

INSPECTION REPORT

Four Counties Training Limited

24 March 2005



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 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

Four Counties Training Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Four Counties Training Limited (FCT) was established in 1993. It is a private limited company offering specialist training for the rail industry. The managing director and the commercial director run and oversee the company. The commercial director and the work-based learning manager are responsible for the provision of work-based learning, supported by the quality assurance, health and safety, and equality and diversity managers. Staff from FCT, employers and colleges of further education provide learners with training and assessment. Training and assessment takes place at college and at the provider's and employers' sites, which include depots, factories, trackside and signal centres. Some FCT staff and the commercial director are responsible for internal verification. Two of FCT's staff provide administrative support for work-based learning.

2. FCT offers advanced apprenticeships in rail transport engineering, and apprenticeships in rail transport operations (signal operations). These are funded by the National Employers Service of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In addition, FCT provides commercially funded training for the rail industry and other industries where safety is critical. FCT is accredited with the Investors in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

3. FCT has 54 advanced apprentices in engineering, technology and manufacturing, all working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 3 in rail transport engineering. The learners are employed by rail infrastructure maintenance or installation companies. FCT recruits learners directly from employers. It carries out an initial assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills. Training and assessment takes place on the provider's and employers' premises, and trackside. Learners attend colleges for training towards technical certificates. FCT's staff provide key skills training in the workplace and at regional centres. Formal progress reviews take place every 10 weeks. FCT's and employers' staff assess the learners and FCT's staff carry out all internal verification.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

4. FCT has 22 apprentices on retailing, customer service and transportation programmes, all working towards NVQs in rail transport operations (signal operations). They are employed by a major London rail operator. The employer recruits all learners, and FCT carries out an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy and language skills. Progress reviews take place every eight weeks. The employer provides occupational training and assesses learners' competence. FCT provides key skills training and assessment and is responsible for internal verification.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	21
Number of staff interviewed	15
Number of employers interviewed	11
Number of subcontractors interviewed	15
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	14

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, FCT's leadership and management including its quality assurance arrangements, are outstanding. Its approach to equality of opportunity is good. The quality of work-based learning in engineering, technology and manufacturing and retailing, customer service and transportation is outstanding.

GRADES

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

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Apprenticeships for young people	54	1

Retailing, customer service & transportation		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Transportation - Apprenticeships for young people	22	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. **Retention and achievement rates for signal operations apprentices are excellent**, and in most years, those for rail transport engineering advanced apprentices are good. All learners are making very good progress with all aspects of the framework.

7. **Learners' have very high standards of occupational skills, strong background knowledge and produce very good written work.** They have an excellent knowledge of the manufacture, operation and maintenance of equipment for the rail industry. Learners using track simulators are outstanding at accurately identifying and correcting rail systems faults. Signal operations apprentices have a very good range of wider occupational skills. All the learners are particularly motivated to succeed in their training.

Quality of education and training

8. Learners receive **very good, thoroughly planned and well-organised occupational training**, which takes effective account of their prior knowledge and experience. Training covers a wide range of relevant activities in the rail industry. There is regular and very good tuition, checking and testing of learners' background knowledge of signal operations and rail transport engineering.

9. **Development of signal operations learners' wider occupational skills is very good.** Learners take part in an outdoor adventure training course to develop their confidence and teamworking skills, and carry out platform duties to improve their social skills. Signal operations learners visit a major urban rail system to conduct projects on a range of relevant topics. Learners make good use of the course on presentation skills to improve their key skills and to present their projects.

10. **Reviews of learners' progress are very thorough.** Staff from FCT and the employers use the reviews particularly well with learners to resolve issues, discuss what went well and plan the next stage of training.

11. FCT's **well-organised and managed key skills provision** includes regional key skills training workshops and individual training sessions. The staff are well qualified and experienced, and in most instances, they make very good use of examples from the rail industry to provide relevant key skills training. Occasionally FCT's staff make insufficient use of evidence from the signal operations NVQ for learners' key skills work. Learners make good progress with their key skills.

12. **Resources are very good.** Wherever possible, on-the-job training takes place on operational railways. Employers all have very good rail training facilities and excellent learning resources. Learners use a range of very good learning materials and specialist training aids. Excellent specialist simulators are available to replicate rail operations when

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it is impractical to work on the operational railway. FCT's and employers' staff are well qualified and have excellent knowledge and experience of the rail industry. Health and safety has a high priority.

13. **Support for learners is good.** FCT's and employers' staff have a positive, caring attitude towards learners and take full responsibility for their welfare and development during training. FCT's staff respond promptly and effectively if learners have any problems or request support. Employers allocate experienced staff to support learners in the workplace. Learners are very appreciative of the support they receive and speak highly of the staff.

14. **Assessment ranges from effective to excellent.** FCT trains assessors particularly well. All assessors have significant experience of the rail industry and are fully qualified to carry out assessment. Learners do not achieve an NVQ until they have collected evidence from a particularly broad range of rail operations, and their answers to questions show a very high level of understanding of background knowledge. Some employers use record cards of learners' tasks as the main evidence of competence.

15. FCT uses initial assessment effectively to provide learners with the most appropriate training programme. Many railway transport engineering learners are also on higher national certificate and foundation degree courses at college. All employers offer very good promotion prospects for learners who successfully complete their training.

16. FCT has established arrangements for learners who need additional support. At the start of training, all learners are assessed to determine their literacy, language and numeracy skills. Those identified as needing help are supported. FCT uses specialist agencies if learners have learning disabilities and/or difficulties and arranges for them to receive adapted equipment or materials.

Leadership and management

17. **Directors and managers have set a very successful strategic direction to raise standards of training in the rail industry.** FCT has developed close links with rail infrastructure and train operating businesses, awarding bodies and colleges, and uses them to promote vocational training and qualifications very strongly. FCT provides speakers at training conferences, and advises on assessment, verification and the development of training materials for the rail industry. It is the lead partner in the newly established Centre for Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for rail competence. Its own programmes of training provide the rail industry with well-trained and qualified workers.

18. **Management of work-based learning is very good.** Directors and managers plan training very effectively in partnership with employers. In consultation with staff and employers they regularly review the content of training materials to ensure that they are of a high standard. They monitor very closely the training provided in the workplace. Regular meetings between directors, managers, staff and employers focus clearly on training and learners' performance.

19. **FCT makes very good use of management information**, analysing it to produce reports on all aspects of the work-based learning programmes including learners' progress and achievement, and early leavers. Directors, managers and staff make very thorough use of these reports to check performance. They act if there are problems and maintain and raise the standards of provision.

20. **Staff development is good.** The comprehensive learning plan links very effectively to FCT's business plans. FCT clearly bases its staff development on the requirements of the business and the learners, and on the personal development needs of staff. Staff attend a wide range of relevant training programmes and events. Induction of staff is effective. The provider uses staff meetings to share good practice and provide information from industry bodies, employers and other training events.

21. FCT has **comprehensive arrangements to support equality and diversity.** All staff receive thorough equality and diversity training. Managers and staff regularly discuss equality and diversity at meetings. Learners receive comprehensive equality and diversity training and staff reinforce this particularly well at most progress reviews. Effective support is available to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. FCT works with employers to target recruitment at under-represented groups.

22. FCT thoroughly monitors the effectiveness of its equality and diversity arrangements. Staff conduct a comprehensive audit of its own and the employers' equality and diversity practices. Managers regularly collect and analyse data on the performance of under-represented groups. FCT produces a **thorough annual monitoring report on equality and diversity.** Its recommendations are incorporated into the FCT development action plan.

23. FCT has **very successful quality assurance arrangements**, which it implements very well. FCT's directors and managers regularly collect the views of learners and employers and observe learning. Directors and managers make very good use of data to monitor the provision. Meetings focus very clearly on the standard of training. If quality assurance arrangements indicate there are weaknesses, directors and managers take effective action to resolve problems. FCT carries out regular, detailed audits of its quality assurance procedures, and reviews their effectiveness.

24. FCT's **very effective approach to self-assessment** involves directors, managers and staff. Employers and learners also contribute effectively to the process. Most of the judgements in the self-assessment report match those of the inspectors and are an accurate record of the company's performance. The self-assessment report is accompanied by a thorough development action plan.

25. **Internal verification is good, particularly in signal operations.** FCT has particularly effective procedures and policies for internal verification. Assessors receive detailed feedback and there are regular meetings to share good practice and ensure consistency. Internal verifiers keep assessors well informed about changes to assessments.

26. FCT manages resources effectively to support learners' training. Directors monitor and regularly discuss the allocation of funds for training. FCT and employers provide

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learners with a range of very good resources. The provider manages its staff particularly well to support learners. FCT's directors, managers and staff, and the employers' staff, are well qualified and experienced in providing training to the rail industry.

27. Literacy, numeracy and language support is managed effectively. The provider has established policies and procedures, and assesses all learners to establish whether they need any support. Those who do, receive it.

28. FCT has clear and established policies and procedures for complaints, grievances and the elimination of harassment and bullying. Staff check the effectiveness of these arrangements at progress review meetings. FCT ensures that employers have appropriate complaints and anti-harassment and bullying procedures.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- very clear and successful strategic direction
- very good management of training
- very good use of management information
- good staff development
- comprehensive arrangements to support equality and diversity
- thorough monitoring of equality and diversity
- very effective quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very high levels of learners' skills
- very thorough and particularly effective planning of training
- well-organised and managed provision of key skills
- very good reviews of learners' progress
- very good resources
- good support for learners
- very effective monitoring and recording of learners' progress

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Transportation

Strengths

- excellent retention and achievement rates
- very good occupational skills of learners
- very good standard of training
- very good development of learners' wider occupational skills
- very good resources
- particularly thorough assessment and internal verification
- good recording and monitoring of learners' progress
- particularly effective partnership between FCT and the employer

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT FOUR COUNTIES TRAINING LIMITED:

- the good support from employers
- getting paid during training
- being given regular information on their progress at reviews
- the support they get from past apprentices
- the trusting managers
- the good support for personal problems
- gaining confidence

WHAT LEARNERS THINK FOUR COUNTIES TRAINING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the design of the uniforms
- the number of computers

KEY CHALLENGES FOR FOUR COUNTIES TRAINING LIMITED:

- maintain the standard of training
- continue to improve learners' high achievement and retention rates
- maintain the standard of learners' occupational skills
- continue the approach to progress reviews
- improve the use of evidence from NVQ work for key skills
- maintain the standard of resources
- consolidate the arrangements for assessment
- build on the good support for learners
- maintain the approach to management of training
- continue the arrangements for quality improvement
- build on the approach to equality and diversity

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 1

Strengths

- very clear and successful strategic direction
- very good management of training
- very good use of management information
- good staff development
- comprehensive arrangements to support equality and diversity
- thorough monitoring of equality and diversity
- very effective quality assurance arrangements

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

29. Directors and managers have set a very clear strategic direction. It is to raise standards of training in the rail industry. They are very successful in achieving and maintaining this direction. The provider is a specialist in training for the rail industry, and over the past 10 years has developed good close working links with the rail infrastructure and train operating companies, and with awarding bodies and colleges. Through these it strongly promotes vocational training and qualifications including work-based learning and training for existing workers. The provider is a key partner in the national steering group for rail industry apprenticeships and a significant contributor to the design and use of assessment materials for the rail industry's national occupational standards. FCT has strong links with rail professional bodies through the provision of workshops and speakers at training conferences, advice on the use of assessor and verifier units, and the development of training materials. The provider is the lead partner in the newly established CoVE for rail competence. Its own programmes of training, including work-based learning, provide the rail industry with well-trained and qualified workers.

30. Management of the work-based learning is very good. The very effective business planning involves all staff, and the plans explain clearly how FCT is going to implement its work-based learning provision. Directors and managers work with employers to plan training in a detailed and very effective way. Individual learning plans and progress reviews are used very well to ensure that learners have training which takes account of their individual learning needs and the needs of the rail industry. Directors and managers regularly check training programmes to ensure that they have clear aims and objectives. Directors and managers, in consultation with staff and employers, regularly review the content of training materials to ensure that they are of a high standard and relevant to current industry practice. They monitor very closely the training provided in the workplace by employers. The regular meetings between directors, managers, staff and employers focus clearly on ensuring that training is of a high standard, is co-ordinated

and organised effectively, and that learners make good progress, achieve and do not leave early. Directors, managers and staff are clearly aware of their responsibilities to provide learners with good standards of provision.

31. FCT makes very good use of management information. It has designed and developed its own very effective data management system to provide a range of very useful reports which are particularly relevant to its needs and to those of the employers. FCT uses the system for analysing data and producing reports on all aspects of the work-based learning programmes, including recruitment and early leavers, equality of opportunity, administration, and monitoring learners' progress and achievement of NVQs and key skills. Directors, managers and staff make very thorough use of these reports to check performance, and they take action if there are issues and to maintain and raise standards of provision. FCT provides employers with regular reports on the progress and performance of their learners.

32. Staff development is good. The provider has a comprehensive learning plan which links very effectively to its business plans. Annual appraisals and performance planning include regular interim reviews. FCT establishes what development staff need at appraisal, based clearly on the requirements of the business and the learners. Staff attend a wide range of relevant training programmes and events. These include courses on teaching, training and assessment, management development, equality and diversity, key skills, occupational and awarding body updating, and further and higher education programmes. The internal mentoring system supports appraisal by providing staff who want to develop with a mentor to help them improve their performance. Other staff development activities include a thorough and effective induction programme, and staff shadowing others to improve their personal performance. FCT uses staff meetings to share good practice and provide information from industry bodies, employers and other training events.

33. FCT's directors and managers manage resources effectively to support training. Directors regularly monitor and discuss the allocations of funds for training. FCT and employers provide learners with a range of very good resources, equipment and accommodation. The provider manages its staff particularly well to support learners. FCT's directors, managers and staff are well qualified and experienced in providing training to the rail industry. Employers' staff are particularly experienced and highly skilled in rail transport engineering and signal operations.

34. The management of literacy, numeracy and language support is effective. The provider has established policies and procedures for literacy, numeracy and language support. All learners receive an initial assessment to determine whether they need any support, and if appropriate, a further assessment to establish the precise level of support needed. FCT's directors and managers have made arrangements to provide support for learners identified as having literacy, numeracy and language needs. Staff also make further checks during the learners' training to ensure that any literacy, numeracy and language support needs are not slowing the learners' progress.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

35. FCT has comprehensive arrangements to support equality and diversity, including equal opportunities policies and additional support policies and statements for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Management responsibilities for equality and diversity are clear and include a dedicated manager for this area who reports directly to the managing director. All staff receive thorough equality and diversity training in topics including disability awareness, discrimination and legislation. Managers and staff regularly discuss equality and diversity at meetings, and if appropriate, take action. Learners receive comprehensive equality and diversity training at induction and staff reinforce this particularly well at most progress reviews. Established and effective arrangements are available to provide learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities with further resources and support. FCT works with employers to target recruitment from under-represented groups. The provider's three-year development plan for the LSC includes equality and diversity impact measures.

36. FCT has systematic and thorough procedures to monitor the effectiveness of its equality and diversity arrangements. FCT's and employers' equality and diversity practices including the implementation of policies and procedures, the recruitment and retention of learners, and the additional support provided, are audited comprehensively. Managers regularly collect data on the proportion, and the achievement and retention rates, of learners from minority ethnic groups, women, and learners with disabilities. They bring this data together to effectively compare, analyse and review the recruitment and performance of these groups. FCT produces a detailed and thorough annual monitoring report on the effectiveness of its approach to equality and diversity. The report covers all aspects of the provider's equality and diversity work including the performance of employers. Recommendations from the report are incorporated into FCT's development action plan.

37. The provider has clear and established policies and procedures for dealing with complaints, grievances and the elimination of harassment and bullying. Staff check that these arrangements are effective at progress review meetings. No learners have yet felt the need to use the procedures. As part of FCT's quality assurance arrangements, staff regularly interview learners to check whether they have had any problems with bullying and harassment. They ensure that employers have appropriate arrangements for complaints, and anti-harassment and bullying procedures.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 1

38. FCT's very effective quality assurance arrangements lead to very high standards of provision. Directors and managers place a particularly strong emphasis on continuous improvement at all levels. The provider has detailed policies and procedures, and systematic arrangements for quality assurance, which it implements very well. Procedures are in place to set high standards of performance, which FCT achieves. A programme of regular observations of learning and visits to the workplace is used to check the quality of training. FCT regularly collects learners' and employers' views, and its analysis of these surveys shows a high level of satisfaction with the training it provides. Directors and managers make very good use of data to review the provision. Meetings

of directors, managers, staff and employers have a very clear focus on training. Where quality assurance arrangements indicate there are weaknesses, directors and managers develop swift and effective action to resolve them. FCT's competent, trained staff carry out regular and detailed audits of its quality assurance procedures. Directors and managers regularly review the effectiveness of its quality assurance policies, procedures and arrangements to ensure their continued success. The provider analyses the potential consequences of quality assurance arrangements not working satisfactorily and the effect this will have on the business and the learner. If appropriate, it takes action to ensure that these potential consequences do not develop.

39. FCT's very effective approach to self-assessment involves directors, managers and staff and takes account of the views of employers and learners. The provider published its most recent self-assessment report in January 2005. The report is informative and most of the judgements in the report matched those of the inspectors. The self-assessment report is linked to a thorough development action plan that identifies areas for improvement and allocates responsibilities and a timetable for completion. The reporting arrangements clearly state the measures for judging success and their expected effect on improving training.

40. Internal verification is good, particularly in rail transport operations, and ensures assessment is fair and accurate. FCT has particularly effective procedures and policies for verification. Managers prepare sampling plans and schedules to ensure that assessments are checked regularly. The verification of assessment is thorough and is recorded in detail. Assessors receive good written and verbal feedback. The provider uses regular meetings to share good practice and ensure a consistent standard of assessment. Internal verifiers keep assessors well informed about changes in assessment practice and qualifications, and pass on any other information from awarding bodies.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other contributory areas - Apprenticeships for young people	54	1

Other contributory areas

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates
- very high levels of learners' skills
- very thorough and particularly effective planning of training
- well-organised and managed provision of key skills
- very good reviews of learners' progress
- very good resources
- good support for learners
- very effective monitoring and recording of learners' progress

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

Achievement and standards

41. Learners' achievement and retention rates for most years are good. However, major changes to rail infrastructure and maintenance arrangements in the United Kingdom, which were outside the control of FCT, affected the achievement and retention rates for learners starting in 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03. Some of the employers that FCT worked with ceased to be involved with rail infrastructure maintenance work and were no longer in the position to provide training. For the learners who were not affected by these changes, achievement and retention rates remained good, and those currently in training are making very good progress. Most are significantly ahead of the target completion dates for the different aspects of the advanced apprenticeship framework.

42. Learners' have very high standards of occupational skills, background knowledge and written work. Many are involved in major rail projects. Learners' design of equipment and production of working drawings for large contracts with major rail companies are outstanding. Other learners are very good in assisting in the developing of signal projects on full-sized demonstration track. These learners demonstrate excellent knowledge of the operation and manufacture of signalling systems. Learners are outstanding at identifying

and correcting rail systems faults accurately, swiftly and systematically. Many training activities involve learners in complex simulation activities, which they understand particularly well and complete very successfully. College assignment work is excellent and shows that learners have very good background knowledge. Learners are very motivated to succeed in their training.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	3		19		39		99		75		9		11		
Retained*	0		1		5		51		59	79	8	89	9	82		
Successfully completed	0		1		5		40		56	75	8	89	9	82		
Still in learning	3		17		23		10		1	1	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

Quality of education and training

43. Planning of training is thorough and particularly effective. Individual learning plans are well written and detailed, and provide an accurate record of learners' progress. On- and off-the-job training is well planned and co-ordinated. Employers' staff are very aware of the occupational training learners require to complete the apprenticeship framework, and are very effective at providing this training. Learners often work in teams. Employers allocate each team tasks which allow the learners to cover very effectively the requirements for the NVQ. FCT and employers arrange for learners to change teams or visit other work depots to ensure they have a wide range of relevant training. Off-the-job training at colleges is well planned and co-ordinated through the review process. Colleges keep employers and FCT well informed about learners' progress during their time at college with regular and detailed reports. FCT and employers organise off-the-job training events at regional training centres throughout the country. These are particularly well planned and co-ordinated to integrate very effectively into the learners' training programme, and take place at relevant points during training.

44. FCT provides well-organised and managed key skills provision through regional key skills training workshops and individual training sessions. Staff are well qualified and experienced. Learners are well aware of the importance of key skills and the part they have in the successful completion of their training programme. In most instances, FCT's staff make very good use of the rail industry to provide relevant key skills training. The provider introduces key skills into the training programme at an early stage. Staff provide very good tuition and support to learners to enable them to progress particularly well with their key skills. If learners have achieved key skills at the level required for the

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framework before they start their training, FCT offers a programme of higher-level key skills.

45. Learners' progress reviews take place every 10 weeks and are very effective. The process is very thorough and involves the learners, FCT and employers' staff, and in some instances, the off-the-job tutor. All are fully involved in the review and are well aware of their roles and responsibilities in the learners' training programme. The review covers all aspects of the training programme thoroughly, and staff from FCT and the employers deal very effectively with any training issues or pastoral matters. Staff and learners discuss progress on issues considered and targets set at the previous review, and take action where necessary. The provider's staff record the details of the review very thoroughly and provide copies of the completed review form to all those involved. At the review, the learner is set new targets and agrees what training he or she needs to do to progress further. Targets are precise, challenging and realistic. Learners and employers speak very highly of the review process and the support it gives to the training programme.

46. Resources are very good. The employers are all major rail industry companies, and wherever possible on-the-job training takes place on operational railway infrastructure. Employers all have very good training facilities and excellent learning resources. Learners use a wide range of learning materials and specialist training aids. Learning materials to support the on-the-job training sessions are outstanding. Excellent specialist simulators are available to replicate rail operations when it is impractical for learners to work on the operational railway. FCT's and employers' staff are well qualified and have excellent knowledge and experience of the rail industry. Many work from home. Staff at FCT's national office support them particularly well. Paperwork and assessment materials are all easily available from the provider's website. Health and safety arrangements and training have a high priority.

47. Support for learners is good. The provider's and employers' staff have a positive caring attitude towards learners, and take full responsibility for their welfare and development during training. In between the 10-week progress reviews, FCT's staff visit learners to provide additional support and training. Learners have the telephone numbers of FCT's staff and can contact them at any time should they need support. Learners are confident about approaching FCT's staff for help and assistance, and the staff respond promptly and effectively if learners have any problems. Employers allocate a mentor who is vocationally very experienced and qualified to support the learner in the workplace. Employers are very supportive of training and give learners significant time during working hours to work on their portfolios and assignment work. Learners are very appreciative of the support they receive and speak highly of the FCT staff and vocational mentors.

48. Assessment ranges from satisfactory to excellent. Where assessment is excellent, the provider plans it particularly well, assessment paperwork is of a very high standard and there is good use of a variety of sources of evidence and assessment methods. Assessors make use of witness statements from employers' staff. At some employers, record cards of learners' tasks are the main evidence of competence.

49. Arrangements to provide learners with support for literacy, numeracy and language are effective. All learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills are assessed, and FCT uses the results to provide additional individual support if it is needed.

50. All learners are on relevant training programmes which are specific to the rail industry and meet the needs of employers. FCT uses initial assessment effectively to inform learners of the most appropriate choice of training programme. Many learners enrol on higher national certificate courses in addition to their apprenticeship framework. Some have enrolled on foundation degree courses. FCT's and employers' staff provide good additional support to help learners on these programmes. All main line infrastructure signal maintenance and installation learners gain mandatory licenses for working on signalling equipment. All employers offer excellent promotion prospects to learners who complete their training successfully, including accelerated promotion to senior positions.

Leadership and management

51. Monitoring and recording of learners' progress by directors, managers and staff is very effective. The provider's managers and staff complete comprehensive records on learners' achievements and progress throughout the training programme, and regularly provide details of these to learners and employers. Learners and employers are fully aware of learners' achievements and progress. Managers quickly detect any missed progress reviews and reschedule them as quickly as possible. Immediately after a visit to a learner, staff log the learner's progress on FCT's data system. At monthly meetings, FCT's directors, managers and staff use the data very well to identify learners who are not progressing as well as expected. If there are problems, directors, managers and staff take swift and positive action to resolve them.

52. Directors and managers have been outstanding at developing and maintaining work-based learning for rail transport engineering at a very high standard. A regular programme of meetings keeps staff and employers well informed about work-based learning. Meetings have a clear focus on the needs of the learners and on training. Quality assurance arrangements for rail transport engineering are very good. Managers and staff regularly seek and analyse learners' views, and deal with any issues arising. Good arrangements for internal verification ensure that assessment is accurate and fair. The self-assessment report is appropriately detailed and largely accurate. Staff development is strong. Promotion of equality and diversity at learners' reviews is good. Links with employers are very effective.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing, customer service & transportation		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Transportation - Apprenticeships for young people	22	1

Transportation*Strengths*

- excellent retention and achievement rates
- very good occupational skills of learners
- very good standard of training
- very good development of learners' wider occupational skills
- very good resources
- particularly thorough assessment and internal verification
- good recording and monitoring of learners' progress
- particularly effective partnership between FCT and the employer

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

Achievement and standards

53. Achievement and retention rates are excellent. In 2002-03, all signal operations learners who started apprenticeships completed them successfully. Since 2002-03, out of the 33 learners who started training, only one has left early. Learners are making excellent progress towards completing their NVQ and key skills awards. At the end of their training, learners take up full-time positions with the employer.

54. Learners have very good occupational skills and particularly strong knowledge of signal operations. At an early stage in training, learners work under supervision in trackside signal cabins, and are responsible for the signalling on a section of track. They control the journey of trains very effectively and efficiently. Learners training on a computerised simulator show extremely high levels of skills at solving traffic interruptions caused by signalling events, unexpected incidents and emergencies. Learners have very strong social skills which they use well with passengers, and they develop strong teamworking skills when working with colleagues. They have a very good background knowledge of signal operations. Each year the employer and the provider have an annual event to present awards to learners and celebrate their success.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	11		12		10											
Retained*	0		0		10	100											
Successfully completed	0		0		10	100											
Still in learning	11		11		0	0											

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

Quality of education and training

55. Training is of a very good standard. It is particularly relevant and meets the needs of the learners and the employer well. The provider and the employer plan learners' training very thoroughly, taking effective account of their prior knowledge and experience. Individual learning plans and supporting paperwork provide very detailed information on every aspect of the training. FCT's and the employer's staff are clearly aware of every aspect of the training and are very effective at reviewing learners' progress. Reviews cover all parts of the training. FCT, the employer and the learner use the reviews particularly well to plan ways of resolving problems, discuss what went well, plan the next stage of the learners' training, and set challenging and realistic learning targets. Training takes place across all parts of the employer's network and covers all the different types of rail operations. During training, learners receive regular and very good tuition, and their background knowledge of signal operations is frequently checked and tested. All learners meet every two months to discuss and put forward their opinions on the training scheme. In some instances, FCT's staff do not make enough use of key skills evidence arising from learners' NVQ work or other aspects of their training programme.

56. Training staff develop learners' skills very well, particularly the wider occupational skills. During the first two months of training and at the end of the first year, all learners take part in an outdoor adventure training course which develops their confidence, an understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses, and particularly their teamworking skills. To help learners appreciate the duties of colleagues and the concerns of passengers, learners accompany train drivers in the train cab, carry out platform duties and make station announcements. A very useful feature of the training is the regular visits to a major city to see how another large-scale transport organisation manages its urban railway. The provider and the employer set the learners major project work to complete during the visit to improve their understanding of urban railway operations. Recent projects have included work on security, customer experience and train operations. The employer and the transport organisation learners visit take up many of the outcomes from the projects to improve how they operate. Learners attend a useful

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course on improving presentation skills. They make good use of this in presenting the findings of projects and for key skills. Some learners have received tuition on training others.

57. Resources for training are very good. During training, learners use signalling for rail systems which run some of the most demanding timetables in the world. The employer has very good training facilities. Off-the-job training sessions use very good specialist rail simulators. The simulator mimics very effectively rail operations and control, signalling and point systems. FCT and the employer provide learners with good-quality learning materials to support training. Each work location has a designated apprentice mentor who trains the learners, monitors their progress and assesses their performance. The employer's staff are particularly well qualified in signalling operations, assessment and training. Staff from FCT who provide key skills training are well-qualified former apprentices who have a very good understanding of key skills.

58. Assessment and internal verification are particularly thorough. Assessment of learners is based on detailed reports from mentors and the observations of the assessors who are senior members of the employer's signalling staff. All mentors are accredited assessors and act as expert witnesses to the learners' competence. FCT trains assessors particularly well. All assessors have significant experience of signal operations and are fully qualified to carry out assessment. Learners do not achieve until they have collected evidence of competence from a particularly broad range of signal operations, and their answers to background knowledge questions show a very good understanding of signal operations. Internal verification is regular, thorough and carefully planned. Written feedback from internal verifiers to assessors is good and assessors value the verbal feedback they receive. Records of verification are comprehensive. Minuted assessor meetings are very effective in sharing good practice and helping to standardise assessment decisions. Internal verifiers produce regular useful bulletins to keep assessors informed of changes to assessment practice, qualifications and news from the awarding body.

59. FCT has effective arrangements to support learners who have additional learning needs. At the start of training, the provider assesses all learners' literacy, language and numeracy skills. If appropriate, learners receive a further assessment, and those identified as requiring help receive support. FCT uses specialist agencies if learners have learning disabilities and/or difficulties, and arranges for them to be given adapted equipment or materials.

Leadership and management

60. The recording and monitoring of learners' progress by FCT's managers and staff is good. It is particularly detailed. Learners' records of achievement and progress are updated promptly and accurately. Their progress is displayed on spreadsheets which clearly show where they have got to with all parts of the framework, when on- and off-the-job training sessions are scheduled and completed, and the dates of assessments and progress reviews. FCT's directors, managers and staff use this information particularly effectively to ensure learners maintain very good progress, and identify any problems.

The employer and the learners receive frequent reports on how learners are progressing and what they have attained.

61. Partnership arrangements between the provider and the employer are particularly effective, and communications are very good. FCT is directly associated with the rail industry in producing the apprenticeship framework for signal operations. FCT and the employer worked together very well to compile the very detailed training programme for signalling operation learners. They are constantly modifying and improving the training programme so learners receive up-to-date training. FCT and the employer work particularly closely on NVQ assessment and internal verification. FCT organises and provides the assessment training for the employer's rail operating training. The provider has designed its data systems so that they are compatible with the employer's arrangements. Both organisations have ready and easy access to each other's information on training and the learners.

62. Directors, managers and staff from FCT and the employer have been very effective at providing learners with excellent training and maintaining outstanding achievement and retention rates. The regular programme of meetings concentrates particularly well on the learners' needs, training and performance. FCT's quality assurance arrangements are very effective at raising and maintaining standards of learning and achievement at a very high level. The provider regularly collects and analyses the views of learners and the employer. Where there are problems, the provider remedies them. The self-assessment of signalling operations strengths and weaknesses matches the findings of the inspection. Staff development is effective and the promotion of equality of opportunity is good.