the NVQ at level 2, the technical certificate and key skills. The remaining two learners' progress has been interrupted for reasons unrelated to the training programme. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report.

40. Learners achieve additional qualifications during their training programmes. Many of them progress to higher level qualifications. For example, 12 modern apprentices have progressed to degree level qualifications in the recent past. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Most of the learners take part in additional training courses, both at their companies and off-the-job, many of which lead to additional qualifications. For example, most modern apprentices achieve externally assessed certificates in health and safety, manual handling, abrasive wheels regulations and other vocationally appropriate skills.

41. Many of the modern apprentices take part in company-specific courses in mechanical and electrical skills, quality standards courses, and production and equipment operation and understanding. In many cases, training courses are followed by planned

periods of work experience in an appropriate department to practise the skills acquired. Many learners complete up to three additional relevant units at NVQ level 2. These additional units broaden the learners' level of skill and their understanding of related engineering processes.

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

LSC funded work-based learning														
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	12		9		5		27		8		13		
Retained*	0		0	0	0		0		7	88	2	15		
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0		0		7	88	8	62		
Still in learning	12		8	89	5		22		0	0	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

LSC funded work-based learning														
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2003-04		2002-03		2000-01									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	8		1		4								
Retained*	0		0	0	4	100								
Successfully completed	0		0	0	4	100								
Still in learning	7		1	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

Quality of education and training

42. Engineering modern apprentices gain a high standard of vocational skills. Learners achieve a high standard of work during on- and off-the-job training, the standard of which is good. Examples of learners' work are displayed prominently for visitors to view. There are examples of particularly good-quality work in maintenance, welding and tool room skills. Learners at one subcontractor have manufactured a working 'go kart', which is on display to emphasise the skills involved in its production. Some learners in their second year of welding training achieve a high level of skills and build large fabrications to an industrial standard in an acceptable time.

43. Pfl uses staff resources very effectively to support its learners. Its well-qualified and experienced staff work very effectively and responsively to support the modern apprentices in their training. Pfl's staff visit modern apprentices at work at least every

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three weeks, often more, and there is regular contact by phone and e-mail. The modern apprentices are supported and trained in the workplace by experienced and well-qualified engineers, some of whom have high levels of technical skills and are experts in their field. Many learners benefit from well-organised and effective employer mentoring, coaching and other supportive arrangements at work. Off-the-job tutors work very effectively with the learners. Support for the modern apprentices to achieve at college is well organised. Pfl's staff work very effectively with college staff to ensure that the learners make good progress in their courses. This strength was recognised by Pfl in its self-assessment report.

44. Learners benefit from using good-quality, industry-standard technical equipment and, in some cases, state-of-the-art technology. Many modern apprentices are supplied with very good personal equipment and tools. There are good resources available at the subcontractors and in the workplace for learners to work on a range of equipment.

45. Pfl's training centre is well equipped with classroom facilities, study areas and computer-based learning resources. The training centre is well used by employers and learners. There is good access to and use of high-quality information and communications technology equipment in practical and classroom environments. One of the larger companies has its own well-equipped training centre, which provides a range of maintenance training courses that some other companies use for specific courses such as pneumatics and hydraulics.

46. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Support for literacy, numeracy and language skills is satisfactory. Pfl has an appropriately qualified member of staff who provides support or refers learners to an appropriate specialist. No learners require literacy or general numeracy support at present. Individual support for specific engineering-related numeracy skills are provided by subcontracted off-the-job staff. Relevant induction training is provided for all learners on and off the job.

47. The monitoring of training and reviews of learners' progress are satisfactory. Assessment is carried out satisfactorily, with a particularly good level of work-based witness statements supporting on-the-job assessment practices in some companies. Pfl's assessors are regularly in the workplace validating work-based assessment by employers. They also assess learners' portfolio evidence and work products effectively. Progress reviews are carried out regularly and involve employers in most cases.

48. There is some insufficient planning of training. In some of the smaller companies, a few learners' training programmes do not integrate the on- and off-the-job training elements effectively. Insufficient explanation has been given to the employer to enable work-based experience to support off-the-job skills learning. In a small number of cases, employers and learners were not sufficiently aware of the standards required to meet the competence levels in order to achieve the modern apprenticeship. This weakness was identified by Pfl in its self-assessment report.

49. Some assessment and review activities are not sufficiently well recorded. Pfl's assessors do not record their observations sufficiently well. Learners' portfolios do not

have sufficient records of direct observation. Records of reviews are not sufficiently clear about the elements completed and those that still require completion. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

50. Leadership and management of the engineering programme are good. Recently, there have been significant changes to the way the programme has been managed. However, the impact on learners has been minimal and learners have remained secure in training and have continued to progress and achieve. The training staff team have effectively managed a potentially difficult transition from the previous training contract.

51. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Communication is good between staff, with employers, and with the two subcontractors. Individual programmes of learning are managed effectively. Progress and achievement are monitored effectively. Staff are well motivated, regularly appraised and are working towards achieving their own development plans. Regular updating takes place, including equal opportunities training. Learners are effectively introduced to equal opportunities at induction and effective reviews, and reinforcement activities take place. Staff have a good understanding of the quality assurance arrangements and they are fully involved in implementing them effectively.