

INSPECTION REPORT

Wolseley UK

27 August 2004



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

Wolseley UK

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Wolseley UK (Wolseley) is part of the Wolseley PLC group which operates in 11 countries. The group is a specialist distributor of building products. There are 1,400 Wolseley branches throughout the United Kingdom (UK). Its branch training programme was designed and implemented 12 years ago as an on-the-job programme to develop the skills and abilities of new entrants. In July 2002, Wolseley secured a contract to offer work-based learning in warehousing and distribution, and the foundation modern apprenticeship was then incorporated into the branch training programme. Wolseley has a contract with the National Contracts Service for foundation modern apprentices in England.

2. Training and development, which includes the work-based learning programme, is the responsibility of the human resources department of the company. A programme manager is responsible for the modern apprenticeship programme and reports to the company training manager, who in turn reports to the human resources director. The programme is nationally co-ordinated through the head office in Ripon. Wolseley employs three assessors and has an arrangement with the subcontractor to provide national vocational qualification (NVQ) assessment and verification services to the company.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Retailing, customer service & transportation

3. Of the 1,400 Wolseley branches throughout the UK, 140 have learners. Overall, 150 foundation modern apprentices are working towards qualifications in distribution, warehousing, and storage operations. All learners are employed, working in various branches of the company. Three Wolseley assessors are each responsible for between 30 and 40 learners. One subcontractor provides additional assessors and is responsible for internal verification. Enrolments for the programme are completed by September each year and programmes run for two years. Training is given by a combination of on- and off-the-job training. Staff from Wolseley deliver both types of training. All learners attend induction training as part of their first week on the training programme. Wolseley's staff visit learners in the workplace to provide training, carry out assessments and to conduct progress reviews.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	6
Number of inspection days	30
Number of learner interviews	57
Number of staff interviews	20
Number of employer interviews	27
Number of subcontractor interviews	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	32
Number of visits	27

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

4. The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, Wolseley's leadership and management are unsatisfactory as is its approach to equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The quality of work-based learning in retailing, customer service and transportation is satisfactory.

GRADES

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		4
Quality assurance		4
Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Warehousing and distribution - Work-based learning for young people	150	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

5. Learners make good progress throughout their modern apprenticeship programmes.

Wolseley offers a structured career route, with good training and prospects for promotion. Some learners are promoted to supervisory positions soon after completing the training programme. Learners gain valuable experience and employability skills and soon become assets to the company.

6. Wolseley has a good retention rate of learners. During the two-year period that the foundation modern apprenticeships have been offered, 150 of the 187 learners who started on the programme have remained in training.

7. Learners' progress with the NVQ and key skills qualification is slow. Target-setting is weak and does not encourage progress. There is not enough assessment in the workplace, or unit accreditation; many learners are in training for some considerable time, with no formal achievement of units.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	4
Total	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	4

8. All learners receive good vocational training. They complete a range of on- and off-the-job learning activities that are well planned, resourced and professionally delivered. On-the-job training is varied and interesting, and learners work in all areas of branch operations.

9. Learners' personal development is good. They develop good customer service skills and deal confidently, competently and courteously with enquiries and requests made by customers, both over the counter and by telephone. Branch managers provide good role models for learners.

10. Learners gain a good range of additional qualifications. They obtain licences in counterbalance, side and reach lift truck driving, and operating woodworking machinery. These licences are highly valued within the industry and by learners.

11. Assessments are satisfactory and learners have a good understanding of their programmes. Portfolios are well structured, with a good range of evidence. There is some over-reliance on evidence from learners' written work, which some learners find difficult. Oral questioning and professional discussions are not used enough as a means of providing evidence for the NVQ.

Leadership and management

12. **The modern apprenticeship programme is a key component of Wolseley's training and development strategy.** The programme is highly regarded across the branch network with high emphasis placed on developing learners' personal and social skills as well as them having the ability to perform successfully in the job and become managers of the future. **Branch managers support the training programme effectively;** many of them consider the programme to be an important and satisfying part of their jobs. They provide good coaching and mentoring support for learners

13. **Target-setting is not used** to guide operations and monitor success. Although there are good informal links with assessors, no standards are set for the rate of progress that should be achieved by learners. Assessors' and verifiers' work is not supervised or monitored sufficiently.

14. **Key skills training is not well managed.** A decision was taken to delay key skills training at the beginning of each programme. All learners' progress in achieving NVQs and key skills qualifications is slow. Assessors have begun to implement key skills training, but there is no formal procedure and they have not been given sufficient guidance to enable them to deliver an effective key skills training programme.

15. Learners' understanding of equal opportunities is satisfactory, with some good examples of support from managers to protect learners from harassment. **Insufficient attention is given, however, to equality and diversity issues within the modern apprenticeship programme.** The company does not routinely review, update and implement its policy. Staff do not receive enough training in equality and diversity and Wolseley does not give sufficient equal opportunities guidance in its recruitment and induction procedures.

16. Wolseley does not monitor equality of opportunity sufficiently. Although Wolseley has recognised that particular groups are under-represented, there has been little commitment and no action to remedy the situation. Recruitment procedures are not monitored to ensure a fair and open process.

17. **Internal verification is weak.** Planning is not comprehensive enough and there is insufficient interim sampling. There is no internal verification of key skills. The internal verification process does not focus sufficiently on sampling individual learners' progress and has not been effective in identifying and rectifying the slow progress made by learners.

18. **Wolseley does not have sufficient formal quality assurance arrangements.** A quality assurance manual has been developed recently, but this lacks sufficient detail to be of any value. The procedures do not contain measures to monitor or audit the operations, neither do they have any indicators or timescales.

19. Arrangements for the initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs are adequate, **but the results are not used sufficiently to identify any support needs; there is**

no strategy to follow should support needs be identified.

20. Overall, the self-assessment process is poor. Branch managers, assessors and learners do not have sufficient input. The self-assessment report did not mention serious weaknesses identified by inspectors, such as the lack of a key skills training policy. The resulting action plan is not thorough enough and has not been shared with training department staff.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- well-developed training strategy
- good involvement of branch managers in training

Weaknesses

- inadequate setting and monitoring of targets
- poor management of key skills training
- insufficient provision for learners with additional support needs
- insufficient attention to equality and diversity
- insufficient equality of opportunity monitoring
- poor quality assurance process

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Warehousing and distribution

Strengths

- good career progression
- very good vocational training
- good range of additional qualifications achieved by learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- delayed introduction of key skills training
- weak internal verification

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT WOLSELEY PLC:

- 'my job - I like every part of it'
- the training programme - 'I like being a modern apprentice, the work is not too difficult'
- 'they help me to gain confidence. It has taught me to look at people in the eye, and deal with customers over the telephone'
- gaining additional qualifications - 'the courses are good'
- having the opportunity to learn something new - 'it sets me up for the future'
- support from my colleagues - 'my mates and my manager help me out'
- learning - 'I learn something new every day'
- off-the-job training - 'the open learning materials and the outdoor activities course'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK WOLSELEY PLC COULD IMPROVE:

- the amount of assessment opportunities - 'we need more regular assessment visits'
- the travelling distance to training courses - 'stopping over at the hotel does my head in'
- the amount of product training
- the training sessions - 'sitting down and listening all day is boring, we need more action in training sessions'

KEY CHALLENGES FOR WOLSELEY PLC:

- increase the frequency of assessment visits to the branches significantly
- develop formal monitoring systems
- review and evaluate the subcontracting arrangements
- improve the management and delivery of key skills training
- maintain the quality of vocational training
- raise the profile of equality and diversity through staff training and thorough monitoring
- develop an equal opportunities management system giving it the same emphasis as health and safety
- improve the management information system

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4**Strengths**

- well-developed training strategy
- good involvement of branch managers in training

Weaknesses

- inadequate setting and monitoring of targets
- poor management of key skills training
- insufficient provision for learners with additional support needs
- insufficient attention to equality and diversity
- insufficient equality of opportunity monitoring
- poor quality assurance process

21. Wolseley has a good strategy for the training and development of its employees. The company defines training as a key component of its business strategy, and has recently updated its training and development strategy. The modern apprenticeship programme is a key aspect of this strategy which includes a wide range of training programmes and short courses. The company's aim is to develop young people as successful and valued employees. Learners have a clear route from their modern apprenticeship programmes to further courses and management training programmes. Particular emphasis is given to the development of personal and social skills as, for example, through the two-week residential outdoor activities course attended by all learners. Before any branch can employ a learner under the scheme, the branch and its manager are evaluated to ensure that they have the time and expertise to provide the necessary support. Branch managers give good support to learners; many consider their work with learners an important and satisfying part of their job. Branch managers and assessors have good relationships. Not all managers have a good understanding of the NVQ requirements and many are not fully aware of the key skills component of the modern apprenticeship framework.

22. Management arrangements for the programme are not thorough enough. Assessors' performances are not monitored effectively. Few targets are set to guide operations, and there is insufficient supervision or monitoring of assessors' work. Informal links between assessors are well developed and provide a useful channel for sharing and developing good practice. The team meets with the training manager approximately every six weeks in order to discuss progress with the programme and any difficulties, but these meetings do not have an agenda and decisions are not recorded. No standards are set for learners' rate of progress. The targets set for learners are often undemanding and many progress slowly, but no action has been taken to rectify this situation. Learners' progress is not monitored to allow analysis of their performance, or to give managers an indication

of possible completion dates. There are not enough policies and procedures to set standards and give guidance to staff in the performance of their duties.

23. Wolseley employs a subcontractor to carry out assessments in one region of the country, and to provide internal verification for the scheme as a whole. This work is not formally monitored and the arrangements for receiving information from the subcontractor are weak. For example, Wolseley does not hold copies of internal verifier reports, or records of internal verification. Management controls for business operations are weak. The company recruited far more learners than predicted in 2003, but did not evaluate the effect of this on its ability to visit all learners regularly. Some learners have not had sufficient assessments to enable them to progress.

24. The management of key skills training is poor. When the programme began in 2002, it was recognised that the team did not have the skills or materials to deliver this aspect of the modern apprenticeship programme. It was therefore decided to postpone this component of the course until the second year of training. However, the company has not developed a policy for the delivery of key skills training. There is no guidance for assessors as to how it should be delivered. Wolseley has subscribed to an online service offering key skills exercises and resources for learners, but has not used them yet. Assessors have received some training, but not enough to enable them to design and implement an effective programme. Some assignments have been introduced which will enable learners to demonstrate key skills but learners' work roles are not used sufficiently to develop and assess key skills. Learners and their branch managers are not sure what is required in order to complete key skills training. Management has not set clear targets and many learners have now achieved, or nearly achieved, their NVQ without making progress with their key skills.

25. Wolseley has no strategy for the provision of additional learning support for learners who need help with literacy, numeracy or language. Wolseley states in its recruitment material that learners should preferably have general certificate of secondary education passes at grade C or above, but not all learners have these qualifications. All learners carry out a diagnostic assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills at induction. Where support needs are identified, they cannot be met effectively. The company's assessors are not qualified to provide literacy and numeracy skills support. Some branch managers provide assistance, but a number of learners are unable to continue with aspects of the programme, such as the open learning modules covering product knowledge and health and safety.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

26. The equal opportunities policy, together with procedures to deal with grievances, bullying and harassment, are contained in the staff handbook. This is issued to all staff when they are inducted into the company. The policy includes a statement about equal access to training. In 2003, a document entitled 'The way we work' was produced which gives an update on Wolseley's business principles and the company's desirable ethics. This is a useful document which updates and supersedes some of the policies on harassment and sets out to promote diversity and inclusivity.

27. Wolseley employs an independent organisation, which gives staff a confidential service to report concerns to anonymously, if they feel unable to deal with them internally; linked to this is a 24-hour confidential telephone service. Wolseley is aware of its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and has carried out an audit of all its premises and made reasonable adjustments, including the installation of ramps for people with limited mobility.

28. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is checked at the 12-weekly review. Learners have a basic, but satisfactory, understanding of equality of opportunity issues. They are aware of their rights and responsibilities and all have contracts of employment. Support for learners varies among the various branches, with some good examples of learners' individual needs being recognised and accommodated. For example, in one branch, flexible working arrangements have been arranged to accommodate a learner's particular needs. In other branches, female learners are protected from harassment as supervisory staff challenge inappropriate language and remarks made by customers.

29. Insufficient attention is given to equality and diversity issues. The equal opportunities policy is not routinely reviewed and has not been updated since 1996. For example, the policy does not reflect current legislation and relevant Acts. The policy is not clearly displayed and staff make little reference to it in their work. Wolseley does not fully implement its equal opportunities policy. Plans to take positive action to remedy the under-representation of identified groups have not been carried out. Staff are not trained and made aware of equality and diversity issues; there is insufficient understanding and appreciation of the types of learners who may be recruited to widen participation. The recruitment guidance given to branch managers contains no reference to equality and diversity. There is little reference to it in the learners' starter pack. The agreement with the subcontractor makes no reference to ensure good equality practice. Monthly internal verification meetings make no reference to supporting learners with particular assessment requirements. The policy for dealing with discrimination and inappropriate conduct with regard to race and gender is unclear. There is a passive approach to these aspects in training sessions, and inspectors observed discriminatory language in training sessions that went unchecked.

30. The company does not conduct sufficient equal opportunities monitoring. This was partly recognised in the self-assessment report. Wolseley does not monitor the particular constitution of the workforce and routinely use local and national statistics for benchmarking purposes. Although Wolseley is aware of the under-representation of particular groups of learners, it has shown insufficient commitment and action to remedy this situation. Wolseley has no links with external organisations to help them redress the balance. Neither the implementation of the policy nor the workplaces are monitored sufficiently to ensure a safe environment, free from discriminatory practices or inappropriate conduct. In some branches, inappropriate materials are posted, making it an unsuitable environment for female learners.

31. The recruitment process is not open or transparent enough. Wolseley does not

analyse applicants' information or monitor unsuccessful applications to check whether the process was fair and objective. Data collected at the recruitment stage is not analysed or used as a basis to plan further action.

32. Wolseley does not use management information to monitor the relative retention and progression rates of different groups of learners, for example the progression of women and men throughout the 1,400 branches.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

33. Feedback with regard to the operation and quality of the programme is gathered from a number of sources, such as regular management meetings with the assessors. The programme manager meets regularly with managers from around the country to share information. Some branch visits are carried out to monitor the training. Improvements have been made as a result of these discussions, such as to the format and duration of off-the-job training sessions. However, quality assurance arrangements are weak. These informal measures are not strengthened by any formal quality assurance processes. The scheme has no quality assurance policy, and a procedures manual has only recently been produced. The procedures in the manual cover most aspects of the learners' experience, but they lack detail. For example, the procedure for staff induction includes just four points, and does not specify the content of the induction programme, but merely how long it will last. None of the procedures contain measures to monitor or audit their operation, or indicators of standards or timescales. At their present stage of development they are not effective in setting standards, or ensuring that they are met.

34. Managers conduct some observations of assessors carrying out their duties, but these are irregular and not recorded. The training department does not conduct an annual review of its activities, although these are discussed regularly at team meetings. The self-assessment report was written by the programme manager, using the information available from informal monitoring activities. Assessors, branch managers or learners have little input. The company collects feedback from learners following their outdoor activities course experiences, but not at other stages of the programme. The report identified some of the weaknesses found by inspectors, such as the slow progress made by learners, but did not identify other serious weaknesses, such as no key skills training policy. The resulting action plan is not thorough enough and has not been brought to the attention of staff working in the training department. Overall, the self-assessment process is poor.

35. Staff in the training department have regular job discussion interviews with their line managers. These give managers an opportunity to provide feedback and for staff development needs to be identified and met. Assessors have undergone a wide range of training and development courses to help them in their jobs.

36. Management of the subcontractor responsible for internal verification is weak. Wolseley has a well-established and positive relationship with the subcontractor's staff, but does not receive sufficient information about their work and its results. Internal verification is weak. The sampling plan for verification does not ensure that all learners

WOLSELEY UK

are included before the end of their programmes. Assessors have regular meetings with the verifier, but the records of the meetings are very brief and the decisions taken have not been incorporated as effective guidance for assessors. The feedback to assessors following verification of learners' portfolios is cursory and inadequate to promote improvements in the quality of assessment decisions.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Warehousing and distribution - Work-based learning for young people	150	3

Warehousing and distribution

Strengths

- good career progression
- very good vocational training
- good range of additional qualifications achieved by learners

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards achievement of modern apprenticeship frameworks
- delayed introduction of key skills training
- weak internal verification

Achievement and standards

37. Learners progress well in their chosen careers. Throughout their modern apprenticeship programme, learners gain valuable experience of working in warehouses, general offices and on the sales counter. Learners use this experience to identify with their managers which section they are best suited to work in. Some learners have taken on additional responsibilities within their branches and several have been promoted to supervisory positions on completion of their branch training programmes. Retention of learners is good, with 150 of the 187 learners who started training during the past two years still in training. This was recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Although no learners have yet achieved their full modern apprenticeship framework, 52 per cent of second-year learners have achieved their NVQs. Wolseley offers learners a structured career with good training and promotion prospects. Learners appreciate the investment made in them and are motivated to achieve their goals.

38. Learners are making slow progress in achieving their foundation modern apprenticeship frameworks. This was partially recognised in the self-assessment report. There is insufficient long- or short-term target-setting. Individual learning plans contain target dates for the achievement of internal courses, but do not plan specific targets for completion of NVQs or key skills qualifications. Long-term targets can sometimes be vague. Targets for the achievement of individual NVQ units are not set by the assessment planning process. Targets in action plans are not challenging, seldom have

timescales and are often generalised. In some cases, assessors do not visit frequently enough, and a few learners have been visited only twice in six months. Learners do not have enough opportunities to achieve NVQ units. Most first-year learners who began last October have not achieved any units of their qualification. All learners receive the same period of training regardless of their prior experience or individual learning requirements.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2003-04		2002-03														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	130		57													
Retained*	0		0														
Successfully completed	0		0														
Still in learning	104		46														

*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

39. Vocational training is very good. Learners attend a number of vocational courses, including personal organisation; counter sales; warehousing; health and safety; and a two-part telesales module. A personal development course at an outdoor activities centre is part of the overall framework of the training course. Programmes are taught by vocationally competent Wolseley staff, who hold, or are working towards, qualifications in training. Good resources are available and trainers give professional presentations using data projectors. Clearly stated aims and objectives for each course are confirmed at the beginning and end of the training. Trainers have a good rapport with the learners, whose needs are met by engaging them in a variety of group and individual activities. On-the-job training is well planned and thorough and includes shadowing the more experienced members of staff.

40. Learners work in all areas of the branch before they make a joint decision with their manager about their strengths and preferences for their future job roles. Managers support learners with coaching and mentoring. Many managers have completed their own branch training programme and are able to help with research for the NVQ. They help learners with writing skills and spelling and check learners' mental arithmetic abilities at interview. Managers are usually involved in learners' progress reviews and amend the programme to ensure that development needs are fully met. Learners' personal skills are well developed throughout the training course, they gain confidence as they learn and use new skills in the workplace. Learners demonstrate competence and confidence when giving customers advice about products and services. Many learners speak positively of the outdoor residential course and how it helped them to develop in their

work roles. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report.

41. Learners have the opportunity to gain a good range of additional qualifications. They follow an open learning course in construction materials distribution and handling which is complementary to the modern apprenticeship framework. Completion of each module of this award triggers a financial incentive which increases with the level of achievement. Some learners have completed first-aid courses. Licences in counterbalance, side and reach lift truck driving can be obtained when the learner reaches the required age and skill level. Learners, depending on their job in the company, can achieve additional units in customer service and administration qualifications; they may also achieve awards in operating woodworking machinery. Learners are given the opportunity to improve their information and communications technology skills by attending a local college and are able to work towards key skills at a higher level than required by their modern apprenticeship. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report.

42. The assessment and marking of work is satisfactory and done with the learner present in order to give feedback regarding quality and sufficiency. Portfolios are well structured and clearly laid out. Learners understand the evidence requirements and are easily able to locate evidence in their portfolios. A range of evidence is included in the portfolios, including observation reports, written questions and answers and photographic evidence. There is too much reliance on gaining evidence from learners' written work, which some learners find difficult. Assessors do not encourage enough guided or professional discussion with learners. Although employers are countersigning learners' work and completing competence tick boxes, there are not enough detailed witness testimonies. Assessment meets awarding body requirements. This was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report.

43. Training and learning resources are satisfactory. Assessors are trained, or being trained, to industry standards and have a detailed knowledge of all areas of the learners' jobs. Assessors have been recruited from within the company and have often held positions in the branches. They are encouraged to develop their skills as assessors, receiving detailed and professionally produced open learning workbooks. They are often allowed additional time within the branches for portfolio-building. Health and safety is strongly promoted and reinforced within the company. Learners are provided with relevant protective equipment and demonstrate good health and safety awareness.

44. Wolseley's support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors have a clear understanding of the occupational area and use this knowledge to engage the learner. Learners and managers value the assessors' visits, which are scheduled at approximately eight-week intervals, although they do not always achieve this frequency. Action plans are agreed at the end of each visit. Learners receive verbal feedback about their progression in the job. Progress reviews are carried out satisfactorily, although not always on time. All learners receive a satisfactory induction during their first week of employment. Individual learning plans are standardised, they do not reflect individual's needs and are not always updated.

45. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed adequately during induction to

the programme. All learners have their literacy and numeracy levels tested by using basic skills assessment tests. Assessors record these results in the individual learning plan, but do not discuss them with the learner. The results are not used sufficiently to identify any additional help the learner may require. At the time of inspection, no learners were identified as having additional learning or support needs. Although branch managers and assessors provide some help for learners, Wolseley has no strategy for supplying additional support.

46. The delivery of key skills training is poor. Learners on the first year of their training programme do not complete any key skills training or assessment. Managers and learners often have little awareness of what key skills are. Learners in their second year of training receive key skills projects which, although work related, do not meet individual learners' needs and the same project is used for many learners. Routine tasks completed by learners at work are not used sufficiently to provide evidence of key skills. Learners receive insufficient key skills training even when entered for key skills tests. The company correctly identifies learners' proxy qualifications, and learning plans record exemptions from key skills tests. Assessors have received some guidance in key skills training, although none have achieved their own key skills qualifications. Wolseley has recently purchased software programmes to help with the delivery and understanding of key skills training, but the programmes have not been fully used. This weakness was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

47. The findings of the self-assessment report match some of the inspectors' judgements, although there is some over-emphasis of strengths which inspectors found to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors also found some additional weaknesses. The company evaluates some parts of the training programme, particularly the outdoor activities course. Assessors receive appraisals regularly and have appropriate qualifications for the positions they hold. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity and are aware of the company's complaints and appeals procedures.

48. Internal verification is weak. Wolseley has no overall strategy for internal verification, although it has a brief policy. Although internal verification planning takes place, it is not comprehensive and covers only the internal verification of NVQ units, not assessors, learners or workplaces. Learners' work receives insufficient verification during the first year and there is very little interim internal verification, although portfolios do receive a final verification. This covers all units of the NVQ; the resulting reports contain insufficient detail. There is no process for ensuring that any action points are completed. Key skills are not currently included in the internal verification sampling strategy. Standardisation meetings with assessors are held and are valued by assessors, but any resulting actions are poorly recorded. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.