

INSPECTION REPORT

Huyton Churches Training Services

10 August 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*

INSPECTION REPORT

Huyton Churches Training Services

Contents

Summary

Description of the provider	1
Overall effectiveness	1
Key challenges for Huyton Churches Training Services	1
Grades	2
About the inspection	2
What learners like about Huyton Churches Training Services	4
What learners think Huyton Churches Training Services could improve	4

Detailed inspection findings

Leadership and management	5
Equality of opportunity	6
Quality improvement	7
Health, public services and care	9
Construction, planning and the built environment	13

INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Huyton Churches Training Services (HCTS) is a non-profit making limited company and registered charity based in Huyton, Merseyside. It provides work-based learning for young people in childcare and floor covering. A board of directors and 23 staff manage and deliver the programmes. Currently there are 66 learners. Of these, 55 are on apprenticeship programmes funded by the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Eleven learners are funded by European Social Fund monies to take a 13-week course. Some learners are employed, others are on placement, and others are hoping to progress into employment. For 2005-06, HCTS's publicly funded work constituted 55 per cent of its total business.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

2. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** HCTS's leadership and management are good, as are its arrangements for quality improvement and equality of opportunity. The provision is good in health, public services and care, and in construction, planning and the built environment.

3. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process was inclusive, and the report is critical and evaluative. It is accurate in identifying many of the strengths and weaknesses found by inspectors.

4. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Actions plans are in place and very well monitored. HCTS has been effective in developing and implementing a range of actions to improve the quality of provision and learners' success.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR HUYTON CHURCHES TRAINING SERVICES:

- improve success rates
- develop employers' engagement
- implement staff training around equality and diversity
- attract more learners from under-represented groups
- improve progress reviews
- improve monitoring of additional support

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management		2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		2
Quality improvement		2

Health, public services and care		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Early years		2
Apprenticeships for young people	39	2

Construction, planning and the built environment		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Construction crafts		2
Apprenticeships for young people	16	2
Other government-funded provision	11	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

5. Health, public services and care was reported on with a contributory grade for early years. Construction, planning and the built environment was also reported on with two contributory grades for construction crafts. Three inspectors visited the provider over four days in August 2006.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	26
Number of staff interviewed	15
Number of employers interviewed	15
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	9
Number of visits	1

Leadership and Management

Strengths

- good strategic planning
- particularly effective management of training
- good initiatives to improve quality
- good actions to promote equality of opportunity and diversity

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Health, public services and care

Early years

Strengths

- good and improving success rates
- good progress for learners
- very good on- and off-the-job training
- productive involvement with employers
- highly effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Construction, planning and the built environment

Construction crafts

Strengths

- good achievement and progression into employment
- good practical skills development
- good off-the-job training
- excellent resources
- highly effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- shortcomings in review process for apprenticeship programmes

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT HUYTON CHURCHES TRAINING SERVICES:

- learning different ideas and skills each day
- 'the staff get the best out of us'
- 'the excellent materials at HCTS - as good as what we use on the job'
- driving lessons to help them get jobs
- a good set of tools to start you off
- the very supportive tutors
- the really good and enjoyable teaching
- the good work placements with lots of opportunities

WHAT LEARNERS THINK HUYTON CHURCHES TRAINING SERVICES COULD IMPROVE:

- the space to work in the workshop - you can't always find any

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good strategic planning
- particularly effective management of training
- good initiatives to improve quality
- good actions to promote equality of opportunity and diversity

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

6. Strategic planning is good. The detailed business and development plan takes into account national, regional and local priorities. Key targets have been identified in an action plan that is monitored and updated on a regular basis. Senior management are very well informed about developments and challenges in the sector, particularly through effective networking and collaborative initiatives with partners and external organisations. The vision and mission of the organisation clearly encourages staff and managers to work well with the learners in obtaining and sustaining suitable employment. HCTS is responsive and plays a valuable part in meeting the needs of both the local community and its learners. Its strategy for withdrawal from provision and introduction of new provision has proved most effective.

7. HCTS has withdrawn from all the construction provision previously offered and replaced it with the more successful provision in floor covering, in response to a shortage of floor fitters. Learners' achievement on the new programmes is much improved and progression into employment is good. The provision meets the needs of the long-term unemployed in the area and effectively promotes social and educational inclusion. Several members of staff are currently engaged in projects to promote work-based learning, to meet local community needs and to improve employers' engagement. The chief executive is part of a partnership project to build a training and employment academy. The training manager attends healthcare forums to ensure knowledge and good practice are shared between providers. Other staff attend local schools, job fairs and recruitment events to raise the profile of HCTS as a provider of training opportunities. The organisation provides free training for employers in the area of floor covering to encourage more people to take up apprenticeships. Senior management meet every two months with a board of directors who have a clear focus on training and the needs of the learners. There is a joint concern to encourage community engagement and enable people to develop. Senior management and the directors are effective in planning for and securing additional funding to support initiatives that directly effect learners.

8. The management of training is particularly effective. The training departments are reviewed regularly and actions are taken to ensure consistency and the sharing of best practice. Improved arrangements for recruitment and induction ensure that learners are on the right programme. Learners are very well supported in all aspects of their learning experience, and their progress is monitored effectively. Most staff are well qualified and

vocationally experienced, and make meaningful use of the good resources available to support learning. The lecture rooms and computer suites are very well equipped, and staff can use a number of vehicles on their regular and frequent visits to support learners and meet with employers. Learning is planned to meet employers' needs and takes account of local labour market needs. Most employers are also actively engaged in the learning process. They are informed about the programme requirements, their responsibilities and the needs of the learners. A comprehensive information pack about work-based learning is provided to employers. Employers provide a good working environment for learners to develop their skills and knowledge. HCTS's placement and health and safety officers work effectively with employers to monitor the workplaces, carry out risk assessments and deal with issues that are affecting or could affect the learners' experience.

9. Communication is shared effectively across the different functions of the organisation. Staff are well informed about developments and changes taking place. HCTS uses a company newsletter and website to inform a wide range of audiences about developments and success stories. Regular minuted meetings are held which focus well on required actions. Through good sharing of information and the appraisal process, the business objectives are communicated to staff. All staff have an annual appraisal to review progress against targets. This is supported by individual reviews every six months. A clear emphasis is placed on staff development and targets for staff to achieve. A learning plan details the development activities that staff are being encouraged and supported to take part in. All staff have a detailed job description and are clear about their roles and responsibilities in the organisation. The staff are well established, motivated, committed and informed about the organisation's direction and objectives. The management information system is supportive in providing data and reports that allow staff at all levels to review critically the different aspects of performance and success.

10. HCTS is working closely with the LSC to develop its approach to supporting learners with additional needs. A skills for life strategy and action plan is in place. Skills for life is the government's strategy in training in literacy, numeracy and the use of language. Learners undergo basic and diagnostic skills assessment to determine whether they have a literacy and/or numeracy support need. Learners with additional needs are either supported in-house by staff or are referred for specialist support. The dedicated skills for life tutor and other members of staff involved in provision either have a relevant qualification or are currently taking one. However, the effectiveness of the support provided in the floor covering programmes is not thoroughly monitored.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

11. HCTS's actions to promote equality of opportunity and diversity are good, and integral to the ethos and culture of the organisation. All staff and learners are recognised and valued. HCTS has established good arrangements to support equality and diversity and to eliminate discrimination. Barriers to learning are effectively minimised. The organisation focuses clearly on fair and anti-discriminatory practice in relation to support for and access to training. Equality of opportunity is applied to all activities within the organisation, including recruitment, marketing, resources, and monitoring and review processes. The chief executive has the responsibility to raise awareness and implement the policies and strategy with staff, learners and employers. All policies have been updated recently and plans are already in place to prepare for the new legislation around age discrimination. HCTS has a designated child protection officer, and a policy to

support and protect children and vulnerable adults. Access issues have been improved and building work carried out to ensure all learners, staff and visitors can use the facilities and resources. Posters are clearly displayed around the building promoting zero tolerance of issues like sexual harassment and disability discrimination. Equality of opportunity is covered for learners at the induction stage, as part of the qualification and at progress reviews. Learners have a good awareness and understanding of their rights and responsibilities, and are well aware of actions to take in the event of a complaint or issue in the workplace. Equality of opportunity has been promoted with staff, but recent training for staff has not taken place.

12. The equality of opportunity strategy and plan identify key achievement targets for 2006-08. These targets are very focused on the recruitment of more men into the early years programme, more women onto the floor covering course, more learners with a disability, and more learners from black and minority ethnic groups. There are also targets for increasing the progression into employment of learners on placements. The monitoring and analysis of equal opportunities data is good. Information is used to identify targets and actions for improvement. HCTS's placement officers effectively monitor employers' compliance to equality of opportunity requirements.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

13. The initiatives to improve quality are good. HCTS has refocused its emphasis from quality assurance to quality improvement. A number of improvements are now well established and are having a positive effect on the learners. The focus is very much on the learners and how their experience can be improved. Quality policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated, and changes to practice are implemented. HCTS has held a valuable staff development workshop to review a range of activities that affect the learner, such as interviews, induction, individual learning plans, monitoring of progress and how the management information system is used to support this. The aim of the workshop was to identify possible improvements and to ensure consistent and best practice between departments. The organisation makes effective use of a quality assurance cycle to audit activities such as staff appraisal, meetings, internal verification arrangements, reviews, and the self-assessment process. The systems and procedures are being used very effectively to continuously improve the success rates for learners and enhance their learning experience. Good use is made of the management information system to provide staff with meaningful information, particularly about the progress of learners. Feedback from learners, staff and employers is collected and used well to make further improvements. Observations of all key learning processes are carried out regularly to improve the learners' experience. These processes cover recruitment, initial assessment, induction, reviews, teaching and learning, and assessment. Verbal feedback is provided to staff and any areas for development are linked to the staff appraisal and development system. Very detailed criteria for grading teaching and learning observations are used. However, there are no criteria to guide staff observing other key processes.

14. The arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. They are used effectively to monitor assessment practices and meet the awarding bodies' standards. Meetings are held regularly to standardise and share best practice.

15. The self-assessment process is inclusive, and involves the effective use of feedback from learners, staff and employers. Each department of the organisation is critical and evaluative of its own practices. Strengths, weaknesses and actions are identified as part of

HUYTON CHURCHES TRAINING SERVICES

the process for continuous improvement, and staff take ownership of this. The self-assessment reports are accurate, and the action plans have clear targets for achievement. The action plans are closely monitored to evaluate the progress towards improvement.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, public services and care

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Early years</i>		2
Apprenticeships for young people	39	2

16. HCTS currently has 39 learners in health, public services and social care. Of these, 28 are working towards an apprenticeship and 11 are on an advanced apprenticeship. No learners are men or from minority ethnic backgrounds, although two privately funded level 3 learners are men. Learners attend off-the-job-training for one day a week at HCTS and spend four days in the workplace.

Early years

Strengths

- good and improving success rates
- good progress for learners
- very good on- and off-the-job training
- productive involvement with employers
- highly effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

17. HCTS's overall success rate for apprenticeship frameworks has improved significantly over the past two years and, at 60 per cent in 2004-05, is well above the national average. This is a considerable improvement in framework completion since the previous inspection three years ago, when no apprentices had completed their framework. Timely success rates of 55 per cent are also well above the national rates of 15 per cent. The proportion of learners achieving their qualification so far in 2005-06 is 50 per cent with just under 30 per cent of learners still in learning. The numbers of learners on advanced apprenticeships in 2003-04 and 2004-05 were too small to make meaningful judgements.

18. Learners make very good progress. In 2004-05, all of the learners who were retained completed their programme at least one month ahead of their planned end date. In this year, all of the learners who completed their programme obtained employment or progressed to further training. At the time of the inspection, most learners' were predicted to complete their programme at least two months ahead of their planned end date, and one of the 11 advanced apprentices had completed five months ahead of target. Learners are very clear about what they need to do to complete their qualification. A useful monitoring document clearly identifies learners' progress. Effective progress

HUYTON CHURCHES TRAINING SERVICES

reviews keep learners on target and ensure employers and learners are well informed of progress. Learners are motivated by the presentation of awards for the learner of the month and of the year, and by the opportunity to act as a buddy to new learners. Assessments are well planned and the outcomes are clearly recorded. Learners receive useful detailed feedback that is used to plan future assessments and learning. They dress and behave appropriately, display confidence in their work and most are able to work independently. Attendance and punctuality are good, both in the workplace and for off-the-job-training. Learners' portfolios are of a good quality and contain a wide range of work-based evidence.

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	6	83	55	83	27
		timely	5	80	31	80	15
	2004-05	overall	2	100	49	50	22
		timely	3	100	26	67	11
	2005-06	overall	0	0	0	0	0
		timely	0	0	0	0	0
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	4	25	49	25	21
		timely	4	25	20	25	7
	2004-05	overall	10	60	53	60	36
		timely	11	55	22	55	15
	2005-06	overall	0	0	0	0	0
		timely	0	0	0	0	0

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

19. On- and-off-the-job training is very good and promotes effective learning. Learners develop good practical skills during off-the-job training and in the workplace. Learning sessions are well planned with flexibility to meet individual needs. Tutors are knowledgeable and very enthusiastic about their subject and link background knowledge to practice well. Teaching during off-the-job training is lively and contains a variety of background knowledge and practical activities. A wide range of well-used learning resources is available in the classroom. Learning is well planned and all learners are provided with a detailed overall programme plan. In the workplace, tutors, employers and learners work very well together when planning assessment and the application of skills learnt in the classroom. Learners are provided with very good opportunities in the workplace to apply the knowledge learnt in the classroom. They display good care skills, and are eager and able to apply their knowledge and skills at work. In the workplace, learners are supported to plan and carry out a range of activities to meet the needs and interests of different age groups and abilities. Learners demonstrate a high level of knowledge about the nutritional needs of children and creating a safe and healthy environment. Many learners are able to apply this knowledge to their own health needs.

Employers are kept exceptionally well informed of where the learner is in their programme and what they are learning during off-the-job training. Learners' reviews are used well to plan future learning and assessment needs. Most learners have very good opportunities to attend additional courses provided in the workplace on topics such as behaviour management, curriculum planning and development of play. A learners' journal clearly documents the learning that has taken place in the workplace and in the classroom and the progress that has been made in the practical application of background knowledge. A few learners do not make effective use of information and communications technology to develop and complete their learning.

20. Relationships with employers are very productive. Learners are able to visit a range of childcare settings to participate in activities that are different to those provided in their own workplace. Tutors enjoy very good working relationships with employers. HCTS ensures that employers are fully involved in the learners' training and maintains regular contact by telephone, frequent visits and monthly progress reports. All employers receive the learners' induction pack which clearly outlines policies and procedures, expectations and course content and structure. A regular employers' forum keeps employers informed of the programme and any changes, and provides useful opportunities to discuss issues and possible changes to the delivery of learning. For example, employers have recently proposed that new learners attend the workplace for four half-days a week rather than two full days to enable the learners to integrate and understand the routine of the placement.

21. Learners receive highly effective support from HCTS. All learners are allocated an existing learner as a buddy. The buddy provides the new learner with useful information on the workplace and the provider, such as the location of canteen facilities, as well as providing support with portfolio-building. HCTS takes care to place learners in placements which are able to meet individual needs and interests and which can lead to full-time employment. Learners who are not ready to progress from level 2 are provided with good advice and support to find and maintain employment. In the workplace, employers and supervisors provide good support to help learners progress in their on-the-job learning. Assessment of individual learning needs is comprehensive. Learners receive good additional learning support in lessons, in small workshops and in individual sessions. Results of initial assessment are used to plan individual support for learners. Many learners receive support from their workplace to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Many employers and workplaces pay learners to attend courses that run on a Saturday. Learners have good opportunities to participate in additional activities such as charity events and outdoor pursuits.

22. Induction is satisfactory, providing learners and employers with useful information on their course. Health and safety, and equality of opportunity are covered appropriately.

23. Learners receive appropriate advice and guidance about all aspects of their training programme before they start. They are fully informed about the qualifications that are available and how these will be covered during the programme. Many learners progress from their advanced apprenticeships to higher education or training, either in management or early years education.

Leadership and management

24. The early years programme is managed well. The previous inspection reports have

HUYTON CHURCHES TRAINING SERVICES

been used effectively to bring about improvements in provision. Progress towards improvements is closely monitored through a planned programme of staff meetings and the effective use of data. A comprehensive course file contains details of planning of learning, learners' progress and analysis of early leavers.

25. HCTS has thorough internal verification arrangements that include well-planned sampling of assessment practice and regular standardisation meetings. Assessors and learners receive good-quality support and feedback that aids their development. New assessors are closely monitored and are supported through a comprehensive induction programme. Learners understand the verification process, to which they are introduced early in their programme.

26. Arrangements for the promotion of equality of opportunity are good. Tutors make good use of a bank of questions to check and reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity during reviews. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of equality of opportunity and have good knowledge of the complaints procedure and how to use it.

27. The self-assessment process is thorough and the resulting report identifies all of the strengths identified by the inspection team. All staff and many learners and employers contributed to the self-assessment report.

Construction, planning and the built environment**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Construction crafts		2
Apprenticeships for young people	16	2
Other government-funded provision	11	2

28. There are currently 27 learners on construction programmes with HCTS, all working towards qualifications in floor covering. Sixteen of these learners are apprentices and 11 are following a programme of training and work experience designed specifically for the long-term unemployed. The programme consists of 13 weeks of full-time training followed by a period of subsidised employment, and is referred to as TREADS. Most learners on both programmes are recruited by HCTS, which finds work placements for TREADS learners and jobs for apprentices. Learners complete an initial assessment and agree a learning plan with HCTS, which provides all the off-the-job training and assessment. On-the-job training is provided by employers.

Construction crafts*Strengths*

- good achievement and progression into employment
- good practical skills development
- good off-the-job training
- excellent resources
- highly effective support for learners

Weaknesses

- shortcomings in review process for apprenticeship programmes

Achievement and standards

29. A high proportion of learners on the TREADS programme progress into employment. Many of these learners have been categorised as long-term unemployed or have poor employment history. The placement of learners into subsidised employment at the end of the 13-week off-the-job training period is very high at 79 per cent. Sixty-two per cent of these learners progress and achieve full employment with their placement providers. The current overall success rate for apprentices in 2005-06 is good at 58 per cent. There are no achievement tables for this provision as the programmes have only recently been introduced. All the construction occupations offered by HCTS at the previous inspection were discontinued soon after the inspection.

30. Learners on both programmes develop good practical skills. The standard of learners' practical work is high, with many learners consistently achieving the standard of work expected in the industry. Learners develop a good range of practical skills in different types of flooring. For example, learners who have been on programme a very short period of time have developed the ability to accurately set out and cut geometrical

patterns in vinyl floors and join carpets 'invisibly' using heat bonding equipment and materials.

The quality of provision

31. Off-the-job training is good. All five learning sessions observed were judged to be good. In practical sessions, learners were developing useful skills and techniques. Tutors were inexperienced but highly skilled in their occupational area and sensitive to the needs of the learners. Tutors' practical demonstrations were effective in helping learners to develop their skills. Tutors' explanations were clear, articulate and successful in identifying the basic concepts that learners need to understand the job. In background knowledge sessions, tutors effectively maintained learners' interest with well-timed changes of activity, and provided sufficient challenge to promote learning. Tutors in all sessions used their industrial experience to add interest and bring the subjects to life, and to continually remind learners of the increased demands of working on site. Questioning techniques were particularly good. Questions were used sparingly and were chosen well to promote learning and check learners' understanding of the subject matter covered. However, there is insufficient overall planning of activities in the workshop and insufficient formal planning of practical sessions. These shortcomings did not significantly detract from the good learning experience enjoyed by the learners.

32. Resources are excellent. Off-the-job training takes place in a recently built training centre. The centre is designed well to promote learning with a series of appropriately sized and easily supervised flooring bays overlooked by a classroom, tutors' offices and a recreational area for learners. Technicians provide particularly good and valuable support in organising and maintaining tools and equipment. HCTS has successfully obtained very valuable sponsorship from a range of manufacturers of flooring materials. Learners benefit from ample supplies of very high-quality materials and equipment that are used in off-the-job training to develop their skills. Such materials are used much more sparingly by employers in the on-the-job training due to the costs involved.

33. Support for learners is highly effective in encouraging skills development and helping learners to obtain employment and stay on programme. Placement officers give good and continuing support to all learners, particularly to those having difficulty with their placements. The organisation is persistent in finding alternatives for learners in difficulty, often finding three or four jobs for some learners. Contact between HCTS and learners in employment is frequent and productive and often extends beyond contractual requirements. Valuable additional support helps learners find and sustain employment. For example, learners receive free driving lessons, additional training to meet health and safety requirements of the industry and a free and valuable toolkit, all of which increases their employability. Formal additional learning and key skills support is now satisfactory and improving. All learners who need or request additional support receive good support from specialist tutors. The interview process is used effectively to provide potential learners with particularly useful information, advice and guidance about what is available and how to get the skills, qualifications and training that they need. HCTS also provides valuable information for employers about learning and developing people at work.

34. Assessment is broadly satisfactory. Considerable improvements have been made recently, resulting in HCTS being granted centre accreditation by the awarding body. Assessment is fair and assessors' decisions are good. Internal verification is fit for purpose,

providing adequate quality assurance of the assessment process. Regular assessors' meetings are held which are useful in developing the assessment process. For example, HCTS has just introduced self-assessment for learners as a routine part of assessment.

35. There are shortcomings in the learners' review process. Review policies and procedures are not always systematically followed, leading to inconsistencies in the quality of reviews. Some reviews are superficial, with insufficient input from employers and poor target-setting. In these reviews, there is insufficient follow up of targets between reviews. Too many reviews are not carried out on time.

Leadership and management

36. The occupational area is managed well. Managers have made bold decisions and changes to staffing to improve management, learners' progress and achievement, and teaching and learning in the area. HCTS made a clear decision to invest significantly in a new area of learning that would meet a local employment need. There were some early problems with the staff recruited originally to deliver the programme, but these staff have been replaced to improve the learners' experience and success. The current staff are highly competent in their vocational area. They make effective use of excellent resources to support teaching and learning, and are supported well by management.

