

REINSPECTION REPORT

Chamber Business Reinspection

09 December 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

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. 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
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.

REINSPECTION REPORT

Chamber Business Reinspection

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Scope of provision	1
About the reinspection	2
Overall judgement	2
Grades	3
Key findings	4

Detailed reinspection findings

Leadership and management	10
Equality of opportunity	11
Quality assurance	12
Business administration, management & professional	15
Retailing, customer service & transportation	19
Hairdressing & beauty therapy	22

REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. The training arm of Chamber Business was founded in 1984 to provide training to businesses and individuals throughout Bedfordshire and Luton. The parent organisation is a local chamber of commerce which provides a range of other services to businesses. Chamber Business employs approximately 55 staff, of whom seven comprise the work-based learning team. This team comprises national vocational qualification (NVQ) tutors, assessors and verifiers, a centre co-ordinator, a contract co-ordinator, recruitment specialist and administration staff. The work-based learning team is able to draw upon the wider staffing resources of Chamber Business. The main office is wholly owned by the chamber and its members. A new enterprise centre provides additional resources for in-house training.

2. Chamber Business has a contract with Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide apprenticeships and NVQ training. Some young people joining the programme are referred by their employers, which may be members of the chamber of commerce. Connexions offices in Luton, Dunstable and Bedford also refer candidates. Chamber Business uses its contacts to find a training job placement for these learners. The organisation provides in-house training in business administration, information and communications technology (ICT), retailing, distribution and warehousing, and customer service apprenticeships. Chamber Business subcontracts hairdressing to a provider in Milton Keynes.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Business administration, management & professional

3. There are six advanced and 10 modern apprentices in business administration. Most learners are referred to Chamber Business by their employers, and a few are recruited through Connexions. Learners are employed in a variety of local companies in Bedfordshire, including financial services, catering, security, leisure and retail organisations. Learners have an initial assessment and induction in the workplace at the start of their programme. Most training is carried out by supervisors in the workplace. Learners can attend additional off-the-job training at the training centre as required for technical certificates and key skills. Chamber Business staff visit learners regularly to assess their performance in the workplace. Learners have progress reviews every nine to 12 weeks.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

4. There are 55 learners in work-based learning. Of these, 17 are advanced apprentices in customer service. The remaining 38 are apprentices, of whom 12 are in retailing, eight are in warehousing and 18 in customer service. Most training is delivered in the workplace. All new starters are assessed for literacy, numeracy, and language skills and receive a basic induction programme. Four staff provide assessment and internal verification. Staff are well qualified and have occupational experience. Some staff are qualified in key skills. All learners are employed and work in a variety of businesses across the area.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

5. Chamber Business subcontracts its hairdressing provision to a provider in Milton Keynes. At the time of reinspection there are four advanced apprentices, 49 apprentices, and nine learners working towards the NVQ at level 2. Of the 62 learners, 56 are women and six are men. The programme is managed by two full-time assessors who work with 22 salons, one of which has an accredited work-based assessor. All the learners are employed by the salons in which they work. Learners joining the programme have a thorough initial assessment of their learning needs, and one of the assessors who is qualified to support literacy, numeracy and language skills devises individual programmes to support those who need them.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	19
Number of learner interviews	37
Number of staff interviews	24
Number of employer interviews	14
Number of subcontractor interviews	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	19
Number of partner/external agency interviews	1

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

6. At the previous inspection, leadership and management and quality assurance were judged to be unsatisfactory. The arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory. Training in retailing and distribution was satisfactory, but training in business administration and hairdressing was unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

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

Business administration, management & professional	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Hairdressing & beauty therapy	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Grades awarded at reinspection

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	2
Quality assurance	3

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

Hairdressing & beauty therapy	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

7. Learners in retailing, customer service and warehousing are making good progress towards achieving their frameworks. Of those starting since 2003, 13 per cent already have achieved a full framework, with a further 59 per cent still in training. This gives a possible maximum achievement and retention figure of 72 per cent across the two years. Twenty per cent of current learners have already achieved their NVQ and most are well on the way to achieving the other components of their chosen framework. All learners seen were either on or ahead of their completion targets.

8. Portfolios for level 3 business administration and retailing and customer service learners are at a high standard. They contain a wide range of diverse evidence. Learners have a very good understanding of how to cross-reference their evidence against the criteria for units of the NVQ and clearly demonstrate which evidence meets the criteria for key skills.

9. Learners in all areas are developing a wide range of practical skills. Some business administration learners' work has had a very positive affect on their workplace, for instance new fire drills and event arrangements. Retailing and customer service learners are valued by their employers. Many learners have been promoted or have taken on more responsibilities. Learners have also progressed from level 2 to level 3. Many hairdressing learners demonstrate skills well above the required level for the qualification. They work confidently on a wide range of clients in a professional manner. Learners are able to complete fashion looks that include advanced technical skills and demonstrate awareness of current trends.

10. Achievement of advanced apprenticeship frameworks in business administration is low but improving. Learners are making satisfactory progress but achievement of the technical certificate and level 3 key skills in communications by advanced apprentices is slow. Achievement of foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks is now satisfactory. Foundation apprentices are completing technical certificates earlier than previously through improved target-setting and monitoring of progress.

11. Learners are slow to achieve NVQ units in business administration and in hairdressing. Many learners on the programme for some months have not achieved any units. However, most learners are achieving elements towards NVQs. Early leavers

receive accreditation for units achieved. Learners with prior achievement in hairdressing are still progressing slowly.

Quality of education and training

12. Chamber Business plans and delivers training for business administration learners particularly well. Tutors use a variety of interactive methods to engage learners and share experiences. Some learners are not always able to attend off-the-job training because of work commitments, but they are able to catch up with tutors' help. Retailing and customer service learners have clearly planned individual schedules to cover technical certificates and key skills early. The previous inspection highlighted inadequate individual programme planning and this has been rectified.

13. Learners receive effective on-the-job coaching to develop occupational skills and quickly become useful team members as their confidence grows. Many learners extend and develop their skills through attending job-related in-house or external training.

14. Target-setting for business administration learners is now good. A thorough and comprehensive review of progress, personal and training needs is carried out with the learner and mentor every nine to 12 weeks. Realistic and measurable medium-term targets are set for the learners to achieve before the next review. Assessment planning is also good. Specific short-term targets are agreed with the learner at the frequent assessor visits to the workplace and this is speeding up progress.

15. In hairdressing, contact with salons is well planned and regular. The assessor visits every two weeks. Each salon has a mentor who works closely with the learner and assessor. Planning for the next training session is discussed at reviews and learning requirements identified. Each session has clearly defined objectives for training and assessment. Learners and mentors are involved in the planning and take responsibility for managing the clients needed for training and assessment, and the time needed for the delivery of background knowledge work.

16. Training resources are good. Training rooms at Chamber Business are very well appointed and there is access to industry standard ICT equipment and the internet. Learning resources include sample examination papers, workbooks and well-designed handouts. There is a good ratio of staff to learners. Staff are well qualified and experienced.

17. Assessment of retailing, customer service and warehousing learners is very well planned and effective. Assessors work closely with employers to maximise their involvement in the assessment and training process. Assessment visits are frequent. Assessors use a wide variety of assessment methods. They discuss evidence gaps with learners and encourage them to collate their own evidence. Assessors carry out detailed observations that are often backed by supporting product evidence. Assessors negotiate effective and achievable short-term targets with learners that keep the assessment process fast-moving and motivating. Completed units are signed off promptly.

18. **Assessments in business administration are carefully planned and agreed with the learners.** They receive a written record of what is being assessed and the methods used. Oral and written questioning is used well to confirm their knowledge and understanding.

19. **Programmes meet the needs of learners and employers.** There is an appropriate range and level of jobs. Employers now have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Assessors involve employers from the start, establishing regular contact to build good working relationships. Apprentices have a sufficient choice of NVQ options to meet their job role. Many take additional qualifications, such as basic computer literacy qualifications, and units from other NVQs, such as customer care. Credit is given for previous achievements such as key skills.

20. **Individual support for all learners is very good, as identified in the organisation's most recent self-assessment report.** The previous inspection judged support to be satisfactory in most areas and good in hairdressing. Assessors are available by mobile telephone out of office hours and during weekends. Frequent visits to the workplace result in early identification of problems. Chamber Business's staff frequently give support to learners with personal problems. They intervene quickly where issues arise in the workplace and help to resolve matters discreetly. If learners lose their jobs, Chamber Business helps them to find another quickly. The role of workplace mentors has been strengthened. The informative mentor handbook provides a useful source of reference. Employers play a key role in learners' progress reviews and work with assessors to plan learners' activities. The subcontractor also supports hairdressing learners well. Learners and employers value the pastoral support. All learners are visited every two weeks in the workplace.

21. The initial assessment for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory and is used to identify levels and additional support needs. Ongoing reviews are used to determine any support needs not identified at the start of the programme. Key skills are well integrated with the NVQ. Tutors work individually with learners who require support to help them achieve the external tests, and learners have access to good practice materials and past papers to develop their key skills.

22. Induction for business administration learners, and for retailing, customer service and warehousing learners, is satisfactory, and helps them to settle in quickly. Spread over eight weeks, it covers such aspects as health and safety, equal opportunities, and fire procedures, as well as providing an introduction to the learning programme. Learners sign an induction checklist to show they have read and understood the various policies and procedures. Workplace induction is also satisfactory.

23. Hairdressing learners receive an extended pre-induction period before they sign up to the programme. This three-month period allows learners to decide whether the job and work-based learning is for them. The subcontractor works with them to assess their needs and aptitude and develop their skills during this time. Retention on the programme has improved since this was introduced. One of the hairdressing assessors is qualified to give specialist support in literacy and numeracy and, where necessary, an

external agency is used to give specific support.

24. In retailing, customer service and warehousing, many learners have insufficient medium-term planning. Short-term planning is good but individual learning plans only show the contractual end target date for the framework. There is no breakdown into ongoing targets for individual units, key skills or technical certificates. This was identified in the previous inspection. Chamber Business has recently started to set unit and other achievement targets at reviews. However, learners in training for some time have not had the benefit of this process. In hairdressing, learning and assessment aims are recorded in insufficient detail in the learning plan. It records dates for completion but does not identify activities or specific tasks needed. Missed targets are not always challenged at learners' progress reviews.

Leadership and management

25. Internal and external communications are good. Senior management takes a close interest in work-based learning, which is a key part of its strategy to develop skills in Bedfordshire. A highly effective meetings structure ensures that everyone is kept informed. Efficient and focused team meetings include monthly internal verification or assessment meetings, team meetings and divisional meetings. The manager meets individually with each of the team every month to monitor progress. The organisation has a wide network of contacts, which it uses well to share good practice and open up opportunities for young people to enter training. Presentations to employer events are very productive. Employers' awareness is raised and they are encouraged to consider employing and developing apprentices.

26. Staff development is good. All staff participate in regular personal and vocational skills development. Each person has targets linked to the organisation's priorities and these are monitored regularly. An annual workshop to update staff on equal opportunities legislation and practice is mandatory. Regular development workshops include the subcontractor. Some courses bought in from external providers are run at the centre and other organisations are invited to participate.

27. Learning is well promoted in the local community. The chamber of commerce's ethnic business adviser has helped the team to develop relationships with a large range of community groups. This has increased the number of learners from minority ethnic groups. The relationship with Connexions has been strengthened to improve the selection process and ensure that learners are put on to suitable and realistic programmes. Learners are interviewed in local Connexions' offices. Chamber Business's staff attend careers days in schools and colleges and have worked with a network of other providers to produce a promotional information pack for work-based learning in the area. Several organisations supporting people with disabilities also have good relationships with Chamber Business.

28. Support arrangements are very comprehensive. Programmes are managed flexibly to help learners to achieve. Staff are available to assist learners at all times and provide personal and vocational help. Specialist agencies support learners with specific problems

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

or difficulties. The contract of service between employer and provider has been thoroughly revised so that it sets out responsibilities in detail. The mentoring system is particularly effective. Mentors act as role models supporting learners while developing themselves. The role of the internal verifier has been enhanced to include an element of learner support and as an intermediary with an employer. Initial assessment diagnoses learning needs accurately and specifically identifies both areas of strength and areas of weakness. Support for literacy and numeracy can now be individually tailored. Expert tutors were brought in to help level 3 learners to overcome their problems with communications key skills.

29. Very effective strategies have improved the quality of all areas of learning. Clear targets were set and met for all actions resulting from the previous inspection. There is a self-critical culture and the team acts promptly to deal with weaknesses. Performance has been monitored continually. The staff can now use the database for planning, which was a weakness in the previous inspection. Well-designed reports contribute to team meetings. Staff routinely monitor their own performance, and trends in areas of learning are analysed. Feedback from employers and learners is used to plan and implement improvements. Monthly meetings with the subcontractor also follow this model. Chamber Business's own assessors are regularly observed and given feedback against a clear set of criteria.

30. The monitoring of the subcontracted vocational training is incomplete. Although auditing of outcomes and files is thorough, no observation of hairdressing training is carried out.

31. There are still insufficient medium-term learning targets. Target-setting arrangements were cited as a weakness in the previous report. Learners now have good short-term targets that are clearly understood. Long-term targets, such as completion dates, are recorded on the individual learning plan. However, short-term targets to measure progress are not clearly recorded or monitored in all cases.

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good internal and external communication
- good staff development
- good promotion of learning in local communities
- comprehensive support arrangements
- very effective strategies to improve quality

Weaknesses

- incomplete monitoring of subcontracted vocational training

- insufficient medium-term target-setting for learning

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good on- and off-the-job training
- good target-setting for learners
- very strong individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- low but improving achievement of advanced apprenticeship frameworks
- slow achievement of NVQ units

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good progress through qualifications
- very good assessment
- highly effective pastoral support

Weaknesses

- no medium-term planning for many learners

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Strengths

- good development of practical skills
- effective review process that supports learning
- well-planned and regular contact with employers

Weaknesses

- poor progress in unit achievement
- poor recording of long-term learning and assessment aims

DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good internal and external communication
- good staff development
- good promotion of learning in local communities
- comprehensive support arrangements
- very effective strategies to improve quality

Weaknesses

- incomplete monitoring of subcontracted vocational training
- insufficient medium-term target-setting for learning

32. Chamber Business communicates well both internally and externally. The work-based learning team is small but meetings of the team are very focused and structured efficiently. Each meeting has a well-defined purpose and minutes are concise. All assessors are qualified as internal verifiers. Meetings each month alternate efficiently between generic discussion of internal verification and assessment issues. Monthly meetings between the manager and each member of the team are an effective formal channel to monitor the progress of staff and their caseload. The manager prepares a summary report each month and discusses it with the commercial director, who presents it at senior management meetings. The organisation's senior management takes a close interest in the work-based learning team as a vital component of its workforce skills development strategy throughout Bedfordshire. Directors have a very clear awareness of the work that the team does. All staff take part in regular divisional and group meetings with the other parts of the organisation. Information and good practice are shared, and potential learners benefit from a variety of contacts that the chamber of commerce makes with employers.

33. Good networking with a range of organisations raises the profile of work-based learning. Good teamwork and an integrated strategy for the development of the business ensures that employers do not receive mixed messages. Presentations at employers' events are very productive in opening up opportunities for young people. Communication with workplace supervisors has been improved with a detailed employer induction and information pack. Team members belong to many local consultative bodies and the chief executive is active at a senior level in determining policies for the eastern region. When necessary, the chief executive has intervened very effectively to assist the work-based learning team in resolving funding issues.

34. Chamber Business works closely with its partners. Candidates for the programme are interviewed in Connexions' offices to ensure that they are recruited to the correct programme. Staff maintain good contacts with other providers so that when they cannot meet potential learners' aspirations, they can refer them to appropriate provision elsewhere. The team has regular meetings with Connexions to share information about learners and programmes.

35. Staff development is good. The staff are well qualified and vocationally experienced. Chamber Business sets well-defined targets linked to business priorities at the staff's annual appraisals and six-monthly reviews. The organisation monitors staff targets frequently and sets good short-term targets through the effective use of data to measure performance. Everyone carries out personal, vocational and skills development. Staff attend internal courses and workshops as well as external training events. All staff attend health and safety and equal opportunities training. The subcontractor is included in all training opportunities and regularly attends development workshops. There are regular awaydays for the team and the whole chamber of commerce. Chamber Business makes economies of scale by purchasing courses from external providers, running them at its enterprise centre, and inviting other local organisations to participate. This centre is a very well-appointed professional resource, which the whole chamber of commerce uses effectively, and it provides a cost-efficient learning space for learners and staff alike.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

36. The management of equality of opportunity was satisfactory in the previous inspection. Many enhancements have been put in place and it is now good. There are very comprehensive and detailed policies and procedures covering equality and diversity. All staff and learners receive training on these during their induction. Data relating to equality and diversity are analysed routinely and used to monitor performance and plan improvement. Chamber Business produces a separate equal opportunities self-assessment report each year that the LSC uses as a model for other providers in the local area. This thorough and wide-ranging document gives rise to an effective action plan that is monitored and updated regularly at team meetings. All staff are required to attend annual training on equal opportunities and any relevant information on changes to legislation is communicated to the subcontractor.

37. Chamber Business promotes learning well in local communities. Luton has pockets of high deprivation and areas with a high proportion of people from minority ethnic groups. The chamber of commerce's ethnic business adviser works productively with the work-based learning team to identify and build relationships with local community groups. Fifteen per cent of learners are from minority ethnic groups, which is about half the percentage in the local population, but their success rate in NVQs is high. In the past six months, approximately 76 per cent of all leavers achieved NVQs. Among learners from minority ethnic groups, the rate was nearly 94 per cent. Presentations and events for the organisation's many employer members increase their awareness of the programmes and open up opportunities for young people. The relationship with

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

Connexions has been strengthened to improve the selection process and ensure that learners are put on to suitable and realistic programmes. Chamber Business's staff interview all potential recruits in local Connexions' offices and have regular meetings to identify and discuss possible candidates. They also attend careers days in schools and colleges and have worked with a network of other providers to produce a promotional information pack for work-based learning in the area. Several organisations supporting people with disabilities also have good relationships with Chamber Business. A company that was doubtful about recruiting a learner with a disability received good advice and assistance through Chamber Business's contacts to enable it to support the young person.

38. Arrangements to support learners are good. The team works closely to manage the employer-learner relationship and ensure that learners are able to progress in a suitable environment. Procedures for workplace induction have been enhanced so that when learners start, assessors take time with employers to ensure that they understand the demands of the programme and both parties' rights and responsibilities using the clearly defined employer agreement. The mentoring arrangement is particularly effective. It boosts learners' confidence and motivation and simultaneously develops mentors' skills. Reviews are planned carefully to ensure that the employer is involved and the dates are confirmed in writing. The new review form has a confidential back page so that the employee can raise issues with the assessor, and these are promptly dealt with in a sensitive and non-confrontational way. Staff are very dedicated to learners' welfare. Since all internal verifiers are now in-house, they perform a dual role in supporting assessors as advocates for the learner if employer issues arise. There is good access to a range of other agencies to offer specialist support to learners who need it. The few incidents of abuse in the workplace and complaints are systematically recorded and followed up.

39. Support for literacy, numeracy and language is satisfactory. Diagnosis of need has been improved and is now much more specific than previously. One of the subcontractor's staff has a qualification at level 4 to support literacy, numeracy and language skills and is introducing well-planned support for hairdressing learners. Many learners in other areas of learning are exempted from key skills, but staff are qualified to support key skills at levels 2 and 3. An external provider has run workshops to help learners with level 3 key skills when required.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

40. Quality assurance was judged to be unsatisfactory in the previous inspection. Most of the related weaknesses have been dealt with and quality assurance is now satisfactory. There is a well-documented set of policies and all procedures are set out effectively in simple flowcharts that are easy to understand. These documents are stored centrally on the network and available to all staff. They are regularly revised and updated. Self-assessment is a team effort and has accurately identified strengths and weaknesses. Chamber Business acts very responsively to rectify identified quality issues.

41. Chamber Business has very effective strategies to improve quality. All areas of

learning have shown considerable improvement since the previous inspection. The development plans set clear targets that have been met. New processes have been introduced and existing ones enhanced. A quality co-ordinator has been appointed to ensure that quality assurance procedures are carried out thoroughly and to strict deadlines. Audits of all provision are thorough and detailed, and actions are followed up. The subcontractor is subject to equally thorough procedures.

42. The organisation is using data far more effectively. The previous inspection cited this as a weakness. The capacity for planning has improved. Reports are available to managers and are used at meetings. All staff know how to use the data to monitor their own performance. Statistics on all aspects of the programmes are used to plan action. Trends can be monitored and are used regularly in meetings. Chamber Business seeks feedback from learners and employers and collates and analyses it. Action plans generated from this have made useful and effective improvements. For instance, employers felt that learners did not have sufficient grasp of suitable use of language in an office, so Chamber Business created a resource pack to guide learners in telephone techniques and letter writing.

43. Internal verification has been improved. All assessors are also internal verifiers. At the time of the previous inspection, some internal verification was subcontracted. The procedures relating to different areas of learning were inconsistent, although internal verification was satisfactory. The new in-house arrangement works effectively. Sampling plans are detailed and cover all learners, units and methods of assessment. There is a new assessor handbook and appeals procedure. Assessors meet each month. Generic internal verification meetings and standardisation discussions relating to assessment and monitoring issues take place on alternate months. These meetings are purposeful and focused, and have raised the quality and thoroughness of assessment and verification. The awarding body has given the provider direct certification status.

44. At the previous inspection, quality assurance of learning was identified as a weakness. A new observation system has been introduced to monitor teaching and assessment quality at Chamber Business. Observations are recorded in detail against the procedure applicable to the event, and tutors and assessors receive constructive feedback. However, sometimes the observations are not evaluative enough and do not focus sufficiently on the learning experience. There are systematic records of learners' interviews.

45. This monitoring of subcontracted vocational training is incomplete. It does not apply to the subcontracted hairdressing provision. There is no observation of teaching and learning by Chamber Business. No member of staff is vocationally competent to make judgements on hairdressing training. However, the management of the subcontract has improved since the previous inspection. Files and outcomes are audited thoroughly every three months, and sampled monthly at quality assurance meetings. Learners' and employers' views are sought confidentially. Results are analysed, fed back to the subcontractor and used to plan changes.

46. There are still insufficient medium-term learning targets. Target-setting arrangements

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

were identified as a weakness in the previous report. Learners now have good short-term targets that are clearly understood. Long-term targets, such as completion dates, are recorded on the individual learning plan. However, short-term targets, against which learners measure their progress, are not always recorded or monitored clearly. Some learners have not achieved any units, although many elements are complete. The new appendix to the individual learning plan is beginning to rectify this for new learners. A learning log and a planner have been introduced, but are not yet in place for all and it is too soon to see what effect they will have.

47. Internal verification activity is carefully monitored and discussed at individual meetings each month. Forward planning dates are entered on a database, but this is not always up to date. While the database is used well as a discussion vehicle for planning, it does not give an accurate holistic view of activity. Records are cleared as soon as learners achieve, so there is no historical record of verification to compare the performance of each verifier, except in each file.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	16	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good on- and off-the-job training
- good target-setting for learners
- very strong individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- low but improving achievement of advanced apprenticeship frameworks
- slow achievement of NVQ units

Achievement and standards

48. Apprentices are developing useful research and computer skills to produce well-presented projects for key skills. Key skills was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection. One learner carried out comprehensive research on holidays, producing graphs and charts to compare temperatures, prices and costs. Learners make good use of the internet to extend their knowledge of employment legislation. The standard of work in portfolios at level 3 is high, reflecting good attainment and progress. The standard of work in level 2 portfolios is satisfactory. Learners develop a wide range of practical office skills. One level 2 learner redesigned the fire drill for her company, which implemented it. Another level 3 learner designed and implemented a teambuilding training event for her department, which involved planning, organising and developing a programme of challenging activities, booking the venue, collating meal requirements on a spreadsheet and budgeting. Learners have a very good understanding of how to cross-reference their evidence against the criteria for various units of the NVQ and clearly demonstrate which evidence meets the criteria for key skills.

49. Achievement of apprenticeship frameworks was judged to be poor at the previous inspection, but the rate is now satisfactory at 45 per cent for learners starting in 2003-04, with 11 per cent still in training. Apprentices are completing technical certificates and key skills earlier than previously through improved target-setting and monitoring of progress. Retention rates were identified as a weakness in the previous report. These are improving each year, and retention is now satisfactory at 73 per cent for learners starting in 2003-04. Early leavers now receive unit accreditation for NVQs. There have

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

been no early leavers from those starting since August 2004. Learners usually remain in employment on leaving training, and many are promoted during the programme.

50. Achievement rates for advanced apprenticeships are low but improving. Only one of the 10 learners who started their advanced apprenticeship in 2002-03 achieved it. However, of three learners from this group who remained at the time of the previous inspection, all have achieved some or all of the framework. One has completed the framework, one has nearly finished the framework and one moved away from the area but achieved unit certification. Current advanced apprentices are making slow progress in passing the technical certificate and level 3 key skills in communications. Only one out of four starting in 2003-04 has achieved so far. However, pass rates on the technical certificate are high and learners have more chances to improve their performance because these elements were introduced early in the programme.

51. Achievement of NVQ units is slow for many apprentices. One apprentice has achieved two units since starting in February 2004, another has only achieved one unit since November 2002, and two have not achieved any units after several months on the programme. However, most have covered a number of elements towards many units.

Quality of education and training

52. Training by Chamber Business and in the workplace is particularly well planned and delivered. Learners receive effective on-the-job coaching to develop occupational skills and quickly become useful team members as their confidence grows. Many learners extend and develop their skills through attending job-related in-house or external training in communication, ICT and customer service. Off-the-job training is particularly effective. The 10-week training for the technical certificates is stimulating and memorable. Tutors use a variety of interactive methods to engage learners and share experiences. Sessions are professionally presented by expert tutors who use excellent audiovisual aids and good-quality handouts. Achievement rates for technical certificates and key skills are improving. Learners who need training in key skills also receive appropriate training from specialist staff. Training rooms at Chamber Business are very well appointed and there is access to industry standard ICT equipment and the internet. Learning resources include sample examination papers, workbooks and well-designed handouts. There is a good ratio of staff to learners. The three assessors are appropriately qualified and experienced, and update their skills and knowledge regularly as part of their continuous professional development. They are also qualified internal verifiers.

53. Target-setting for learners is now good. A thorough and comprehensive review of progress, personal and training needs is carried out with the learner and mentor every nine to 12 weeks. Realistic and measurable targets are set for the learners to achieve before the next review. Learners and employers are clear about the actions that they have to take, and the assessor follows up to see if they have been carried out. Assessment planning is good. The assessors visit the learners every two to three weeks in the workplace to assess evidence and agree short-term targets with them on what tasks need to be completed before the next visit. Individual learning plans have

improved, but information is sometimes poorly recorded. Targets are not always set for dates of unit completion on individual learning plans, and are not always referred to in reviews. Individual learning plans are not always updated to show achievements.

54. Individual support for learners is still very strong, as identified in the self-assessment report. The assessors' team members meet regularly to discuss the most appropriate ways of supporting learners with particular issues and to share their expertise. Assessors are available by mobile telephone out of office hours and during weekends. Frequent visits to the workplace allow early identification of any problems. Chamber Business's staff frequently give support to learners with personal difficulties. For example, one learner with accommodation difficulties was helped with furniture and clothing. The organisation's staff intervene quickly where issues such as work overload or personal conflict arise in the workplace, and they meet with the employers to help resolve matters discreetly. If learners lose their jobs, Chamber Business helps them to find another quickly. The role of workplace mentors has been strengthened. They are involved from the start of the programme, and take an active part in learners' progress reviews. The informative mentor handbook provides a useful source of reference. Learners appreciate the encouragement and support mentors provide, which helps them to make faster progress. Several of the mentors were formerly apprentices and they have a very good understanding of the programme's requirements.

55. Induction is satisfactory and helps apprentices to settle in quickly. Spread over eight weeks, it covers such aspects as health and safety, equal opportunities, and fire procedures, as well as providing an introduction to the course. Learners sign an induction checklist to show they have read and understood the various policies and procedures. Workplace induction is also satisfactory.

56. The initial assessment processes are satisfactory. Learners without appropriate general certificates of secondary education have a key skills assessment to determine their level and any additional literacy, numeracy and language support needs. Regular reviews determine any support needs not identified at the start of the programme. Key skills are well integrated with the NVQ. Tutors work individually with learners who require support to help them achieve the external tests, and learners have access to good practice materials and past papers to develop their key skills. Key skills were cited as a weakness in the previous report.

57. Assessment practice is satisfactory and follows awarding body procedures. All assessments are carefully planned and agreed with the learner, who receives a written record of what is being assessed and the methods used. Learners' portfolios demonstrate good attainment and progress, and contain a wide range of diverse evidence from the workplace, as well as witness testimonies, direct observations by the assessor, personal statements, professional discussion, and photographs. The standard of level 3 work is particularly good. Evidence is cross-referenced systematically to the relevant NVQ criteria. Oral and written questioning is used productively to confirm the learners' knowledge and understanding. All work is authenticated and dated. Learners receive detailed feedback from assessors on their evidence, but do not get enough feedback on how to improve. Detailed records of individual progress help to identify

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

any learner falling behind.

58. The range of jobs meets the needs of the learners well. Chamber Business is involved with a large number of good employers from the public and private sector, many of which recruit all their young employees through the organisation. If learners are not already employed when they apply for an apprenticeship, Chamber Business finds them appropriate jobs, carefully matching their skills and aspirations to the employers' requirements. Employers value the screening process that Chamber Business carries out, which results in the learners settling into their jobs quickly. Employers now have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Assessors involve employers from the start, and establish regular contact to build good working relationships. Not all employers attend progress reviews, leaving it to the mentor. Apprentices have a sufficient choice of NVQ options to meet their job role. Many take additional qualifications, such as basic computer literacy qualifications and units from other NVQs, such as customer care. Credit is given for previous achievements, such as key skills.

Leadership and management

59. Staff at Chamber Business work well as a team. They meet regularly to share information and ideas and discuss learners' needs and progress. Meetings are recorded and action points are followed up. Staff have improved their use of data to monitor trends in achievement and retention. Staff development is readily accessible through the appraisal process and on individual request. Staff and learners have a satisfactory awareness of equality and diversity issues. Internal verification is satisfactory, and includes sampling plans, standardisation meetings and staff development. There is better monitoring of the quality of induction, training, assessment and progress reviews through observations by senior managers and internal verifiers. Constructive and detailed feedback is given to staff observed and support is given where necessary. Staff are routinely involved in self-assessment. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate, although it over-estimated the strengths. The culture of continuous improvement has enabled many practices to be improved since the previous inspection.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 2**

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

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good progress through qualifications
- very good assessment
- highly effective pastoral support

Weaknesses

- no medium-term planning for many learners

Achievement and standards

60. Learners are making good progress towards achieving their frameworks. Of those learners who started since 2003, 13 per cent have achieved a full framework, with a further 59 per cent still in training. Twenty per cent of current learners have already achieved their NVQ and most are well on the way to achieving the other components of their chosen framework. All learners seen were either on or ahead of their completion targets. Learners have also developed work and social skills. Employers value their work and they hold responsible positions despite overcoming barriers such as low self-esteem. Many learners have either been promoted or taken on more responsibilities. A high proportion of learners progress from level 2 to level 3. The previous inspection identified good skills development and good progress but highlighted poor framework achievement as a key weakness. The strengths have been maintained and, although it is too early to judge framework achievement for the years 2003-05, learners are well on the way to achieving.

Quality of education and training

61. The previous inspection judged assessment to be satisfactory. Assessment is now very well planned and effective. Assessors have established strong credibility with employers and work closely with them to maximise their involvement in the assessment and training process. Assessment visits take place every two to three weeks. Assessors use a wide variety of assessment methods that engage learners. They make full use of professional discussion and many authenticated employer statements. They discuss gaps in learners' evidence with them and encourage them to produce their own evidence that includes examples of their work, case histories, photographs, designed questionnaires and company paperwork. Detailed observations are often backed by supporting

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

product evidence. Learners' portfolios are of a high and individual standard, with varied evidence, and learners are well able to show their personal involvement in the process. Assessors negotiate effective and achievable short-term targets with learners to keep up the pace of assessment and motivate them to achieve faster. Learners have a good understanding of their framework requirements, which enables them to contribute fully to assessment planning. Completed units are signed off promptly to motivate learners to complete further units. Assessors have a keen regard for health and safety. Prior learning is now accredited and there is clear planning of technical certificates and key skills. The previous inspection highlighted inadequate individual programme planning and this has been rectified.

62. The previous inspection described support as satisfactory. Pastoral support is now highly effective and comprehensive. Assessors know their learners well and have created relationships of mutual trust that enable the learners to confide in them. Learners feel able to contact assessors out of hours. Many learners have discussed family and other personal problems and some have been referred to outside agencies. In addition, all learners have a workplace mentor who works closely with the assessor. The mentors act as role models and work with the learners to gain evidence and help them to progress within the workplace. In general, employers are very supportive and in many cases they are highly involved with the assessment process. Employers help and advise learners on vocational matters and ensure that current job roles match NVQ assessment requirements. Employers play a key role in learners' reviews and work with assessors to plan learners' activities. Where problems occur, they deal with them effectively and speedily. Recent examples include problems such as bullying, domestic violence and other personal issues.

63. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners are tested thoroughly to determine their literacy and numeracy needs. All of the learners seen were on appropriate courses at the correct NVQ level. Although additional support for literacy and numeracy is available none of the learners currently in training have been identified as needing any support. There is a system to refer learners who need additional support to specialist providers.

64. Resources are satisfactory. All workplaces are well resourced to current commercial standards and enable learners to observe good practice. Chamber Business has a good selection of books and toolkits for literacy, numeracy and key skills. There is a very well-resourced information technology room, as well as modern, well-furnished training rooms. Staff are appropriately qualified with vocational experience.

65. The induction process is also satisfactory. Learners have a good recall of their rights and responsibilities, including the NVQ appeals and complaints procedures.

66. Although short-term planning by assessors is good, there is no medium-term planning for many learners. The individual learning plans only show the contractual end target date for the framework. There is no breakdown into ongoing targets for individual units, key skills or technical certificates. This was identified in the previous inspection. There is no pre-planned overview to set a timescale to achieve the framework. Without this detail it is difficult to monitor progress. Chamber Business has recognised this and

has recently started to set unit and other achievement targets at reviews. This is not satisfactory for learners who have been on the programme for some time, as it does not establish at the start of the programme the necessary timescales of achievement.

Leadership and management

67. Chamber Business's management has been very effective in establishing strengths in progress, assessment and support. Two of these were not identified at the previous inspection and the third has been greatly enhanced. The provision is well managed and all assessors work together as a team. They share information at the monthly formal meeting and in ongoing informal meetings. All staff are very involved in their programmes and are enthusiastic across the provision. Internal verification is satisfactory. The self-assessment process was very inclusive and identified most of the strengths. It did not recognise the identified weakness, but identified two weaknesses that inspectors found to be satisfactory. Action-planning and monitoring have been very effective in making improvements in the provision.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	62	3

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good development of practical skills
- effective review process that supports learning
- well-planned and regular contact with employers

Weaknesses

- poor progress in unit achievement
- poor recording of long-term learning and assessment aims

Achievement and standards

68. Learners exhibit good development of practical skills. They work confidently on a wide variety of clients, in many instances at a standard well above the level required for their programme of learning. They are particularly knowledgeable in product use and the techniques required to complete some very complex fashion colouring and styling services. To ensure that all learners have opportunities in working on a range of services not necessarily available in their own workplace, the provider arranges access to other salons. This extends the learners' experience and skills acquisition. Written assignments are to a satisfactory standard, well presented and many of them are word-processed. Learners can negotiate their choice of optional units for their NVQ in collaboration with their salon employer and assessor.

69. Learners are making poor progress towards unit achievement. Retention and achievement were identified as a key weakness at the previous inspection. Their acquisition of elements towards units has improved, but unit completion is not managed effectively. Some learners who have been on the programme for a year have achieved only one or two units. During the initial review, learners agree unit target completion dates with the assessor. However, these are continually extended as target dates expire with no achievement outcome. In 2002-03, 44 learners started apprenticeships, of whom nine successfully achieved. Of the 16 still in learning, 14 are outside their planned duration.

70. The introduction of a three-month monitoring period before the start of the programme has resulted in improved retention. Sixty-one per cent of learners who started in 2003-04 are still in training and all of the learners who started in 2004-05 have been retained.

Quality of education and training

71. An effective review process supports learning. Every assessor's visit culminates in a very detailed review sheet that records the activities carried out during the session and identifies areas for further development. Learners and mentors receive copies of the reviews and take responsibility to ensure that revision exercises and extra skill practice that may form part of the extended learning are completed. Learners are very comfortable with the short-term actions and take the initiative to manage their action points effectively.

72. Contact with salons is well planned and regular. Assessors attend the workplace for extensive sessions every two weeks. Each session has aims and objectives developed from the training or assessment carried out in the previous one. Each visit is pre-planned with the mentors and learners. Clear requirements for the visit are recorded and agreed. These may include the type of clients needed, convenient visit times and the required environment for training or testing. Mentors describe assessors' visits as very supportive and informative.

73. There have been substantial improvements in the involvement of employers in the progress review. This was a significant weakness in the previous inspection. All learners are allocated a mentor who takes an active role in the review and ongoing support of the learner. There is a collaborative approach to learning and assessment, with some salon mentors taking a particularly active role in the development of learners' skills.

74. Learners' understanding of background knowledge and practical skills are developed well. Assessors use a good variety of methods to meet the learners' and employers' needs. For example, in some salons the assessors work with individuals in quiet areas of the workplace and in others there are designated training rooms to meet the needs of small groups. The training time is well structured and resourced with clients to meet the learning needs, and time is allocated to carry out the training. The sessions are well planned with good questioning techniques used throughout. The learners are given constructive feedback and are encouraged to identify their training needs.

75. Learners work in salons that are well equipped, have a wide range of professional products and receive training from a variety of specialist companies. Teaching materials used are of an appropriate standard. The subcontractor has purchased a commercial salon which will be used to extend the learners' training to one day each week and enhance their learning experience.

76. Literacy and numeracy skills are assessed during induction using an appropriate initial assessment test. Any identified support needs are recorded on individual learning plans and literacy and numeracy support is given by vocational staff that are accredited to adult literacy level 4 standard.

77. Learners receive helpful literacy and numeracy support, integrated well into

CHAMBER BUSINESS REINSPECTION

vocational learning. For example, they have extra sessions allocated for assignment work and exercises that involve hairdressing practices. This learning is appropriately matched to the core curriculum and suitable resources are used. The subcontractor also offers specialist support from the Basic Skills Agency to those learners that have been identified as dyslexic or have English as their second language.

78. Assessments for the NVQ are carried out regularly and meet awarding body standards. The learners understand the assessment process, are professional, and display confidence from an early stage in their programme. Learners receive immediate, constructive feedback and assessors use good questioning techniques to encourage them to identify areas for improvement. Learners work at a pace that suits their individual needs and those of the salon. Employers and mentors are involved in the pre-assessment process. Key skills have been integrated with the vocational assignments and are assessed alongside the hairdressing qualification. In addition, learners are encouraged to collect case studies as additional evidence. There has been some improvement in assessment opportunities for learners within the workplace through the recruitment of a work-based assessor.

79. Internal verification is satisfactory. Internal verification of key skills is carried out by an external specialist who also acts as a consultant for the subcontractor. This specialist attends team standardisation meetings. The process is well planned and a variety of evidence is assessed.

80. Long-term learning and assessment aims are poorly recorded. Insufficient detail within the individual learning plan is reducing the effectiveness of the medium-term 12-week reviews. Learning and assessment aims are recorded as a date for completion, with no reference to the activities and stages that support achievement. Insufficient detail at the planning stage results in medium-term target-setting not always reflecting the unit outcomes.

Leadership and management

81. Subcontractor staff hold regular internal two-weekly meetings and they have a well-structured meeting each month with Chamber Business. Audit checks are scheduled throughout the year to quality assure learners' files, health and safety monitoring of salons and the regularity of learners' reviews. Analysis of data and newly introduced quality assurance processes have been used effectively to develop a well-informed self-assessment report and an effective development plan. Improved evaluation of data and new recording systems have not as yet improved achievements. However, there is greater awareness of learners' progress and strategic plans for improvement. There is a good staff development policy that is responsive to requests for further accreditation and development. The ineffective quality assurance monitoring for the subcontractor, identified during the previous inspection, has not improved. There is no observation of teaching, learning or reviews to confirm that the subcontractor is providing a good-quality learning programme.