

making the grade
a report on standards
in work-based learning
for young people

Maria Hughes

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Summary

Background

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has been investigating the reasons for the deterioration in the inspection grades awarded for work-based learning provision. The changing grade profile is a continuation of a trend which began in inspections conducted by the Training Standards Council (TSC) in its last year of operation. The trend increased in grades awarded by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) in the first nine months since it was established.

The research involved:

- a statistical analysis of the TSC and ALI inspection grades from 1998 to 2001
- a qualitative review of inspection data looking at strengths and weaknesses identified in ALI inspection reports
- structured interviews with ALI inspectors, Learning and Skills Council (LSC) quality managers and work-based learning providers.

Because there have been significant changes to the framework within which inspection is conducted and, to some extent, to the programmes within government supported work-based learning, such as Modern Apprenticeships, it was not possible to draw direct comparisons over the period concerned. Rather the focus of the research was on the critical issues which are important for the development of better quality within work-based learning.

Main findings

- ALI inspections are revealing significant problems in the quality of work-based learning. The proportion of poor grades increased in the last year of operation of the TSC and increased further in subsequent ALI inspections. A noticeable deterioration in the last year of operation of the TSC has accelerated under ALI.
- There appears to be no single cause for the poor grades awarded for work-based learning. Some reasons appear to be linked to the transition into new arrangements for inspection, quality assurance and funding arrangements of post-16 education and training, while other reasons may be related to deeper systemic issues.

Implications of findings

Transitional issues affecting quality and standards

- Inspection is a relatively new process for work-based learning providers. Lack of familiarity with the process of inspection coupled with changes to the inspection framework may have contributed to a lack of preparedness of providers inspected early in the ALI inspection cycle.

- The transition from Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) to local LSCs may have reduced the support available to providers who were preparing for inspection in the early days of the LSC's operation.
- Providers have problems with the availability, collection and use of data which is needed to provide evidence of learners' achievement.

Many of these transitional issues have now been resolved or are actively being addressed.

Systemic issues

Better work-based learning

- The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) emphasises the benefit to the individual learner as the principal criterion for judgements on the quality of provision. Modern Apprenticeship frameworks require greater theoretical understanding and the development and assessment of key skills. These developments have switched the emphasis from the assessment of competence in a work role to the development and application of knowledge and skills in a work context. The inspection process is therefore looking for a wider range of learning activities and observable learning in the workplace.
- Providers need more support to come to terms with these developments and to adapt their methods of teaching, learning and assessment accordingly.

Success in work-based learning

- The Common Inspection Framework (CIF) places considerable emphasis on learner success in achieving the aims of the apprenticeship or other work-based learning. Success rates within work-based learning are improving but are currently low, and this is a contributory factor in the proportion of low grades that are awarded. There are, however, concerns about how these measures of success capture the labour market context of work-based learning for young people.

Building capacity in the work-based training sector

- There is a low proportion of staff with relevant qualifications in the work-based sector.
- There has been little sustained and systematic development of staff. Demands for more rigorous learning and assessment in the work-based route need to be accompanied by support and development of the people charged with its delivery.
- The work-based sector needs to be supported to take a strategic view of its own development through better self-assessment and quality improvement.

Range of provision

- The range of programmes available for young people may not be meeting the needs of all learners in work-based learning. As a result, learners may be placed on inappropriate programmes, which they subsequently leave without completing.
- There are important related issues of good careers guidance and accurate initial assessment followed by the delivery of effective learner support.

part a
analysis of key issues

Introduction

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) was requested by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to investigate the reasons for the deterioration in the grades awarded to work-based learning provision from Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspections compared with Training Standards Council (TSC) inspections. The change is a continuation of a downward trend from the last year of TSC inspections, but has sharply accelerated since the beginning of April to the end of December 2001. In contrast, grades for New Deal provision, which is also inspected by the ALI, continue to improve.

The LSDA investigation into the underlying reasons for the changes in the grade profile from TSC to ALI indicates that some of the reasons may be transitional and related to the changes in post-16 inspection and quality assurance arrangements. These shortcomings may be easily remedied in the short term as all concerned become accustomed to new ways of working. However, there may also be deeper systemic problems outside the inspection framework which require attention.

Declining inspection grades under ALI

A statistical analysis of ALI inspection grades for work-based learning confirms the continuation of the trend for poorer grades which was evident in later TSC inspections. The changes to the inspection framework and varied nature of the provider base and learners who participate in work-based learning make comparing like with like an impossible task and so care must be taken in any conclusions derived from this evidence alone. The ALI data considered in this report also covers less than a full year, and consequently there are some small numbers within the subgroups that have been examined. That said, the average area of learning (AoL) grade¹ has deteriorated from 2.7² in 1998/9 to 3.32 in 2001/02 and the average leadership and management grade has worsened from 2.97 to 3.59 in the same period. While there was a steady downward trend under the TSC, there has been a marked deterioration since the beginning of ALI.

ALI grades awarded for New Deal, which is also inspected with the Common Inspection Framework (CIF), have improved from those awarded by the TSC.

Key issues

Transitional issues affecting quality and standards

Turbulence and uncertainty in the period leading up to and immediately following the inception of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) appears to have had a significant impact on providers' readiness for inspection. The research revealed some instances of providers preparing their self-assessment report (SAR) against the former inspection criteria given in *Raising the Standard*.³

- 1 Average grades are used in the report as an indicative measure of change. As the gaps between grades are not equally spaced, percentages of grades 1 and 2 and 4 and 5 are also given in some cases.
- 2 Grades in the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) range from 1 to 5, where grade 1 is outstanding and grade 5 is very weak.
- 3 TSC. *Raising the Standard: guidelines for self-assessment and inspection of work-based training*. Training Standards Council, April 1998.

While the primary responsibility for improving the quality of provision must rest with providers, local LSC quality managers themselves observed that support to providers from some local LSCs was not as knowledgeable or sufficient as it should have been. Most of the providers inspected by the ALI were not inspected by the TSC, and the process is therefore entirely new to them.

Providers are often unsure about what is required and how to amend their practice to secure the levels of quality which are now expected. However, access to the Standards Fund could enable providers to gain support to improve. Indeed, some providers reported that they were able to remedy most of the additional administrative and process-related deficiencies in their provision after these had been revealed by their inspection.

There is evidence of improving support as LSC staff gain experience in their new roles. Providers who have attended the ALI briefing sessions say these are helpful in understanding the CIF and inspection process. Support for preparation could be further improved if the CIF was accompanied by more detailed guidance on preparing for inspection and the self-assessment process.

Providers are not good at collecting and analysing data to obtain information they could use to improve their performance. They have difficulty in understanding the way that data is used in the inspection process. Greater transparency in what data is being used and its purpose, together with training for providers in the use of data, could result in quick wins in quality improvement.

Systemic issues

The decline in the grade profile for work-based learning is too stark to be entirely explained by the turbulence caused by the introduction of the new post-16 arrangements. The marked deterioration in the grade profile in the 20 providers that have experienced both ALI and TSC inspections suggests that there are significant underlying issues. These issues may be related to the capacity of providers to deliver the more rigorous Modern Apprenticeship programmes and the increased scrutiny of the CIF, with its emphasis on the impact of provision on learning.

Triangulating concerns

The research identified the different perspectives of the key players on the nature of the problem.

Providers :

- are aware of the impact of retention and achievement, but do not link this to impact on learners and learning
- are working with a new system of inspection which they do not fully understand
- lack support or resources to remedy their shortcomings
- have difficulty in delivering key skills
- think they are working with increasingly less able or motivated trainees
- have problems in obtaining and using data.

LSC quality managers :

- have significant concerns about the impact of provision on learners and learning
- see data collection and interpretation as a key issue
- see providers as relatively immature organisations
- see key skills and training programme issues as part of the problem
- share to some extent the providers' views about changes to the cohort of learners in the work-based route.

ALI inspectors :

- closely link retention and achievement issues with impact on learners and learning
- share a similar priority ranking with providers regarding lack of support, and to a lesser degree with providers' unfamiliarity with the CIF
- agree that there are key skills and other programme-related issues
- think there is some relationship to the size and scale of the organisation.

Support for changes to Modern Apprenticeships

The provision inspected since the ALI was set up has been predominantly Foundation and Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, these generally being undertaken by young people who are entering the workforce for the first time. This reflects both the shift of responsibilities for work-based learning for adults to the Employment Service (ES) and the phasing out of 'other training'. Many of the Modern Apprenticeship frameworks have recently been revised. All require the successful achievement of a whole Level 2 or 3 NVQ and key skills. Some frameworks include additional qualifications or units of qualifications. Achievement of a Modern Apprenticeship programme is therefore more complex than achieving an NVQ, requiring in most circumstances dedicated time for off-the-job learning.

Key skills are almost universally seen by providers as a problem, and irrelevant to the young people and their employers. The introduction of technical certificates is seen as a further potential problem. These changes are a major shift for providers of work-based learning, and the findings reveal that many providers are ill prepared.

The emphasis on a wider range of learning activities and more structured delivery of underpinning theory within Modern Apprenticeships is revealing pedagogical issues. There is a need for more regular and planned 'learning episodes', within a work-related context. In some occupational areas there is no tradition of this type of learning and models for its delivery need to be developed.

Focus on the impact of provision on learning

The key question in the CIF asks, 'How well do learners achieve?' and this factor drives the inspection of quality. The primary evidence source for this is retention and achievement rates. The availability of more reliable (but not yet satisfactory) year-on-year data on retention and achievement has enabled the ALI to make more robust judgements.

The reason that the focus on teaching and learning is having a negative impact on grades is related to the subsequent switch from assessment of competence in role to the development of knowledge and skills in a work context. The work-based sector is geared up to deliver the former and will need support to find new ways of delivering effective work-based learning for new entrants to the workforce.

The inspections considered in this research project have almost entirely focused on training for young people at a formative stage in their career. The picture may be different for adults who are mature learners, for whom a work-based assessment of competence may be entirely appropriate.

These increasing demands appear to have taken providers by surprise, and support for their introduction was patchy across Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and in the early work of the local LSCs. The expertise within the work-based route clearly has many strengths in terms of occupational expertise, and more recently in assessment processes. However, experience in more structured work-based teaching and learning is less well developed.

Success in work-based learning

Providers are concerned that the ALI's expectations of the success rate of learners on work-based learning provision are too high. They comment on the lack of a shared agreement on what should be the average retention and achievement rates for work-based learning provision, differentiated by programme and occupational area.⁴

Data collection in work-based learning has historically been poor and inconsistent. The shifting definition of successful completion from NVQs to full Modern Apprenticeship frameworks is also seen by providers to limit the extent to which they can achieve good inspection grades. As it is some years since the Modern Apprenticeships were introduced, more young people should have completed their training. Expectations of a good track record in successful completion have therefore increased.

However, achievement within work-based learning is approximately 50% at best. Achievement rates – as measured by the percentage of trainees who leave with a full or part NVQ qualification – have varied considerably across the different government-supported training programmes. This relatively modest achievement is reflected in the grade profile of ALI inspections and is an indication of issues outside the inspection process which are impacting on the quality of provision. It is likely that the CIF and the ALI inspection process are merely reflecting these problems.

Range of provision

Providers and LSC quality managers raised concerns about the insufficient range of provision to meet the needs of all actual and potential learners in the work-based route. As a result, young people are often placed on inappropriate programmes, which they subsequently leave without completing.

Some providers reported that they are being encouraged to place trainees on Advanced (rather than Foundation) Modern Apprenticeship programmes, which are not the best option for these particular young people.

The absence of flexibility in programme design may therefore contribute to poor retention. This is a different, although related, issue from poor initial assessment.

⁴ We understand that the ALI is working on benchmarking data.

Quality improvement lessons from New Deal

While there are similarities in the delivery and inspection of New Deal and work-based training – in terms of the inspection framework, and in some of the people delivering and inspecting it – there are differences in programme design and expected outcomes. These differences may reveal some of the reasons for New Deal's improving grade profile. Emphasis on job outcomes has been a consistent policy objective of New Deal. It also is, of necessity, more learner centred, with flexible and short-term goals, such as units of NVQs, being accepted as successful completion. More networking and exchange of good practice is evident, and collaboration between providers is encouraged. There has been good and sustained support locally from the unit of delivery coordinators and nationally from Employment Services. The support that providers receive and the more flexible view of achievement may make less onerous the task of delivering learning to a very difficult client group.

Capacity building

Many providers and LSC staff commented on the lack of sustained and sufficient development and training for staff within the work-based sector. The contrast with the college sector and its tradition for networking and exchanging practice was frequently drawn. Many of those interviewed commented on work-based trainers' lack of access to the FE Standards Fund until very recently.

There is a need to support a more critical, self-improving culture across all providers of work-based learning, together with a greater strategic awareness of how this contributes to their own and their learners' success.

The emphasis on a wider range of learning activities and more structured delivery of underpinning theory has significant implications for staff development and training. Providers will need support to amend their practice. The work-based training sector is under-qualified, even in terms of the previous focus on assessment. The changing emphasis on impact of learning has taken many by surprise and the cost of re-skilling assessors to become trainers is seen as prohibitive by many providers.

Problems in delivering work-based learning are apparent across all types of provider, including college-based provision. This perhaps illustrates that work-based learning is difficult to deliver. While the workplace may provide a rich environment for learning, there are difficulties in securing the time, space and resources to learn as well as work. Support for the development of methods of work-based learning which work is needed for all types of providers.

Funding and resourcing issues

Some providers commented on the reduction in real terms of the money available to support work-based learning, and on problems with the standard length of stay. Meeting the increased demands of Modern Apprenticeship programmes within the available resources appears to be problematic. This is often further exacerbated by the modest entry qualifications of trainees, and their need for significant additional support and extra time on the programme to enable them to achieve.

part b
full report

1 Background

The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) was requested by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to investigate the reasons for the deterioration in the grades awarded to work-based learning provision from Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspections compared with Training Standards Council (TSC) inspections. The change is a continuation of a downward trend from the last year of TSC inspections, but has sharply accelerated since the beginning of April to the end of December 2001. In contrast, grades for New Deal provision, which is also inspected by the ALI, continue to improve.

Preliminary discussions between the ALI, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the DfES, and an internal investigation of the views of inspectors by the ALI, identified possible causes. It was suggested that the sharp downturn in grades may be related to:

- changes to the framework and method of inspection
- changes in grade assessment, benchmarking and moderation methods among inspectors
- disruption caused by the transition from Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) to (local) LSC(s)
- changes in provider and employer actions and funding for improvement
- changing characteristics of learners and providers inspected.

The project investigated the possible contribution of these causes, but also looked for other reasons.

The research took place between December 2001 and February 2002.

1.1 Research question

The research question addressed by the project was as follows:

Why are grades awarded for work-based learning by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) substantially worse than those awarded by the Training Standards Council (TSC), while at the same time the performance of New Deal providers continues to improve?

1.2 Project aim

The project aimed to identify the underlying causes for the worsening or improvement of grades, and whether these relate to individual providers or systems.

1.3 Method

The investigation involved:

- a statistical analysis of the TSC and ALI inspection grades since 1998
- a qualitative review of inspection data
- consultation with the ALI and other stakeholders
- a survey of providers, local LSC quality managers and ALI inspectors.

In-depth interviews were conducted with ALI inspectors, local LSC quality managers and a representative sample of training providers. The sample included providers whose grades have changed significantly.

A standard interview tool (available on request) was used to investigate some of the possible causes of poor grades identified in the data analysis and discussions.

2 Findings

2.1 Statistical analysis of inspection grades

The research project analysed information on the inspection grades awarded by the TSC and ALI from April 1998 to December 2001. The analysis involved an examination of the overall grade profile, comparisons of grades awarded for leadership and management in ALI and its equivalent in TSC, and comparisons of TSC and ALI grades for areas of learning. Relationships between inspection grades and other factors, such as type and size of provider, were also undertaken. The analysis also considered data on achievement in government-supported training programmes. The commentary which follows notes significant findings from the full statistical analysis.⁵

2.1.1 All grades – work-based learning

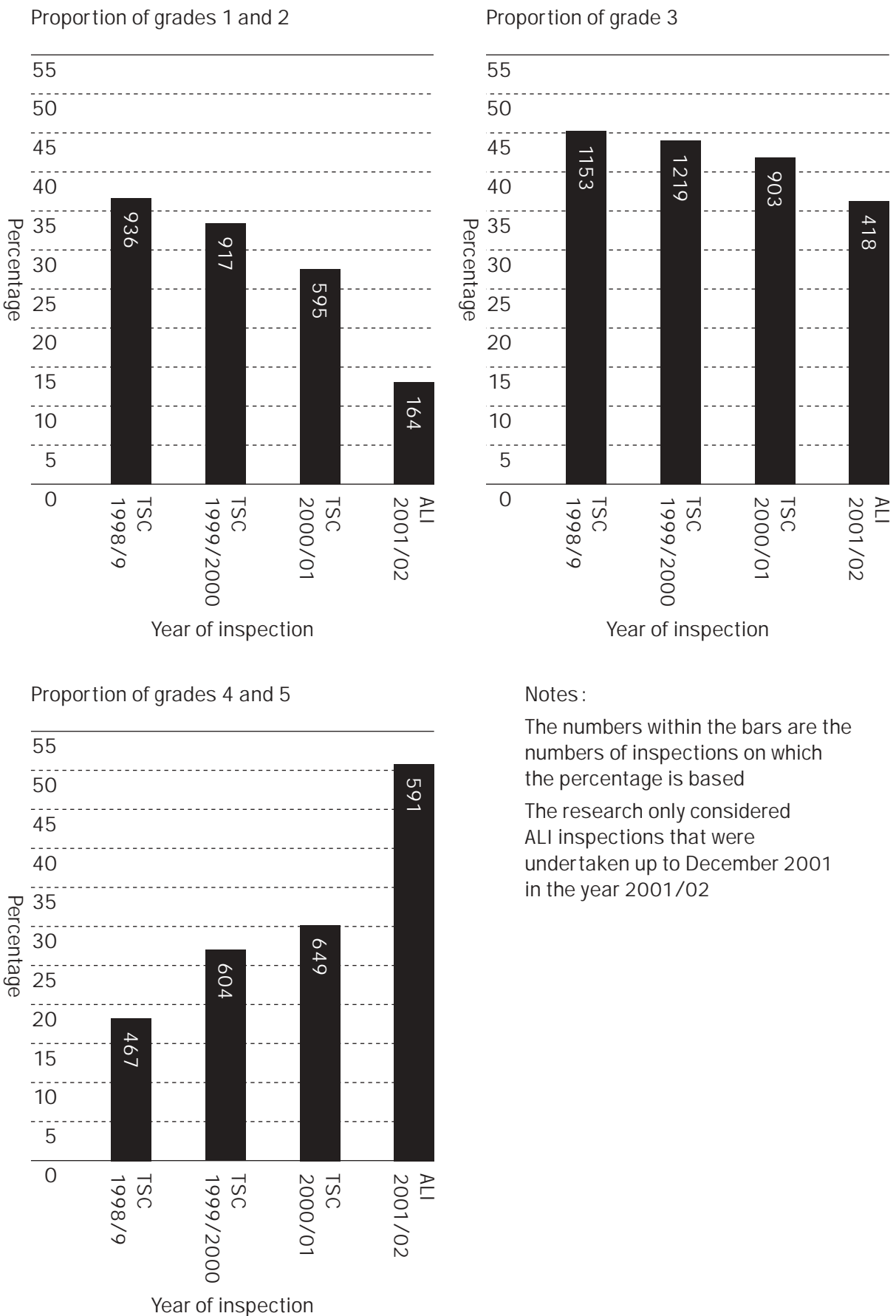
Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of grades in TSC and ALI inspections 1998–2001.

- The proportion of grades⁶ 4 and 5 has increased from 18% in the first year of TSC and 23% averaged across 1998–2001 to 51% in the first 9 months of ALI. However, the number of providers inspected during the current year (232) is approximately 60% of the average of the three preceding years (378), and about two-thirds of the 347 conducted during 2000/01. (The number of inspections on which the comparisons are based is therefore lower in the current year.)
- While the grade profile was deteriorating steadily in the last 2 years of TSC, the proportion of grades 4 and 5 has increased markedly under ALI.
- The proportion of grades 1 and 2 has fallen from 37 to 13% over the 4 years.
- The percentage of 'satisfactory' grades (ie grade 3) has also declined from 45% in 1998/9 to 36% in 2001/02.
- The average grade has declined from 2.79 in 1998/9 and 2.89 across the total operating time of TSC to 3.46 under ALI.
- A quarterly analysis of grades indicates a 'step change' between TSC and ALI.

5 Available from LSDA on request.

6 In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas (referred to as 'areas of learning' (AoL) in inspection reports), and about the quality of leadership and management, ALI inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are: grade 1 – outstanding, grade 2 – good, grade 3 – satisfactory, grade 4 – unsatisfactory, grade 5 – very weak. These grades, and their descriptors, are similar to those used by the TSC. There are major differences, however, in the Common Inspection Framework (CIF), which is now used for work-based inspections, from that which the TSC used, as described in *Raising the Standard* (TSC 1998).

Figure 1 Distribution of grades in TSC and ALI inspections 1998–2001



2.1.2 New Deal inspection grades

Average grades for all forms of New Deal provision have improved from TSC to ALI inspections, with the exception of the average grade for equal opportunities, which has worsened from 2.97 to 3.13 (see Table 1).

Table 1 Comparison of New Deal average grades in TSC and ALI inspections

	TSC number of grades	TSC average	ALI number of grades	ALI average
Employment	66	3.06	5	2.60
Self-employment	53	2.66	2	2.00
Full-time education and training	67	3.34	13	3.15
Environment Task Force	67	3.16	10	2.90
Voluntary sector	67	2.94	11	2.55
Leadership and management	67	3.39	15	3.27
Equal opportunities	67	2.97	15	3.13
Quality assurance	67	3.78	15	3.60

2.1.3 Areas of learning

Areas of learning were compared by matching as closely as possible the TSC's occupational areas with the ALI's areas of learning (AoLs). In this report, these are both referred to as areas of learning.

Table 2 Areas of learning grades in TSC and ALI

AoL code	Area of learning	TSC % grades 4 and 5 in 1998/9	Average % of all three TSC years	Difference % (1998/9 and 2001/02)	ALI % grades 4 and 5 in 2001/02	Difference % TSC average /ALI
2	Land-based provision	29	29	38	67	38
3	Construction	15	17	44	59	42
4	Engineering, technology and manufacturing	11	15	19	30	15
5/6	Administration and ICT	9	15	37	46	31
7	Retailing, customer service and transportation	12	17	39	51	34
8	Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	12	20	45	57	37
9	Hairdressing and beauty therapy	16	21	38	54	33
10	Health, social care and public services	16	21	32	48	27
11	Visual and performing arts and media				Low sample	
14	Foundation programmes	15	16	8	23	7

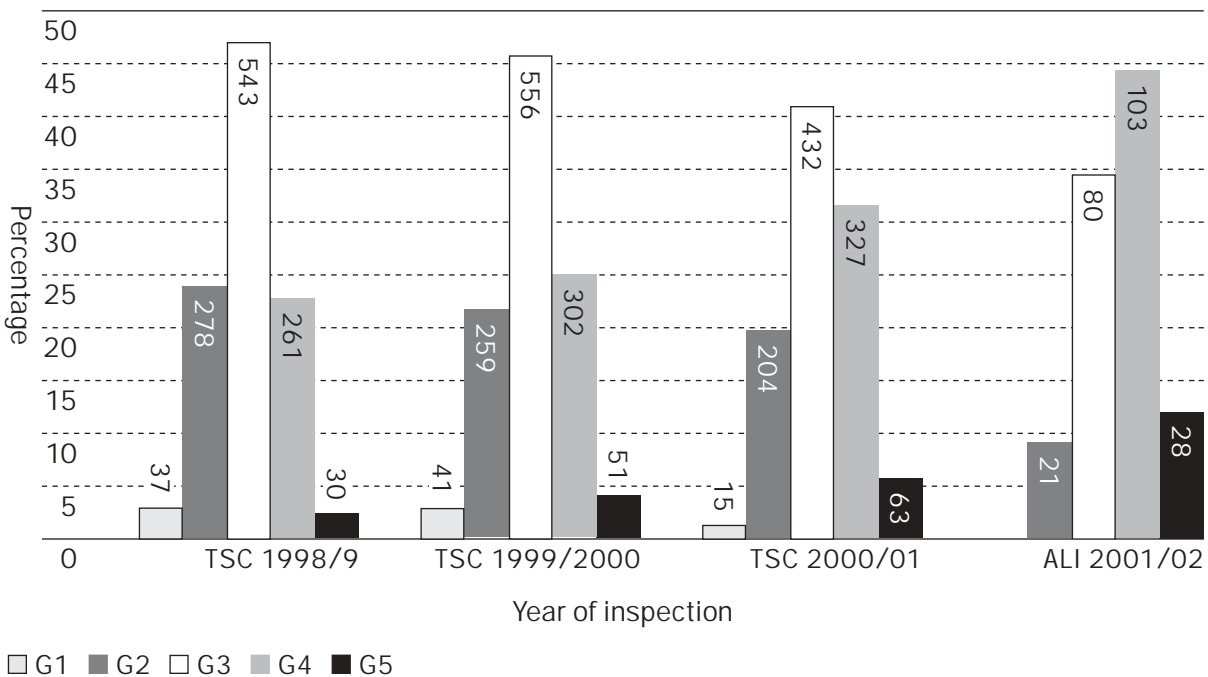
As Table 2 shows, the area of learning grades show the same pattern of accelerated deterioration over the 4 years :

- the proportion of grades 4 and 5 has risen from 13 to 45%
- most areas of learning show a similar worsening
- foundation programmes are an exception : grades have deteriorated much less than the other areas of learning
- construction and hospitality, sports, leisure and travel grades have deteriorated more than average
- engineering, technology and manufacturing grades have deteriorated less than average.

2.1.4 Leadership and management

Leadership and management grades in ALI were first compared with the combined grades for management of training, equal opportunities and quality assurance in TSC, and later with management of training only. There were no significant differences in the results of these two comparisons. In this report, grades for these areas are referred to as leadership and management.

Figure 2 Comparisons of TSC and ALI leadership and management grades



Note : Numbers within or above the bars are the numbers of inspections on which the percentage is based

The examination of leadership and management grades revealed that:

- the leadership and management grades show the same pattern of accelerated worsening over the 4 years
- the grades are significantly worse for leadership and management than areas of learning
- the proportion of grades 4 and 5 is 56% for leadership and management in ALI
- the average grade has deteriorated from 2.97 to 3.59 over the 4 years, a drop of 0.62 of a grade
- no grade 1s for leadership and management were awarded by ALI in the period considered by this project.

2.1.5 Size of provider

The influence of the size of provider on the grades awarded was investigated. The size of provider was estimated according to their numbers of learners, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Leadership and management grades 4 and 5 awarded by size of provider

Size of provider by number of learners	% of combined grades 4 and 5 awarded			
	1998/9	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02
0–50	26	30	31	56
51–100	24	32	41	49
101–200	32	27	48	55
201–500	20	29	35	47
501+	20	21	38	100

The management and leadership grades for the providers in each band were examined. While the patterns are not uniform, there is a general increase in the percentage of grades 4 and 5 awarded since 1998/9. The 101–200 category saw fewer grades 4 and 5 between 1998/9 and 1999/2000, but all grades deteriorated in the last year of TSC and worsened still further under ALI. However, the distribution of the providers inspected was noticeably skewed in the current round of inspections towards those with fewer than 50 learners.

2.1.6 Grade profiles by size of provider and specific area of learning

Grade profiles in the three areas of learning with the most inspection grades (engineering, retailing and transportation, and business) were also considered by size of provider.

Figure 3a Average grades TSC versus ALI : retailing and transportation

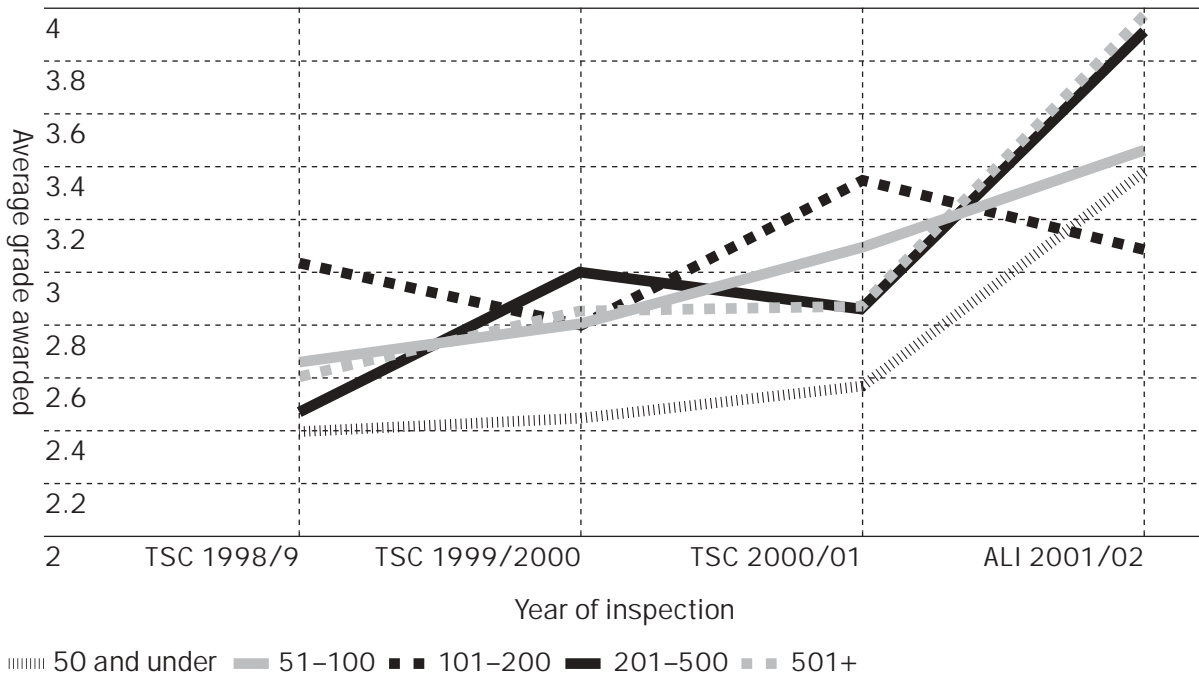


Figure 3b Average grades TSC versus ALI : engineering

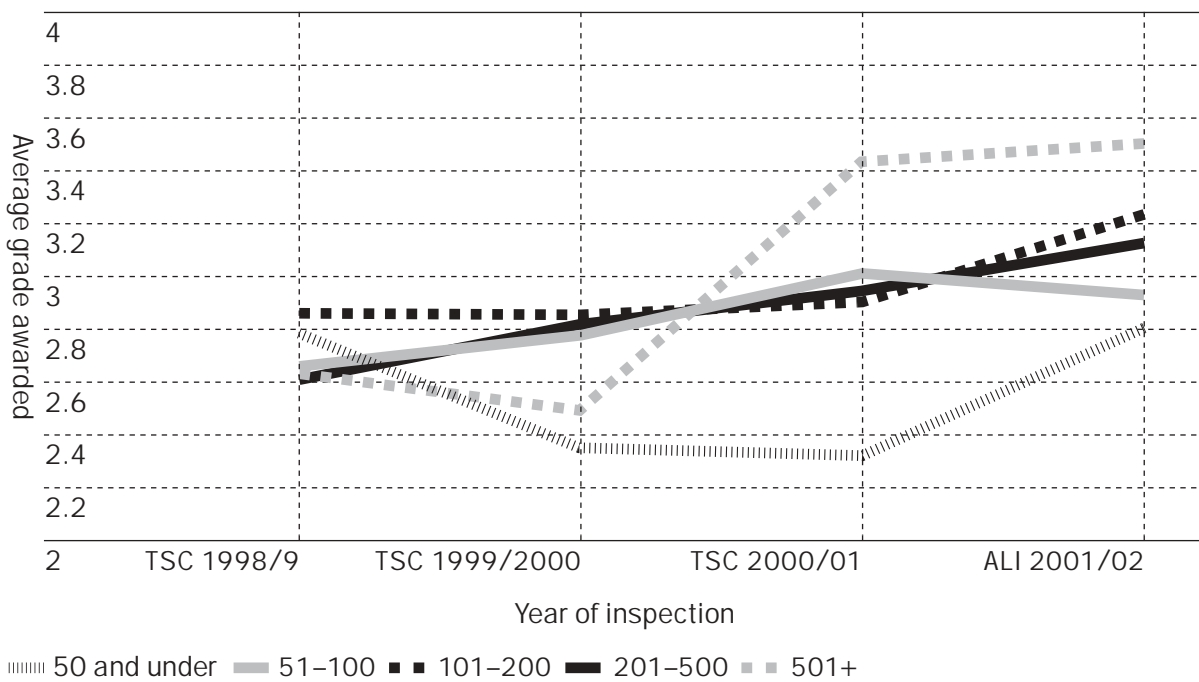
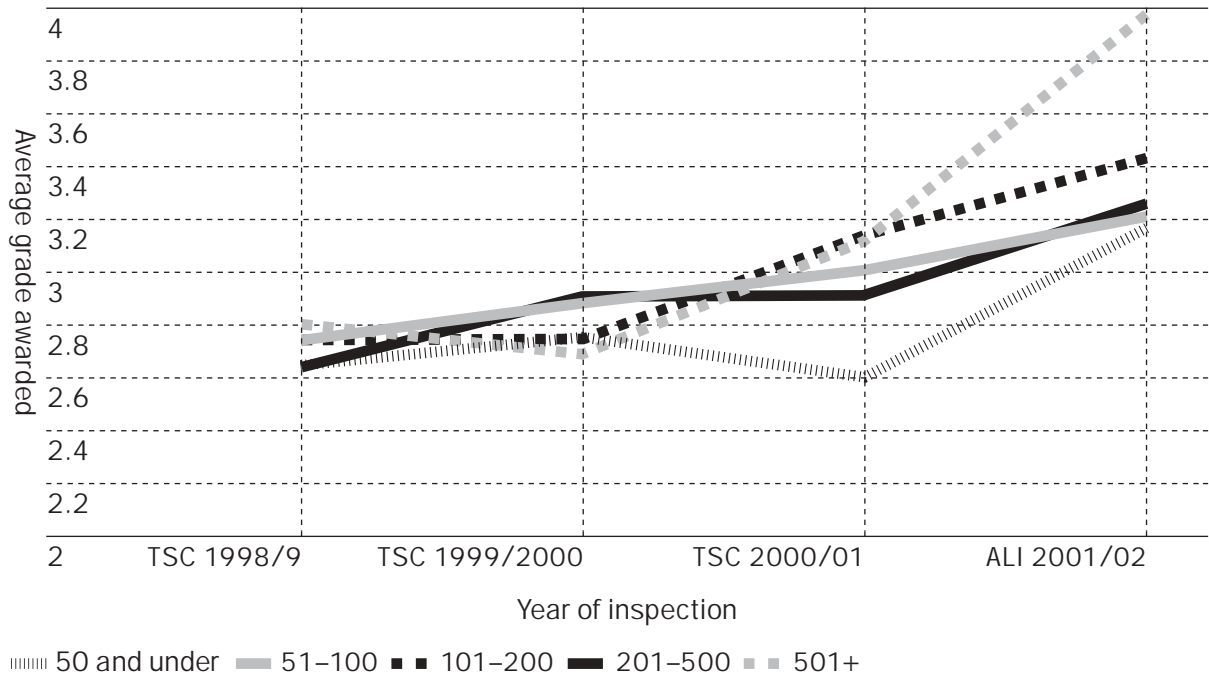


Figure 3c Average grades TSC versus ALI : business



As Figure 3 reveals :

- there has been a decline in the average grade for all categories under ALI, except for providers with 51–100 learners in engineering, and those with 101–200 in retailing and transportation
- the slight decline already apparent for retailing and transportation in the 50 learners or fewer category has sharply accelerated under ALI.

2.1.7 Achievement in government-supported training programmes

Achievement within all forms of work-based learning is difficult to judge, as the data available can be interpreted in several ways.

Figure 4 shows the achievement rate as reported to DfES by government-supported training (GST) providers. This is based on providers' responses to the leavers' form which is returned to the DfES when trainees leave (or complete) the programme. This shows a relatively modest achievement rate. The highest achievement rate is 45%, and this includes both full and part NVQ achievement. These rates are likely to be better than the achievement of full Modern Apprenticeship frameworks, for which data is not available.

However, DfES notes that in 2000/01, 49% of Advanced Modern Apprenticeship (AMA) leavers achieved a qualification at Level 3 or above, and 45% of Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (FMA) leavers achieved a qualification at Level 2 or above. This is an improvement on the 22% achievement rate for AMAs in 1996/7, and the 36% rate for FMAs in 1999/2000.

Figure 4 NVQ achievement rates in GST programmes by leaving year

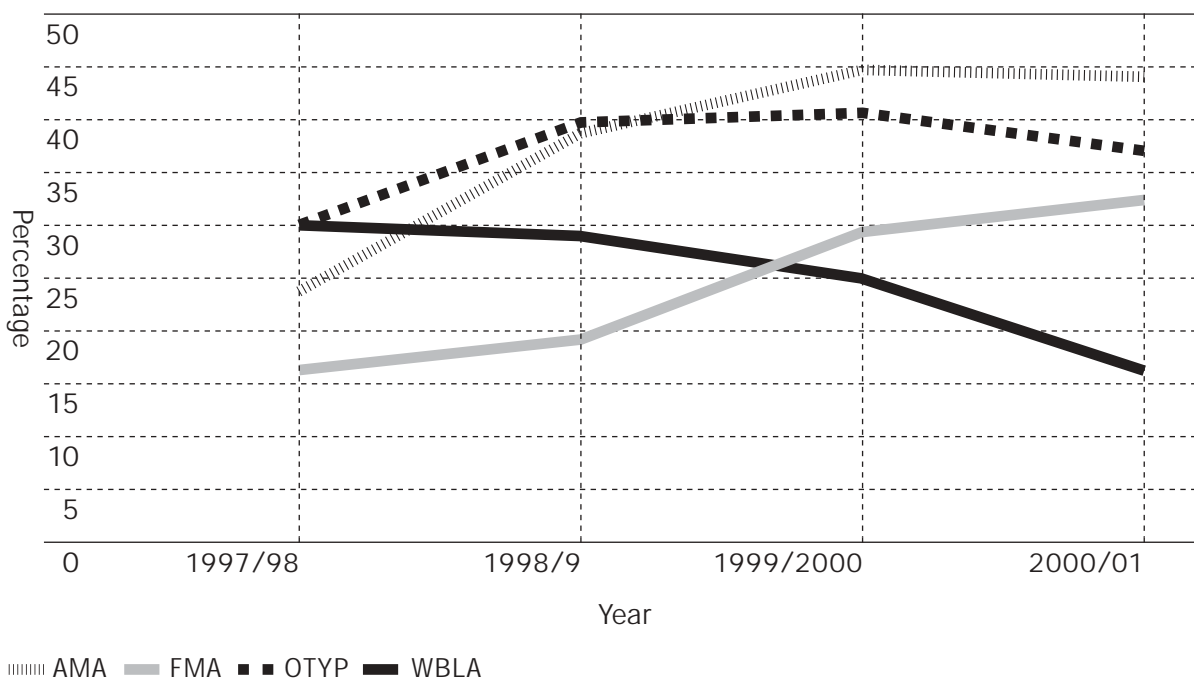


Table 4 shows completers, with part or full NVQs, as a percentage of the total leaving within the same year.

Table 4 Achievement of part or full NVQs as percentage of completers with known outcomes by leaving year of trainee⁷

Programme	1997/8	1998/9	1999/2000	2000/01
AMA	23.6 (25,069)	38.6 (47,288)	44.8 (64,226)	44.1 (59,860)
FMA	16.7 (42)	18.8 (10,594)	28.9 (48,924)	32.4 (67,890)
OTYP ⁸	29.7 (118,456)	39.7 (121,955)	40.8 (107,774)	37.0 (63,348)
WBLA ⁸	29.8 (3297)	29.2 (72,141)	25.1 (101,201)	16.4 (102,809)

Note: Numbers in brackets are actual numbers of completers on which the percentage is based

7 The achievement rate has been calculated using standard LSC methodology: the numerator is [number of whole NVQ qualifications + (0.5 × the number of part NVQ qualifications)]; the denominator is the number of trainees for which NVQ qualification outcomes are known [whole + part + none].

8 OTYP = other training for young people, WBLA = work-based learning for adults.

2.1.7.1 Survey of trainees

DfES also asks trainees about their achievement in a follow-up questionnaire, and the achievement rates they report are shown in Figure 5. This allows trainees to report NVQ achievement, which may not have been confirmed at the time of leaving the programme.

Figure 5 NVQ achievement rates in GST programmes of 'survey respondents' by leaving year

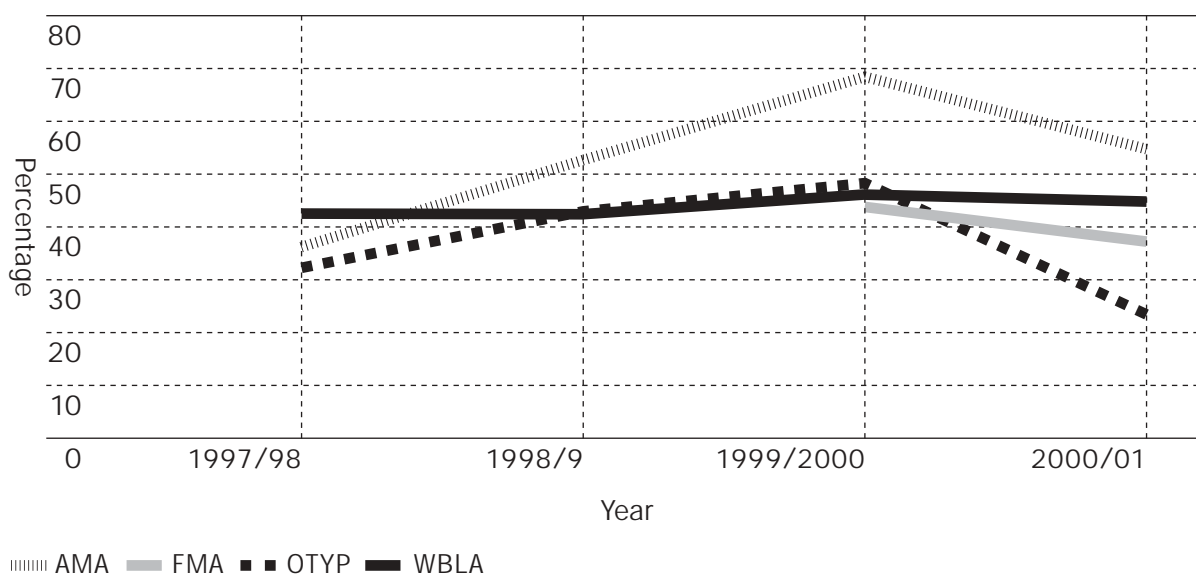


Table 5 indicates that NVQ achievement rates reported by trainees are generally higher than those reported by training providers, but it is important to note that these may be based on low survey response rates. The number of returns shown in Table 5 is a low percentage of the number of starts shown in Table 6, although the years of starting and completing vary and direct comparisons are therefore not possible.

Table 5 Achievement rates reported by respondents to the DfES 'follow-up' survey

Programme	1997/8	1998/9	1999/2000	2000/01
AMA	36.0% (4185)	52.3% (9132)	67.6% (11,629)	54.9% (4902)
FMA	N/A (0)	N/A (0)	44.5% (4205)	36.6% (5680)
OTYP	33.0% (30,368)	44.2% (28,580)	47.5% (27,684)	24.9% (5171)
WBLA	42.7% (295)	43.1% (24,304)	46.0% (35,381)	45.0% (29,826)

Note: Numbers in brackets show the number of returns on which the percentage is based

Non-completion does not necessarily mean that trainees have not achieved at all. There are also outcomes which are not directly related to qualifications; for example, over a quarter of early leavers remain with the same employer who originally offered them the apprenticeship and about 20% go on to do similar work with a different employer. DfES follow-up studies suggest that satisfaction about the programme from both young people and employers is high. Inspection bases judgements about quality on completion of whole qualifications and full frameworks, as it is these that the provider is contracted to deliver.

2.1.7.2 Decline in participation

The number of starts in each programme for each of the 4 years has also changed considerably. As shown in Table 6, numbers appear to be declining, with the exception of FMAs, which may be increasing because of the phasing out of OTYP.

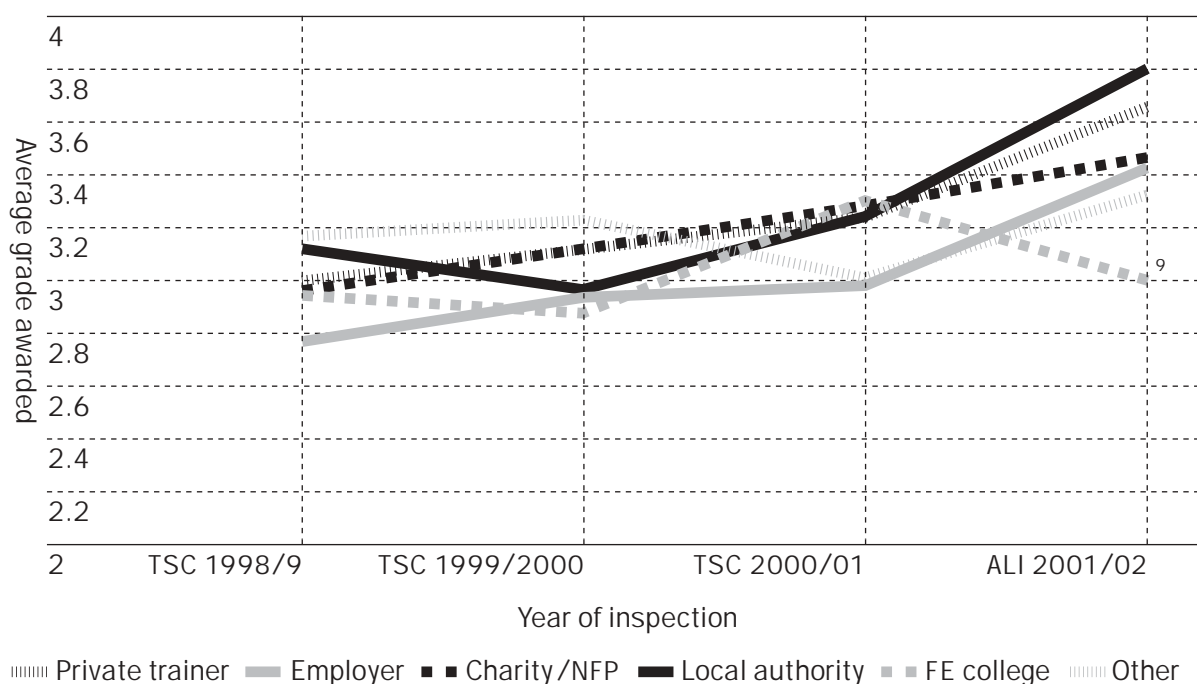
Table 6 Number of starts on GST programmes

Programme	1997/8	1998/9	1999/2000	2000/01	April–September 2001/02
AMA	87,864	85,568	86,522	83,470	33,400
FMA	1399	41,043	97,499	106,052	57,100
OTYP	204,321	128,710	71,548	59,240	24,600
WBLA	195,932	101,126	108,311	108,772	Not known

2.1.7.3 Type of provider

There are many different types of provider involved in work-based learning. The respective performance in leadership and management of the different types of provider is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6 Average leadership and management grades by type of provider



9 One one FE college's work-based learning provision was the subject of an ALI-led inspection during the period covered by the LSDA research.

As Figure 6 illustrates:

- grades for leadership and management have all worsened over the 4 years since 1998/9
- there are significant differences in the grades awarded to different types of provider
- there have been few grade 1s awarded to charity / not-for-profit providers even though a relatively high number of inspections has been completed
- employer training providers were awarded more of the better grades for leadership and management and charity / not-for-profit providers received more of the poorer grades in this category.

2.1.8 Providers inspected twice

Up to the end of 2001, 20 work-based learning providers had been inspected twice, once by TSC in its first year of operation and once by ALI.

The TSC inspection reports for these providers were published between 22 July 1998 and 3 February 1999, and the last day of inspection by ALI ranged from 5 October to 14 December 2001.

Comparison of the TSC and ALI grades indicates that:

- each of the providers' average grades has worsened
- the proportion of grades 4 and 5 has risen from 7 to 59%
- in areas of learning, the proportion of grades 4 and 5 has risen from 7 to 56%
- in leadership and management, the proportion of grades 4 and 5 has risen from 10 to 65%
- the average decline for all grades is 0.97 of a grade
- areas of learning have declined by an average of 1.01 grades
- leadership and management grades have declined by an average of 0.90 of a grade.

2.1.9 Grades for work-based learning provided by colleges

At the time that the project research was undertaken, only a relatively small number of college (Ofsted-led) inspections had included work-based learning. Between September and December 2001, 38 college inspections took place, 10 of which graded work-based provision. Twenty-three grades were awarded, with an average grade of 3.3. This compares with an average grade of 3.4 for the same areas of learning for non-college work-based learning (ALI inspections) over the same period of time.

These grades were for areas of learning only, although they are likely to have contributed to leadership and management grades. In six cases, the grade awarded to the area of learning within which the college work-based learning was being inspected was the same, in four cases, the grade for work-based learning was better, and in 13 cases the work-based grade was worse. However, the college work-based learning provision has grades across 1–5, whereas the grades for other work-based training providers have no grade 1s and more grade 4s. Of college work-based learning grades 57% were judged to be satisfactory or better compared with 49% of the grades awarded to other training providers for the same areas of learning (see Figure 7).

Figure 7(a) Grades for college-led work-based training provision, inspected September–December 2001

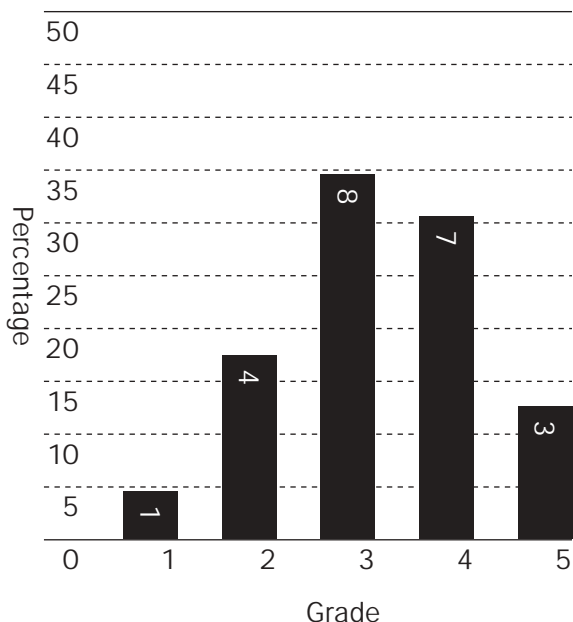
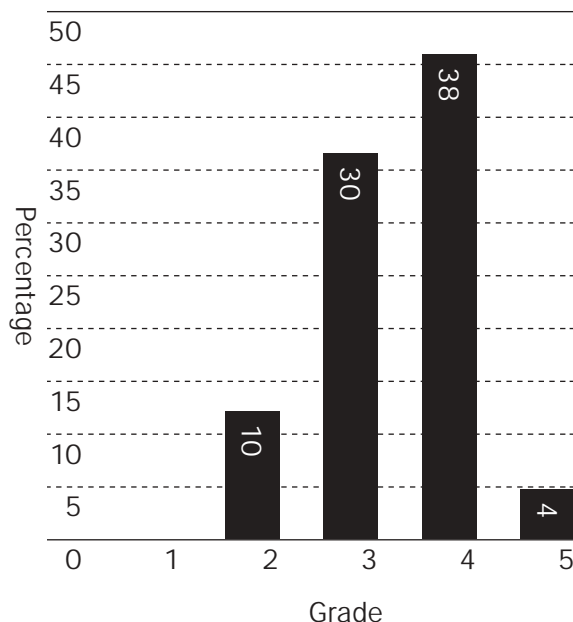


Figure 7(b) Grades for other work-based training in the same areas of learning, inspected September–December 2001



Note: Numbers above the bars are the number of inspection grades on which the percentage is based

2.2 Implications and issues arising from the statistical analysis

The statistical analysis of work-based training providers confirms the acceleration under ALI of the deterioration of grades, which was evident in the latter part of the TSC regime. However, care must be taken in any conclusions derived from this evidence alone. There have been relatively few examples of the same providers experiencing both regimes, and the varied nature of the provider base and learners within it make comparing like with like an impossible task. The ALI data also covers less than a full year, and this has resulted in some of the numbers within the subgroups that have been examined (eg areas of learning) being quite small. The changes in emphasis and method of inspection from TSC to ALI need also to be taken into account.

The different grade profile within New Deal provision further complicates the identification of underlying causes. Many of the issues encountered by the work-based learning providers are similar to those experienced by New Deal providers. In some cases, they may be the same providers, and the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) is used as the basis of ALI inspections of New Deal provision.

Despite these reservations, the marked deterioration in the grade profile in the 20 providers that have experienced both ALI and TSC inspections suggests that there are significant underlying problems. Some of these may be connected with increasing robustness within the inspection process. Additionally or alternatively, ways of looking at evidence may be changing. The emphasis of the CIF on the impact of provision on learning within the CIF, as evidenced by achievement data, is likely to be having a significant effect on judgements about quality.

The similarity in the average grade awarded for college-led work-based learning and other work-based provision suggests there are difficulties in delivering work-based learning across all types of providers. It perhaps also points to some inherent problems with the programmes on offer and the models of learning being used.

2.3 Qualitative analysis of the ALI inspection reports

The ALI inspection reports provide bullet points of key strengths and weaknesses. The ALI database, which identifies the number of times particular issues are mentioned, and the comments made, was examined to identify trends that could reveal the link between the grades awarded and the underlying concerns about the quality of practice.

There is a very clear pattern of leadership and management issues raised in relation to areas of learning (see Table 7). For all areas of learning, *management of data* was the most frequently mentioned weakness (apart from in foundation for work, where it was staff development and appraisal). Poor analysis and use of data to guide decisions was mentioned twice as frequently as inadequate data or management information systems *per se*.

The second most frequently mentioned weakness was *internal verification* (except in foundation programmes where it was leadership and strategy). The third issue most frequently mentioned was *targets* (although management of learning was also the most mentioned weakness in six areas). Three-quarters of those weaknesses were in general setting of targets for improvement and staff performance, with a few specific references to retention and achievement and to under-represented groups.

There was uniform ranking of leadership and management weaknesses mentioned under New Deal areas: *management of data* (1), *target-setting* (2) and *monitoring systems* (3).

A wide range of strengths and weaknesses are mentioned in inspection reports under areas of learning. As can be seen in Table 8, *achievement and retention* was the most frequently mentioned issue identified as a weakness, apart from in foundation programmes and foundation for work, where it was *basic skills*, and in hairdressing and beauty therapy where it was *assessment processes*. Second and third ranking issues were more widely distributed but the overall weaknesses in areas of learning are *achievement and retention* (1), *assessment processes* (2) and *key skills* (3).

Achievement and retention was highlighted as a weakness 205 times. Of these 141 were in areas graded 4 and 5 and 57 in areas graded 3. Only seven were mentioned in areas of learning gaining grade 2, and these were very wide-ranging, four comments relating to retention and the others to specific qualifications. An examination of comments in particular areas of learning such as foundation programmes and engineering did not show particular emphasis on either retention or achievement, although the number of providers in each area is small.

Retention and achievement was also mentioned as a strength in 135 areas of learning / New Deal areas, 84% of these in areas graded 3 or above, and only 16% in those graded 4 and 5 (in New Deal grades 4 and 5 only 7%). In work-based learning there were equal mentions of retention, achievement, and retention and achievement together in areas graded 1 or 2, whereas in areas graded 4 or 5, two-thirds of the mentions were for retention only.

Assessment processes were recorded as a weakness in 159 areas of learning reports. Most referred generally to poor assessment practices, although there were also references to poor internal verification, training of assessors and planning of assessment. Most frequently mentioned (43 times) was insufficient assessment in the workplace, also including lack of involvement of supervisors, employers and lack of assessment by direct observation.

There were 139 mentions of key skills as a weakness. Specific weaknesses highlighted were poor or inadequate training, poor integration and / or late introduction of key skills, poor assessment practice, lack of understanding and poor progress by learners.

The key areas of concern which are repeatedly highlighted in the ALI reports appear to be:

- management of data
- achievement and retention
- the quality of the assessment process.

These issues broadly relate to those emerging from the quantitative analysis and the interviews with interested parties which follow.

Table 7 Strengths and weaknesses in leadership and management mentioned most frequently in inspection reports by areas of learning (1, 2, 3 represent topics mentioned most frequently in rank order)

	Strengths			Weaknesses						
	Staff development and appraisal	On-off job (training) Communication	Leadership strategy	Management of data	Internal verification	Targets	Management of learning	Staff development and appraisal	Leadership strategy	Monitoring systems
Areas of learning										
Business administration	1	2	3	1	2	3				
Construction	1	2	3	1	=2		=2	=2		
Engineering etc	1	2	3	1	3			2		
Foundation for work	1	2	3	2		3		1		
Foundation programmes	1	2	3	1			=3	=3	2	
Hairdressing and beauty	1	2	3	1	2		3			
Health etc	1	2	3	1	2	3				
Hospitality etc	1	2	3	1	2	=3	=3			
ICT	1	2	3	1	2	=3				=3
Land-based	1	2	3	1		=2	=2			=2
Retailing etc	1	2	3	1	2		3			
New Deal										
Employment	2	1	3	1		2				3
Environmental Task Force	2	1	3	1		2				3
Full-time education and training	2	1	3	1		2				3
Self-employment	2	1	3	1		2				3
Gateway	2	1	3	1		2				3
Voluntary sector	2	1	3	1		2				3

Table 8a Strengths in areas of learning mentioned most frequently in inspection reports (1, 2, 3 represent topics mentioned most frequently in rank order)

Areas of learning	Employment / work placement	Learner support	Off-the-job training	On-the-job training	Additional qualifications	Progression	Resources	Achievement and retention	Assessment processes	Range	ILPs	Next steps
Business administration												
Construction	1	2			3							
Engineering etc	3	2	1									
Foundation for work		2	3					1				
Foundation programmes												
Hairdressing and beauty												
Health etc	3	1	2									
Hospitality etc		1	=3		=3			2				
ICT	2	1	=3		=3			=3				
Land-based	1	=2	=2					=2				
Retailing etc	1		=2					=2				
AOLs overall	1	3							2			
New Deal												
Employment												
Environmental Task Force	1				=2					=2	=2	
Full-time education and training		2			1			3				
Self-employment		=2	1					=2		=2		
Gateway	*	1	*		*	*	*	*				
Voluntary sector	1	2						3				
New Deal overall	2	1						3				
Overall	2	1	3									

* All other areas equal

Table 8b Weaknesses in areas of learning mentioned most frequently in inspection reports (1, 2, 3 represent topics mentioned most frequently in rank order)

Areas of learning	Achievement and retention	Assessment processes	Key skills	Initial assessment	Reviews and visits	Individual learning	Management of learning	Internal verification	Basic skills	Resources	Progression	Employment involvement	Job search	Targets / action plans	Other
Business administration	1	2		3											
Construction	1		=2	=2											
Engineering etc		1	2	3											
Foundation for work				=2	=2	=2			1						
Foundation programmes				=2					1	=2					
Hairdressing and beauty	2	1	3												
Health etc	1	3	2												
Hospitality etc	1	=3	2		=3										
ICT	1	2	3												
Land-based	1						=2	=2							
Retailing etc	1	=3	2	=3											
New Deal															
Employment	2				=3					1	=3				=3
Environmental Task Force	=2	=2													1
Full-time education and training	3			1									3		
Self-employment	=1			=1	=1	=1	=1	=1							=1
Gateway									1	3					2
Voluntary sector	1			3								2	3		

2.4 Consultation with ALI inspectors

Members of the project team met with a group of approximately 60 ALI inspectors to introduce the research project, ask for views on the reasons for the deterioration in grades and consult on the research instrument and sample of providers for the telephone interviews. The discussions took place in small groups and plenary sessions.

2.4.1 Issues raised by inspectors

- The different focus of the CIF from *Raising the Standard* is perhaps best illustrated in the prominence of statistics on retention and achievement at the beginning of inspection reports. There is a strong emphasis in ALI on retention and achievement, and inspections are built around this.
- There is a need for caution in comparing the TSC and ALI grades ; we are not comparing like with like. The inspection framework has changed significantly. Inspectors commented that :
 - while the emphasis now is on retention and achievement, providers may not always appreciate this
 - expectations have increased, but providers have not been supported to raise their game
 - inspectors have more data at their disposal, particularly on retention and achievement
 - inspectors are better informed about programmes and qualifications.
- The emphasis on data about achievement and retention may also help to explain why New Deal grades have not declined in the same way. Data on outcomes, other than job outcomes, is not always available or used, as New Deal is primarily aiming to get clients into jobs and this is the most important measure of success. Achieving the full Modern Apprenticeship framework was seen to be more challenging. Achievement in key skills is often poor, which also impacts on grades awarded. The CIF provides less explicit examples for self-assessment than *Raising the Standard*.
- There are changing expectations on what counts as completion in work-based learning – without a re-appraisal of the funding and resources to achieve this. Although more is expected of trainees, in terms of Modern Apprenticeship frameworks, but the time allowed for completion is not always sufficient. This is likely to be further exacerbated when key skills examinations come into play. Some questioned whether expectations were reasonable.
- Leadership and management grades are now more influenced by retention and achievement data. Even where training is good, if trainees do not successfully complete, provision is judged to be unsatisfactory, and this reflects in turn on leadership and management.
- Providers get less support for self-assessment from local LSCs than they did under the TECs. The reduction in support in the handover from TECs to local LSCs may have contributed to the problem but this did not fully account for the step change in deterioration of grades.

- Providers are disadvantaged by not being predisposed to share practice and learn from each other.
- Re-inspections bring about improvements in outcomes and self-assessment, but the lasting effects of re-inspection are not known.
- The inspection focuses much more clearly on assessing provision from the learner's perspective – some inspectors also noted the CIF's emphasis on learning and the learning process.
- The breadth of inspectors' experience has increased, as have their expectations. Falling grades are not the result of poorer provision, but a reflection of higher expectations. Provision which was regarded as exemplary three years ago now looks more like the norm. Inspectors have got sharper and more confident. They are focusing on targets, the setting and achievement of targets, and continuous improvement. The training that inspectors have had on entry to ALI has developed the skills of new and experienced inspectors.

These views provided valuable insight into inspectors' perceptions of the reasons for poor quality in work-based learning and informed the areas of further investigation in the structured interviews.

2.5 Views of established providers

Two teleconferences were held with established providers to seek their views on the reasons for the deterioration of grades for work-based training. The issues emerging from the teleconferences indicated tensions between programme design, the ability levels of clients on these programmes, and capacity of the providers to deliver within the context of a more demanding inspection regime.

2.5.1 Issues raised by established providers

- The focus on retention and achievement was thought to be a major contributory cause of declining inspection grades for work-based learning. Concerns were raised about the validity of the data on which judgements about retention and achievement are based, especially the use of historical information collected by TECs. The criteria for successful completion were perceived to have changed, from the TEC view that this was about achievement of NVQs to the achievement of broader Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. This was seen to limit the extent to which fair comparisons between TSC grades and ALI grades could be made.
- Teleconference participants noted that their trainees are not generally selected by ability. Indeed, if strict criteria for entry were adhered to, many providers would not be viable. Early leavers were thought to be caused by the poor guidance given before candidates are recruited, and also because young people in work-based training are ill equipped academically and attitudinally. Many trainees on work-based training programmes need a great deal of additional support.
- Changes to the CIF in relation to the absence of a specific quality rating for learner support and the lack of emphasis on developing basic skills were seen to be retrograde steps, which limited the extent to which the strengths of some providers could be celebrated.

- Differences in approach and criteria for provider review and preparation for inspection, and lack of consistency in judgements between local LSCs, had been observed by teleconference participants. For example, in the case of a national provider, local LSC assessments of financial viability ranged from 'serious concern' to 'good'.
- General approval was expressed for the CIF's emphasis on teaching and learning, but providers were concerned about the resource implications of this, especially for re-training of staff.
- Unease about the way grades are determined, and the perceived mismatch between the description of provision and the grade awarded, was expressed by some participants. The process appears subjective, and weighting for particular strengths and weaknesses unclear, and perhaps open to different interpretation by other inspectors.
- Early TSC inspections were seen to be a learning process for both inspectors and providers. Inspectors are now more confident, have seen more practice and can judge provision in relation to a range of other provision.
- Comparisons with FE college provision were seen to be at the heart of the 'secret' ALI benchmarks, which providers firmly believe are being used by ALI.
- The arrangements for inspecting national providers were also commented upon. The time required for these inspections may prove to be onerous for providers, with some sites being inspected many times for different areas of learning. In large organisations, nominees will need to be released from all other duties.
- Funding was seen to have declined in real terms from TEC to LSC, the decline being estimated as between 15 and 25%. This reduction is being imposed within a more demanding regime, during a time of considerable change, alongside a fundamental shift from assessment-led provision to more direct training. There are concerns that the provider base is being reduced by attrition.
- The absence of sustained and sufficient support for staff development and training was seen as a major obstacle to improving provider performance. Staff recruitment and retention was quoted as a major inhibitor to quality improvement, especially as higher pay levels outside the work-based training sector result in qualified staff leaving to take posts in other sectors.

2.6 Telephone interviews

In order to investigate the concerns and issues raised by previous aspects of the research further, structured interviews were conducted with representatives of all the interested parties. These included a sample of providers, including providers previously inspected by TSC and ALI and those inspected only by ALI, ranging in size, type and geographical location. LSC quality managers and ALI inspectors, specialising in a wide range of areas of learning, were also interviewed. The interviews were conducted by telephone and each lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Interviews were conducted with 18 providers inspected by both ALI and TSC, 21 providers inspected by ALI only, 11 LSC quality managers and 12 ALI inspectors.

2.6.1 Research instrument

The research instrument for the telephone interviews included similar prompt questions for each type of participant, investigating the areas listed below.

- Quality and inspection :
 - inspection framework
 - the inspection process
 - preparation and follow-up
 - quality monitoring and improvement.
- Organisational Issues :
 - stability and maturity of provider organisations
 - scale and complexity of provision
 - staff – roles, occupational competence, qualifications
 - contracting and allocations arrangements.
- Leadership and management :
 - management of the learning process
 - self-assessment and development plans
 - data
 - strategic planning and quality assurance processes
 - equal opportunities.
- The learning process :
 - programmes and curriculum
 - key skills
 - teaching and learning
 - retention and achievement.

2.7 Findings from telephone interviews

2.7.1 Quality and inspection

2.7.1.1 *The inspection framework*

There was considerable agreement among LSC quality managers and ALI inspectors that the CIF places great emphasis on the impact of provision on the learner.

The focus on experience of the learner has probably had most impact on grades. (LSC quality manager)

The CIF focuses more on the learner and places more emphasis on retention and achievement. The TSC inspected the delivery of NVQs and the skills development of NVQs. The ALI places more emphasis on the teaching of theory and underpinning knowledge. (ALI inspector)

Some providers raised concerns that the attention paid to retention and achievement does not sufficiently take into account the type of learners and their various support needs.

The more able trainees are remaining at school or college. Trainees who are coming into work-based learning have poorer basic skills. But as a company trainer, we can pick and choose our trainees. (Provider)

The extent to which providers understand the CIF varies greatly. Some noted that it is difficult to understand the principles before an inspection has taken place. Others noted that the CIF is less specific than *Raising the Standard*, and does not give as much guidance about what is expected.

Raising the Standard was based on quality statements. It had the learner as a focus. The CIF is based on evaluative questions, which bring the learner even more to the fore. The CIF has a strong emphasis on teaching and learning as well as the learner. All its emphasis is on the impact on the learner. (LSC quality manager)

Many providers noted the absence of explicit benchmarks for retention and achievement, and the lack of reference in expectations about retention to the prevailing levels of retention in jobs, as well as in training within occupational areas. The perception that there are 'secret' benchmarks and that these are unfairly drawn from college-based provision is firmly held. Some of those interviewed called for a review of the basis on which retention and achievement rates are calculated, and for recognition of the need to have an equitable measure of success across different post-16 learning routes.

2.7.1.2 *The inspection process*

Most providers agreed that the inspection process is fair, and great value is placed on the pre-inspection meetings with inspectors. While many were complimentary about the professionalism of the inspectors, a number expressed concerns about the attitude of some of the inspectors, and their lack of relevant experience in the occupational area or work-based training *per se*.

Concerns were expressed about how grades were arrived at and the apparent contradiction between the commentary in inspection reports and the grades awarded. For some providers, this created anxiety about their efforts to improve. They are unclear about what needed to be done to improve the quality of what they do and are concerned that similar evidence may be judged differently by another inspector.

Many providers stress that they put great effort into providing a good service, but find that their efforts are not acknowledged by the inspection process.

The organisation is genuinely better than it was at TSC inspection but obtained worse grades. There is a lack of understanding at high levels as to how difficult work-based learning is. (Provider)

An ALI inspector observed that the TSC used to have grade descriptors and something like that could be useful.

2.7.1.3 *Preparation and follow-up*

Early ALI inspections appear to have suffered from inadequate support from local LSCs. There were examples given of providers basing their self-assessment on *Raising the Standard*, and reports that local LSCs were unable to provide answers to queries, as they, too, were coming to terms with the changes. However, many providers warmly praised post-inspection support from local LSCs.

Providers noted the value of the self-assessment and development planning process. LSC quality managers saw some providers as paying lip service to these processes, and being driven by events, rather than anticipating changes in a strategic manner. The absence of a critical, self-improving culture was raised as a significant concern. The prevailing view is that providers generally do not know how to get better and need considerable support.

ALI is spot on in its judgements. Providers are not analysing what they are doing.
(LSC quality manager)

Each provider has a contract manager who works with them on their self-assessment report and development plan and a quality manager. We provide workshops on common themes. It is difficult to know when to stop supporting and let them get on with it. Some national guidelines would help.
(LSC quality manager)

2.7.1.4 *Quality monitoring and improvement*

Providers, and some LSC quality managers, noted the dissonance between the inspection and provider review processes. Provider review appears to be undertaken in different ways in local LSCs and ranges from a desk exercise to a full quality audit.

Local LSCs and providers agree that the lack of sustained support for development and staff training within the work-based sector has been a major contributory factor in the failure to improve practice.

2.7.2 **Organisational issues**

2.7.2.1 *Stability and maturity of provider organisations and scale and complexity of provision*

There were conflicting views about the importance of the size and maturity of providers' businesses and the scale of their provision. Some thought that small-scale provision could secure overall quality more easily. Others noted that there was a need for dedicated staff to deal with quality assurance and administrative issues, requiring economies of scale only possible in larger organisations. Inspectors commented that the broader the provision, the more scope there was for problems, although one observed that there could be an optimum size, below which providers struggle.

Providers believe that companies with few vocational areas get better grades.

LSC quality managers, in particular, noted variations in the quality of provision across sites within national and regional providers. One quality manager particularly welcomed the 'blitz' approach to inspection of these providers.

Quality can vary widely in different branches. Conformance to, and understanding of, quality assurance processes is variable. ALI's 'blitz' approach in inspecting all sites is better. (LSC quality manager)

2.7.2.2 *Staff – roles, occupational competence and qualifications*

It is apparent that many providers operate on low staffing levels. Several providers mentioned the problem of recruiting and retaining staff, and their lack of resources to pay staff with appropriate qualifications was also of concern.

Providers offering small minority areas of training find it difficult to obtain staff with the appropriate teaching qualifications or experience. (ALI inspector)

Providers noted that they had put great effort and resources into training staff to be assessors, and now they needed to upskill them to become trainers. Some commented that once staff gained qualifications they left for jobs in other parts of the sector.

Local LSC quality managers observed that some providers employed former trainees as trainers. Quality managers and inspectors saw what constitutes 'suitably competent and qualified' as problematic.

2.7.2.3 *Contracting and allocations arrangements*

Most providers noted the changing nature of the client group with which they were dealing – their declining level of ability and motivation. Young people in the care sector, in particular, appear to be prone to leaving the profession to work in retailing, where pay and conditions are better. The value placed on the end qualification by these trainees appears to be low.

At the same time, expectations of trainees have increased. Modern Apprenticeship frameworks are more rigorous than NVQs alone, and key skills are seen as a major obstacle to achievement.

Given these problems with the client group, inadequacies in funding and the standard length of stay were seen as a contributory factor in unsuccessful completion. The lack of flexibility in the length of stay previously available in some TEC areas was seen to be a retrograde step. However, LSC quality managers noted the lack of awareness of providers about the potential for securing additional support for learners, either in-house or outsourced.

Providers are crying out about revising the standard length of stay. There is confusion (possibly LSC's fault) about the availability of extra funding for additional learning needs. Use of this could resolve some of the issues. Support can be bought in from elsewhere. Because the providers don't network, they probably would not know who could help. It is almost like they don't realise that there is a new system. (LSC quality manager)

There was general agreement that resources were insufficient to support successful completion and that funding had declined.

For example, an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship in Business Administration last year was worth £2500. Now the same candidate would be worth £600. The emphasis of remuneration now is 'bums on seats' for a set amount of time. It's not worth doing. (Provider)

Some of the more successful providers interviewed had significant alternative resources for their trainees – up to 75% extra. Providers noted that they usually supported the trainees to achieve their qualification aims outside the period of the standard length of stay – but this was not funded by the LSC.

2.7.3 Leadership and management

2.7.3.1 Management of the learning process

Providers noted that ALI appeared to expect to see management systems similar to those in colleges. Some providers observed that their processes were more informal, and less paper driven, but proving their effectiveness was more difficult in the absence of a 'paper chase'.

Some providers still experienced difficulties in managing subcontractors, but others had ended their contracts with other parties because of the difficulties in maintaining quality.

Local LSCs noted the absence of a strategic view of the management of learning, and the tendency of small providers to be intimidated by larger organisations, usually colleges, with whom they subcontract.

2.7.3.2 Self-assessment and development plans

Most providers claimed to value the process of self-assessment and production of development plans, and saw them as useful. A minority of providers thought that these were produced solely for LSC/TECs. Some said they were using the CIF to drive the quality improvement process.

2.7.3.3 Data

Providers reported many problems relating to the collection and interpretation of data. Many providers were concerned that historical data, collected for other purposes, was being used to judge the effectiveness of Modern Apprenticeship provision. Data collected for TECs was produced in different formats from that requested by ALI. Some TECs had judged successful completion on the basis of achievement of NVQs rather than completion of the Modern Apprenticeship frameworks. The lack of a standardised format for data collection by the LSC was of particular concern. Many providers were re-formulating their existing data at great cost, but were concerned that this would need to be re-done once LSC decided on a common format.

Data issues related to the concerns expressed earlier over benchmarking were reiterated.

Some inspectors noted the need to use data as a guide rather than an absolute measure.

Inspectors need to consider the factors behind the data, rather than just considering raw data. (ALI inspector)

2.7.3.4 *Strategic planning and the quality assurance process*

Providers were asked whether they were more concerned with contract compliance than quality improvement. Many were puzzled by this comparison and noted that they needed to comply with contracts in order to be given subsequent contracts. The concept of delighting rather than satisfying does not appear to be widely held, and reinforces earlier observations about the lack of strategic vision in many providers.

LSC quality managers thought that providers lacked self-awareness and strategic vision. Providers were seen by some to do the minimum to meet requirements. This had engendered a dependency on the TEC, which was now continued into the LSC. Some inspectors also observed that providers did not exploit the CIF as a management tool – using it only to get through inspection.

Inspection should be encouraging providers to become less reliant and more in charge of their own destiny, but this won't happen overnight. It needs to be developed. (LSC quality manager)

2.7.3.5 *Equal opportunities*

In the majority of cases, equal opportunity issues were not seen to have a detrimental impact on grades. Provision was said to be improving in many cases, although issues relating to occupational bias were raised. In general, it was thought that the CIF was more receptive than the TSC to the efforts of providers to overcome issues of bias.

2.7.4 **The learning process**

2.7.4.1 *Programmes and curriculum*

The demands of the Modern Apprenticeship frameworks and the associated need for dedicated learning time were raised as major difficulties.

This has to have an impact on judgements about quality because inspectors have to see teaching in action. (LSC quality manager)

Some providers were especially concerned about the impact that technical certificates may have on the quality of provision once they are introduced. Some expressed concerns about the low tolerance of employers for providing time off to undertake specific off-the-job training sessions. There were also concerns about the extent to which trainees would accept a more formal delivery system, if this were to be similar to the formal, classroom-based system that many had disliked during compulsory schooling.

2.7.4.2 *Key skills*

Key skills were almost universally seen by those interviewed as a burden and barrier to achievement. The prospect of key skills tests was seen as a further contributing factor to decline in achievement. Many reported that trainees were refusing to engage in key skills sessions and that employers were supporting their trainees in this. The issue that was raised was not that key skills are irrelevant, but that there was a lack of flexibility in relating the key skills content to the main learning programme.

The inability of providers to deliver key skills – either integrated into other learning or discretely – is seen by all concerned as a major obstacle to the development of high quality provision.

2.7.4.3 *Teaching and learning*

Many providers welcomed the explicit reference to teaching and learning embodied in the CIF. However, some noted the need for a broader view of how this may be delivered in the workplace. Others were opposed to the notion of explicit teaching within work-based learning. The need for resources to upskill assessors to provide direct training was seen as an additional demand. Not all providers appreciated the significance of the switch from the NVQ assessment process to the delivery of Modern Apprenticeship programmes with greater need for underpinning knowledge and theory. Providers did not always see the relationship between better achievement and more rigorous teaching and learning.

In contrast, inspectors emphasised the need for more defined teaching and learning activity.

2.7.4.4 *Retention and achievement*

Most providers held the view that retention and achievement levels expected by ALI were unrealistic. Poor initial guidance and a lack of awareness of what the job entails was seen often to result in young people leaving within the first few weeks of a programme. Providers noted that, in contrast to colleges, they had few alternatives to offer when this was the case. Some also observed that four years (in some cases) was a long time in which to take a Modern Apprenticeship programme. Staging posts along the way may be helpful in maintaining motivation for young people.

Inspectors were convinced that retention and achievement was a major indicator of the quality of provision, and that it was legitimate to expect that recruits have more than a 50% chance of successfully completing their training programmes.

2.8 Triangulating issues from the structured interviews

The structured interviews revealed similarities and differences in the most frequently mentioned concerns by providers, LSC quality managers and ALI inspectors. Table 9 triangulates the concerns most frequently mentioned by each of the interested parties.

Table 9 Triangulating concerns – priority rankings¹⁰

Issue identified	Providers	LSC quality managers	ALI inspectors
Retention and achievement	=1	5	1
Lack of support	=1		=3
Unfamiliar with CIF	=2		=4
Insufficient funding	=2		
Key skills	=3	4	=4
Less able learners	=3	7	
Data	4	2	
Impact on learners and learning		1	2
Providers are not strategic		3	
Training programme issues		6	=3
Size and scale of company			5

These concerns indicate the different perspective on the problem as perceived by the key players.

Providers :

- are aware of the impact of retention and achievement, but do not link this to impact on learners and learning
- are working with a new system of inspection which they do not fully understand
- lack support or resources to remedy their shortcomings
- have difficulty in delivering key skills
- think they are working with increasingly less able or motivated trainees
- have problems in obtaining and using data.

LSC quality managers :

- have significant concerns about the impact of provision on learners and learning
- see data collection and interpretation as a key issue
- see providers as relatively immature organisations
- see key skills and training programme issues as part of the problem
- share to some extent the providers' views about changes to the cohort of learners in the work-based route.

ALI inspectors :

- closely link retention and achievement issues with impact on learners and learning
- share a similar priority ranking with providers regarding lack of support, and to a lesser degree with providers' unfamiliarity with the CIF
- agree that there are key skills and other programme-related issues
- think there is some relationship to the size and scale of the organisation.

¹⁰ The issues most frequently mentioned by each key player were not entirely consistent.

3 Implications of findings

The reasons for the decline in inspection grades for work-based learning appear to be multi-causal. Some of these may be related to transition from TEC to LSC, and as such may be transitory in their nature. However, the CIF and ALI inspection process may be revealing deeper systemic issues, which require attention from policy-makers if work-based learning is to improve.

3.1 Understanding the CIF and support for inspection

Lack of understanding and awareness of the new inspection framework on the part of the local LSCs and providers probably had a detrimental effect on providers' readiness for inspection in the early days of ALI. Inadequate preparation for changes in self-assessment reports, data collection etc may have had some effect on grades. However, this appears to be being remedied in some local LSCs as they become more confident in their role. Post-inspection support is said to be good by many practitioners.

3.2 Data and benchmarks for retention and achievement

Many providers are convinced that there are 'secret' benchmarks being used by ALI, which are not related to occupational averages for either length of stay in certain jobs, or achievement of qualifications. Some maintain that there is an unfair comparison with further education colleges – in terms of the data on which retention and achievement is based. In further education colleges, achievement rates are calculated by expressing the number of learners obtaining their target qualification as a percentage of those who complete their learning programme. Retention rates are based on the numbers of learners completing their course as a percentage of those enrolled at the first census date.¹¹ In work-based learning the achievement rate is calculated by expressing the number of learners fully achieving all elements of their individual learning plan as a percentage of those who started the programme. The calculation in school sixth forms is estimated in yet another way. ALI's view is that its expectation of average grades is influenced by the occupational area and programmes concerned, and not on comparison with college programmes.

An explicit and shared basis on which judgements are made about retention and successful completion would be welcomed by all concerned.

¹¹ This date was November of the respective academic year, but is being changed to October in 2002.

Some providers noted that there were other outcomes in addition to the achievement of qualifications and completion of the Modern Apprenticeship framework which should be considered as measures of success. Aspects of provision, such as support for learners, are not inspected as a separate area in the CIF, although they were in *Raising the Standard*. Equally, one of the critical success factors in New Deal is the extent to which programmes can be adapted to meet the needs of individuals. There may be merit in reconsidering whether a range of value-added measures of success would be useful in estimating progression and development.

3.3 Comparison with New Deal

Some of the factors involved in the delivery and inspection of New Deal and work-based training are the same :

- the inspection framework is largely similar
- inspectors are drawn from ALI
- providers offering training for New Deal may also be offering work-based training.

Differences in the programmes include :

- emphasis on job outcomes from New Deal has been a consistent policy objective
- definitions of achievement are more flexible than completion of a full Modern Apprenticeship framework with key skills
- provision is organised and inspected within a unit of delivery, which encourages collaboration and provides opportunities for networking and support
- Employment Services nationally have provided a substantial amount of guidance and have disseminated examples of good practice consistently since the early days of the programme.

The support that providers receive and a more flexible view of achievement may make the task of delivering to a difficult client group less onerous.

3.4 Providers or range of provision ?

The fall in quality reflected in the ALI grade profile appears in part to be related to the capacity of providers to deliver the more rigorous Modern Apprenticeship programmes, combined with the increased scrutiny of the impact of provision on learning within the CIF.

The emphasis on a wider range of learning activities and more structured delivery of underpinning theory is a marked shift. The pedagogical implications of delivering Modern Apprenticeships need to be considered. Difficulties in delivering key skills are illustrative of the problems currently being faced by work-based training providers. The introduction of technical certificates is seen as a potential future problem, mainly because they will require more direct delivery of learning.

In some sectors, providers are unsure about how to amend their practice to secure more regular and planned 'learning episodes', which are needed in programmes not exclusively leading to NVQs. Providers, employers and learners may not know what is required, and in some cases the changes may not be practical without a radical change in delivery and resourcing.

Providers and LSC quality managers were concerned that there is not a good enough range of provision to meet the needs of all actual and potential learners in the work-based route. Providers report that in some instances they are encouraged to place trainees on Advanced Modern Apprenticeship programmes. As a result, young people are often placed on inappropriate programmes, which they subsequently leave without completing. This is a different, although related, issue from poor initial assessment.

Providers see the emphasis in the CIF on the impact of provision on learners as a significant change. While ALI inspectors noted that this emphasis was always a strong feature of *Raising the Standard*, it may be the most significant reason for providers' difficulties in improving the quality of their provision. Providers see the unreliability of data on learners' retention and achievement as a major contributory factor in the decline in grades. However, even at its most fragile the data reveals that people on work-based programmes are more likely to be unsuccessful than successful in achieving their learning goals.

The focus on teaching and learning is a result of the switch from assessment of competence in role to the development of knowledge and skills in a work context. The work-based sector is geared up to deliver the former and will need support to find new ways of delivering effective work-based learning for people at the initial stages of their careers. These increasing demands do not appear to have been anticipated by work-based training providers. The support for their introduction has been patchy across TEC and now local LSC areas. The expertise within the work-based route clearly has many strengths in terms of occupational expertise, and more recently in assessment processes. However, experience in more systematic teaching and learning in a work-based context is less well developed.

3.5 Provision for young people or adults ?

The inspections considered in this research project have almost entirely focused on training for young people at the formative stage of their career. The picture may be different for adults who are mature learners, for whom a work-based assessment of competence may be entirely adequate.

In the case of one provider, the focus on Modern Apprenticeships resulted in very poor grades for only 3% of the total provision. There may be issues relating to young people and 'pre-service' learning, which is less problematic for adults in the workplace with significant experience that can be accredited and extended by means of work-based assessment.

3.6 Capacity building

Many providers and LSC staff commented on the lack of sustained and sufficient development and training within the work-based training sector. The contrast with the college sector and its tradition for networking and exchanging practice was made, as was providers' lack of access to the Standards Fund until very recently.

The absence of a strategic view of many organisations offering work-based learning was also seen to contribute to the lack of responsibility taken by providers for their own development – to anticipate and prepare for change.

The work-based sector is under-qualified, even in terms of the previous focus on assessment. Most providers interviewed had made great efforts to ensure that their staff obtained assessor qualifications and saw the cost of re-skilling assessors to become trainers as prohibitive.

3.7 Key skills

These are seen by the majority of providers as a major problem – not necessarily in their inclusion in vocational learning programmes, but in the relevance of the mandatory key skills, and their testing. Many providers note the difficulty in teaching key skills, and the danger that, if this is done in a formal, class-based manner, it could undermine the informal methods developed within work-based training, which are greatly appreciated by young people for whom school was a negative experience.

3.8 Funding and resourcing issues

Many providers commented on the reduction in real terms of the funding available to support work-based learning, and on the period of time during which funding is available. Problems with the standard length of stay and also local variations in this appear to be related to the increased demands of Modern Apprenticeships programmes, and the emphasis on higher achievement within the available resources. This problem is further exacerbated by the often modest entry qualifications of young trainees, and their subsequent need for significant additional support and extra time to achieve.

4 Recommendations

The research findings have revealed a significant agenda for the improvement of work-based learning. This will require attention to immediate gains in quality improvement, as well as detailed consideration of some of the underlying issues which are hindering the development of a robust and effective work-based learning route for young people.

- In the short term, attention needs to be paid to the respective roles of the LSC staff and ALI inspectors in supporting providers. Greater clarity and transparency in expectations about success rates should be sought, and better and more comprehensive guidance on the CIF and its implications for self-assessment and inspection would be helpful to providers.
- Consideration should also be given to the range of programmes on offer to ensure that there is a sufficient breadth of provision to encourage participation, to sustain learners' interest and secure progression.
- In the longer term, there is a need to build the capacity of work-based providers and also to develop new ways of delivering work-based learning for young people. This may require a substantial development programme, with exchange and development of practice. It would be beneficial if this process encouraged cross-fertilisation from all providers in the post-16 education and training sector, and also from other programmes, such as New Deal.
- Achievement in Modern Apprenticeships must be improved if the economic challenges of the new century are to be met. In addition to the development of better work-based learning, there is also a need to encourage more able young people to make apprenticeship their preferred route, rather than a second choice.

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The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has been conducting research into the reasons for the deterioration in the grades awarded to work-based learning provision from Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspections compared with Training Standards Council (TSC) inspections. The investigation indicates that changes to the post-16 inspection and quality assurance arrangements may be part of the reason for the dramatic change in the inspection grade profile. These shortcomings may be easily remedied in the short term as all concerned become accustomed to new ways of working. However, there may also be deeper systemic problems outside the inspection framework which require attention before the quality of work-based learning can be improved.