

INSPECTION REPORT

Charter Training Services Limited

27 October 2006



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Charter Training Services Limited (Charter) is a privately owned company based in Macclesfield. It also has offices in Altrincham, Chester, Crewe, Hanley, Northwich, Warrington and Widnes. At the time of the inspection there are 98 learners in administration and customer service apprenticeship programmes. There are a few learners in accounting, information and communication technology (ICT) and call centre operations. The company also has contracts with Jobcentre Plus, learndirect and it also offers some private training.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Charter's leadership and management are satisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. The provision in business administration and customer service is satisfactory.

3. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The process is satisfactorily managed. However, while consultation takes place with all staff, those who are involved in training apprentices do not fully participate. The report was reasonably accurate, as were the grades, although some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Analysis of quality improvement is not fully developed and the presentation of data to evaluate success rates is not in the prescribed format.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** The overall framework success rate has increased in the past three years, and is judged to be satisfactory for 2005-06. Improvements have been made to the main training processes. Quality assurance and audit procedures are effective. Systematic analysis and planning for improvements is not fully developed.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR CHARTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- continue to improve the overall success rates
- continue to improve the effectiveness of the learning sessions
- introduce procedures to assure the standard of employers' equality and diversity practices
- develop the self-assessment process
- introduce more systematic arrangements for quality improvement

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Business administration and law			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Administration Apprenticeships for young people	71	3	
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	27	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. Charter's provision in business administration, customer service and leadership and management were inspected over four days by three inspectors. The inspection was the only visit.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	17
Number of staff interviewed	22
Number of employers interviewed	11
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	14

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- good performance management
- good development of staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal planning for quality improvement
- insufficiently developed procedures for monitoring employers' equal opportunities practices

Business administration and law

Strengths

- good development of work-related skills
- particularly effective individual learning sessions

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners
- insufficient recording of action plans

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT CHARTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- 'helpful and friendly staff who work hard and motivate you'
- 'helped me break my job role down and better understand it'
- 'made me think'
- 'gave me pride in achievement'
- assessors can be contacted easily
- the way learning is related to work
- learning new skills

WHAT LEARNERS THINK CHARTER TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- 'more guaranteed time at work to do my NVQ'
- more opportunity to meet others doing same course

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good performance management
- good development of staff

Weaknesses

- insufficient formal planning for quality improvement
- insufficiently developed procedures for monitoring employers' equal opportunities practices

6. Charter has particularly good performance management arrangements for work-based learning assessors. Each assessor has annual targets, which are broken down into monthly targets. These are then closely monitored at individual meetings between the work-based manager and individual assessors. During the individual sessions, assessors produce progress sheets for each of their learners and these sheets are the basis for a detailed discussion about the learners' progress. The work-based learning manager also audits learners' files and checks the quality of documents. The meetings provide good support for assessors and include discussions on their welfare and continuing professional development. Assessors receive an incentive bonus when learners complete their frameworks. The overall framework success rate has improved since 2003-04. For 2005-06 the rate is satisfactory, based on provisional data from the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

7. Charter develops its staff well. At strategic level, Charter has recently developed a plan which matches every member of staff against essential and desirable job role qualifications, and against the requirements from each funding stream to identify whether staff have the relevant qualification, are working towards it or need to do it in the future. The company is very clear about how staff development can contribute to the overall business of the company and their own professional development. Each member of staff has an annual appraisal, which identifies individual training needs. The company creates good opportunities for progression. Sixty per cent of current staff were once learners. Staff are well supported in their requests for training. On average, members of the work-based learning team have been on five training events in the past year. There are good examples of staff being supported to gain level 4 qualifications. Staff keep themselves professionally updated. Staff who attend training events share the information with other staff.

8. Business planning was a weakness at the previous inspection, but it is now satisfactory. Charter has a three-year development plan which includes a good outline of regional contexts and is responsive to the need of local employers. It also includes targets for participation and achievement for learners by disability, ethnicity and gender. Each of Charter's regional centres has its own business plan, which reflects their local contexts. A whole-company business plan identifies 10 key priorities. However, some of the statements are vague and monitoring responsibilities are not always clear.

9. Communications within Charter are satisfactory. Staff have good access to senior managers and are able to approach them on matters of concern. There are regular team meetings across the organisation. Assessors meet quarterly to share good practice at standardisation meetings. Each centre has regular meetings which include all relevant staff including assessors. There is good e-mail contact between staff. Managers meet bi-monthly for operational meetings, which have fixed agendas covering quality improvement and equal opportunities. Meetings are generally well minuted with appropriate action points. Charter has satisfactory links with external organisations, and staff are involved in local and regional meetings with other training providers. Links with employers are generally good.

10. The management of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Charter has a clear procedure for identifying and supporting learners who have additional learning needs. Learners who do not have the key skills entry requirements for the programme or the general certificates of secondary education equivalent are required to take a basic skills assessment. Assessors are responsible for supporting learners who have additional learning needs. Additional support is recorded on a learning support plan, which is used alongside the learners' individual learning plan. The number of learners who need additional learning support is very small. Resources are satisfactory overall and include specialist resources for those with additional needs.

11. The management of health and safety is satisfactory. Recruitment liaison officers carry out a full health and safety assessment of all new employers. If there are areas of weakness the recruitment liaison officers ensure that they are dealt with in a timely fashion. The assessment includes a special section on management of a young person's health and safety for apprentices who are under 18 years of age. Charter has decided that all staff will undergo Criminal Records Bureau checks in a phased plan which has already begun.

12. The use of management information is satisfactory. The company currently uses two systems, one to monitor contractual requirements primarily and the other to monitor the learners' progress. Three members of staff have access to the management information system and regular reports are produced for the work-based learning manager. The data manager produces regular quarterly reports for the management team on equality statistics, covering participation and achievement as well as early leavers.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

13. Learners have an appropriate individual induction which includes sessions on developing their understanding of equality and rights and responsibilities. This is followed up with further training and reviews, although a few of the questions used in reviews do not promote discussions and reinforce understanding. Charter has recognised this and has plans to improve this aspect of reviews.

14. Staff demonstrate an appropriate and inclusive style in their work with learners. There is a set of principles that are shared with learners and which guide the way Charter works with learners. Learners believe these are followed well. Staff meetings regularly include awareness and development for staff in a range of equality and diversity topics. Staff also participate in formal training courses to develop their knowledge and understanding.

15. Charter has identified the need to improve participation rates by learners from minority ethnic groups and other specific groups and has set realistic targets. Currently, Charter is not meeting the target it has set for participation by minority ethnic groups. Charter effectively monitors recruitment, progress and achievement, although not the rate of conversion from enquiry to application for specific groups. Charter has a range of links and partnerships with relevant organisations and takes part in promotional activities to widen participation, although there has been little effect as yet.

16. Charter has an appropriate equality and diversity policy and action plan, although the action plan does not include measurable objectives to support planned activities. Procedures are in place to implement the policy. Marketing and promotional materials have been reviewed and improved to provide suitable images.

17. Access to training facilities for people with restricted mobility varies. For example, in Macclesfield there is suitable access, but in some other centres access is restricted. Charter is aware of these restrictions and facilities are reviewed and improved where possible. Access is seen as a priority in future moves to new premises.

18. Arrangements for monitoring equal opportunities with employers are still not fully developed. This was a weakness at the previous inspection and, although Charter has changed its approach, some deficiencies remain. For example, there are no formal procedures to monitor employers' practices over time. Although the intention is that employers are involved in the equal opportunities part of reviews with learners, this is not always the case and this is not formally monitored by Charter. Some checks are made, such as on employers' equal opportunities policies. If employers do not have their own policies, Charter offers advice and makes its policy available to the employer. Charter recognises that the monitoring of employers' practices is not fully developed and has plans to introduce a thorough and systematic process.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

19. Charter's quality improvement arrangements have generally been effective in improving the quality of the work-based learning provision. Charter has improved the overall framework success rates which for 2005-06 are satisfactory overall based on provisional LSC data. It has also resolved most of the key weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Charter had good audit procedures at the previous inspection and the focus on audits is still thorough. The quality system sets out how and when quality processes are checked and covers the major stages of a learner's experience. Appropriate documents are available to staff on the intranet to support the quality assurance arrangements.

20. The self-assessment process is broadly satisfactory. Managers meet to discuss strengths and weaknesses relating to the Common Inspection Framework and send a draft to centres for staff to make comments. However, key staff members, such as assessors, are not directly involved in the process. Employers and learners are not directly involved, although their feedback is used in the report. The development plan covers the major weaknesses but has a number of vague actions that are not sufficiently quantified. Monitoring responsibilities are not always clear.

21. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. There are clear, up-to-date policies that set out procedures and practices for internal verifiers and assessors to follow.

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Learners' portfolios are sampled every six months. The work-based learning manager carries out observations of assessment and gives appropriate feedback. The internal verification sampling plan includes a clear timetable for internal verification activities and this is understood by assessors. The internal verifier follows up delays promptly. Four of the current eight assessors have internal verification qualifications and a further three are working towards the qualification.

22. Charter does not always ensure that key quality improvement processes lead to an improvement in the overall quality of provision. For example, observations of assessors are noted in detail and developmental feedback is given to individual assessors. However, the results of all observations are not collated or sufficiently analysed. The findings are not systematically shared and trends are not identified to improve the quality of training. Charter also carries out employer and learner evaluations twice a year and the results are collated. Where specific employers or learners comment on a weakness, it is followed up with the employer or learner. However, the results have not been sufficiently analysed or used to make interventions to improve the quality of provision.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration and law

Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Administration Apprenticeships for young people	71	3
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people	27	3

23. Learners are mainly recruited through marketing to employers, word of mouth, referral from Connexions and advertising campaigns. They are employed in a range of organisations including solicitors, accountants, call centres, estate agents, manufacturing companies and local authorities. Learners are able to join all programmes at any time of the year.

24. The induction is carried out over eight weeks and includes an initial assessment of literacy, numeracy, language and key skills as well as consideration of learners' interests and motivation. Training is provided by Charter's staff in the workplace and includes individual training sessions to support national vocational qualification (NVQ) achievement, key skills development and technical certificate training. Training in job-related skills is provided by employers.

25. Eight assessors visit the learners to carry out training and assessment every three to four weeks. Progress reviews are completed every 12 weeks with the learner and the employer.

Strengths

- good development of work-related skills
- particularly effective individual learning sessions

Weaknesses

- slow progress by some learners
- insufficient recording of action plans

Achievement and standards

26. Learners develop good work-related skills. Charter works effectively with employers to ensure that learners quickly establish constructive relationships with work colleagues. Learners experience a good range of work situations that allow them to gain confidence in a wide range of new tasks. They are effectively able to apply these skills in a range of situations. Many employers have recognised this improvement in learners' personal effectiveness and have given them increased responsibilities. Some learners work between departments or premises and are able to cope well with the differing expectations made of them. Learners report improved personal confidence and self-esteem in applying their new skills. Within their work role, learners often attend a

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range of courses provided by employers. Learners are able to use the courses to enhance their work roles by taking on additional responsibilities. For example, one learner attended a specialist spreadsheet course and is now responsible for disseminating its use to other staff. One learner who attended a communication course reported that she has developed more assertiveness skills and is more effective in her role. Employers value the good workplace skills that learners use in their daily work. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.

27. Framework success rates for business administration and law are satisfactory overall. Between 2003-04 and 2004-05 the framework success rate for apprentices was satisfactory and well above the national average. Provisional LSC data for 2005-06 indicates that overall framework success rates for administration apprentices have further improved. Overall framework success rates for advanced apprentices have not been as good in the past, but for 2005-06, provisional LSC data indicates that they have improved and are higher than 2003-04.

28. Approximately 10 per cent of business administration learners are making slow progress. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report. In some cases, learners are making slow progress even though they have been training for a significant period of time. Charter continues to support learners who have exceeded their expected completion date. Charter has introduced a monitoring system which now highlights slow progress and has put suitable support action in place, although it is too early to see the effect on progress rates overall. The current progress of most other learners is satisfactory or better.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	82	63	46	40	28
		timely	65	38	30	20	18
	2004-05	overall	48	38	47	21	31
		timely	41	17	35	12	23
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	86	70	51	52	37
		timely	72	31	25	22	22
	2004-05	overall	80	69	56	56	45
		timely	90	31	35	37	28

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

29. Charter provides learners with particularly effective individual learning sessions which are carried out at employers' premises. These sessions are well planned and are supported by good use of learning materials and effective coaching. Staff demonstrate a highly appropriate style, using good questioning techniques. They use their experience of the sector well to enhance the learning. Projects are used effectively to integrate work

contexts, tasks and learning. Charter's staff encourage and motivate learners and learners respond well and participate in these sessions and carry out learning tasks between visits. Learners demonstrate good understanding. For example, one learner has produced a thorough and well-illustrated set of guidelines for a new task that he and colleagues follow at work. In doing this, and with practice, the learner has become competent in this task. The employer has recognised the value of this and has given the learner more responsibility which has further developed the learners' confidence.

30. Assessment practices are satisfactory. All learners are assessed in the workplace, although in a few cases, learners have not had visits because of staff absences. Assessors use a suitable range of methods that include observations, professional discussion and questioning techniques. Some learners can access an electronic communication system to submit their work for assessment. Learners value the quick feedback on progression and assessment decisions that the system allows. Assessment documents are suitably maintained. Assessors maintain productive working relationships with learners. Portfolios are well organised and learners are able to assess their progress against the required standards. Portfolios contain a satisfactory range and quantity of evidence. The quality is satisfactory overall, but some evidence contains grammatical errors that are not identified or corrected by assessors.

31. Most of the training is carried out in the workplace. All learners can access Charter's training centres and a few gain additional nationally recognised qualifications through this route. Learners have good access to paper and electronic learning resources for independent study. Most learners have adequate access to ICT equipment at their workplace to support their learning. However, not all learners have sufficient allocated work time to develop their NVQ portfolio.

32. Initial assessment is satisfactory. The results of initial assessment are recorded on learners' individual learning plans. Charter provides timely additional support for learners who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Support is provided in the workplace and at local Charter offices by appropriately qualified staff. Induction is carried out over eight weeks and is satisfactory. It is effectively used to give learners an appropriate understanding of the demands of their programme. Charter celebrates learners' success. There are satisfactory arrangements to provide independent information and advice during the recruitment and induction of learners. Learners have good access to individual personal support from Charter's staff.

33. Learners are employed in a wide range of appropriate workplaces. They are able to carry out roles and responsibilities that are relevant to their programme. The extent to which employers are involved in learners' training varies, but is satisfactory overall. Most have a satisfactory or better understanding of how they can support the learner during their programme. Employers are appropriately involved in progress reviews.

Leadership and management

34. The management of programmes is satisfactory. Communication is satisfactory and regular team meetings are held. These are supplemented by frequent and effective individual review meetings between assessors and their manager. Assessors have personal targets for learner achievement and these are appropriately monitored. Data is adequately used to aid planning and decision-making for improvement.

35. All staff are suitably qualified, experienced and occupationally competent. They are able to access a good range of relevant staff training and development. Annual appraisals effectively identify further areas for improvement.

36. Staff have an adequate understanding of Charter's arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity. They have received recent and relevant training on equality and diversity. Learners receive a suitable introduction to equality and diversity during their induction and this is followed up in reviews and learning sessions. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They are regularly and effectively reminded of the means by which they can raise a concern. Complaints are dealt with in a confidential manner that is satisfactory to all parties.

37. Quality improvement arrangements are adequate. Strategies for internal verification and assessment practice are satisfactory. Internal verification processes are suitably planned and recorded. Written feedback to assessors from internal verifiers includes appropriate actions for improvement. Regular and frequent meetings are held to share good practice. Recording of the outcomes of these meetings is satisfactory. Five staff have the full qualification for internal verification and three are working towards the qualification. Charter uses a biannual questionnaire to gain feedback from learners. The responses are analysed and evaluated. Improvements to the equality of the learners' experience have been introduced.

38. Staff were consulted about the current self-assessment report and have an appropriate understanding of the report's content. Communication is effective and ensures that staff are updated on achievements relating to the development plan. The report adequately considered the questions in the Common Inspection Framework but the data analysis to support judgements on achievement was not in the recommended format.

