



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1999

# The Training and Business Group

## SUMMARY

The Training and Business Group offers outstanding training in retailing and customer service. It offers good training in hospitality, security and foundation for work. Training in management and business administration is satisfactory. At the first inspection, construction training was unsatisfactory. At reinspection training in construction is now good. Training is well planned with good links between on- and off-the-job training. Under-represented groups, such as the minority ethnic population or the long-term unemployed are targeted for training. Trainees have a good record of obtaining employment across all areas where training is given. They have access to a range of different support, and assessors provide good support in the workplace. The Training and Business Group's commitment to equality of opportunity is outstanding and is exemplified by the degree of self-respect developed by trainees. Management of training and communication within the company are good, with all training centres holding weekly staff meetings. Quality assurance is satisfactory and has effectively embraced self-assessment.

**As a result of the reinspection of The Training and Business Group, the original published report text for construction has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report which have not been subject to full reinspection have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	4
Management & professional	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	1
Hospitality	2
Health, care & public services	2
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	1
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Construction	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent visits by assessors to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ good links with employers and the employment service
- ◆ effective tracking systems to monitor trainees



- ◆ good marketing and promotional activities
- ◆ high levels of trainee support
- ◆ a strong commitment to equal opportunities
- ◆ well-documented quality assurance procedures

#### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ lack of qualified assessors in some areas
- ◆ unsystematic sharing of good practice
- ◆ unsatisfactory quality of some documents

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Training and Business Group (the Group) is a limited company delivering training programmes for unemployed adults and young people, to enable them to secure jobs and/or qualifications. The Group employs 230 staff, operating from eight training centres in Birmingham, Bridgwater, Chelmsford, Derby, Gravesend, East London, South London and West London.

2. The Group was established in 1986 to provide training to a wide variety of commercially based customers. In subsequent years, it became involved with government-funded training schemes. In 1995, the Group was acquired by the Rehab Group, an independent non-profit-making organisation, concerned with the training and employment of people with disabilities, and other socially excluded groups. It has over 100 locations throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom and they employ 1,800 people, 20 per cent of whom are those with disabilities.

3. The Group contracts with 10 training and enterprise councils (TECs), delivering work-based training for adults and young people, as well as modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. Training takes place at the eight centres and in the workplace. The Group has some 1,200 TEC-funded trainees. There are 22 construction trainees. This is nine more than there were at the first inspection. Since 1995, the Group has also franchised courses from colleges of further education. In 1997-98, this represented 25 per cent of the Group's business and has become approximately 33 per cent in the current year.

4. The Group has also been granted a number of full-time education and training contracts under the New Deal initiative, for those aged 18 to 24, in all training centres. The Group also delivers Gateway, for those aged 18 to 24, in Bridgwater and South London and, in addition, has New Deal contracts for those aged 25 and over.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The Training and Business Group takes the self-assessment process seriously. All staff were involved in the first self-assessment and carried out mini self-assessments in each occupational area within each training centre. Overall, the self-assessment report produced prior to the first inspection was a reasonably accurate reflection of the Group's work. Some of the strengths included were no more than normal practice, and some weaknesses were not sufficiently identified. Several further strengths were identified during inspection. Inspectors confirmed six of the 11 grades presented in the self-assessment report, but graded three higher and two lower. A second self-assessment report was produced prior to reinspection involving staff in all centres. It includes progress on action plans and reports on previous weaknesses that have been addressed. The section of the report on construction, which has been reinspected, is evaluative and self-critical.

6. For the original inspection, a team of nine inspectors spent a total of 44 days at the Group during October 1998. Inspectors examined company and awarding body documents. They met staff at all eight main centres and observed 40 trainers and assessors. Inspectors visited 48 employers across the country, and interviewed 20 company managers and 141 trainees. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios. Inspectors observed 57 monitoring or assessment visits and instruction sessions, which are graded in the first table below.

7. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors for a total of four days. They interviewed seven of the 22 construction trainees. They examined trainees' portfolios and assessment records, and interviewed staff, employers, supervisors and managers. Inspectors observed two off-the-job training sessions and visited four work placements. Grades for the two instruction sessions are given in the second table below.

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction			3			3
Management & professional		1	2	1		4
Business administration	1	4	3			8
Retailing & customer service	2	7	3			12
Hospitality		8	3	1		12
Health, care & public services		3	1	1		5
Foundation for work		7	5	1		13
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>57</b>

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 2

8. The Group offers training in brickwork and carpentry and joinery to young people and adults at its centre in Bridgwater. There are 19 trainees and three New Deal clients. Eleven are brickwork trainees: five modern apprentices, one national trainee and five adults on work-based training. Eight are carpentry and joinery trainees: one modern apprentice, and seven adults on work-based training. Of the New Deal clients, one is in brickwork and two are in carpentry and joinery. Off-the-job training for employed trainees takes place in the Group's training centre either one day each week, or on a 'block-basis' one week in every four. Staff at the training centre have assessor qualifications and industrial experience. All youth trainees are employed. All adults are unemployed. Since the first inspection, the company has started to carry out NVQ assessments in the workplace. New staff have been appointed to review and develop internal verification procedures. Internal verification is subcontracted to a consultant. The internal verifier makes regular visits to the training centre. There is an internal verification sampling plan. All trainees now receive an initial basic skills assessment upon entry to their programmes and are offered additional support where necessary.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

The Group took the opportunity of a national regulatory body being set up to improve contacts with local employers. Workers in the construction industry are issued with cards which identify their levels of skills. Part of the criteria for obtaining cards is that holders should have attended a health and safety training programme within the last five years. Forty-one employers attended a seminar organised by the Group to publicise the scheme. This event was so successful that employers asked the Group to provide health and safety training for their staff. Employers have very positive views on the work being done by the Group in promoting construction training.

At the first inspection, inspectors identified the following main weaknesses.

- ◆ lack of achievement in carpentry due to no qualified assessor
- ◆ ineffective assessment of basic skills on entry
- ◆ trainee reviews not kept up to date
- ◆ poor initial interview and individual training plan documents
- ◆ poor attendance by some trainees
- ◆ key skills not effectively developed or delivered

9. The second self-assessment report identified the actions taken since the first inspection. Most of the weaknesses from the first inspection have been addressed. Inspectors did not agree with a number of the weaknesses in the second self-assessment report and identified a number of additional strengths. The re-inspection grade is higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement rates
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ appropriate additional qualifications taken
- ◆ well-presented portfolios
- ◆ frequent, effective progress reviews
- ◆ effective working relationships between trainees and training staff

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training and assessment
- ◆ few work-experience opportunities for carpentry and joinery trainees

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*This is an example of a good training session made memorable for trainees. During a practical session with carpentry and joinery trainees, the tutor used an appropriate point in the session to introduce the use of a complex specialised tool and its use in the trade. The short session was clear and concise and related to current industrial practice, while at the same time linking to the relevant NVQ unit. The trainer gave trainees several tips on the 'tricks of the trade', which made the session fun and understandable for the trainees, who would soon need to use this tool in the workplace.*

10. Achievement rates are good. In brickwork in 1998-99, 83 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2 with 56 per cent going into employment. In carpentry and joinery during the same year, 65 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2. The same proportion gain employment. These achievement figures are above the national average for construction training. The improvement in achievement rates in carpentry and joinery coincide with the trainer having become a qualified assessor. A brickwork modern apprentice has achieved an NVQ at level 2 in one year and has been entered for a regional achievement award from a national craft association. Where additional support needs are identified, good opportunities are available for trainees to develop literacy and numeracy skills. The training and assessment opportunities available during work placements are good, with trainees being given a range of work experience appropriate to their NVQs. For example, brickwork trainees have the opportunity to work on projects ranging from the renovation of old buildings to new building construction. Tutors have developed effective links with employers with improved co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Employers are aware of the work being undertaken off the job and select jobs that provide trainees with the chance to practice skills at the relevant times. Employers recognise the importance of providing training opportunities and are supportive of training and work-based assessment. A seminar arranged by the group to make employers more aware of NVQs was well attended.

11. Trainees are able to take additional qualifications in health and safety. Carpentry and joinery trainees are able to gain extra qualifications in machine woodworking during off-the-job training. The opportunity to gain these additional qualifications is welcomed by trainees and employers. Trainees' portfolios are well presented. Trainees produce good-quality evidence both on and off the job. Photographs and witness testimonies are used to provide additional evidence of trainees' achievements in the workplace. The portfolios contain good-quality reference material which supports the evidence. Trainees' reviews are carried out by training staff on a monthly basis. This exceeds the contractual 13-week requirement. Initial assessments are regularly updated and the trainees' training and development plans are revised as necessary. Initial assessments are regularly

updated and the trainee's training and development plans are revised as necessary. Employers and trainees are involved in reviews. All employers reported on the improvement in this area since the first inspection. The effective working relationships between trainees and training staff, identified in the first inspection, are still a feature of the training. This includes staff in other occupational areas, particularly from those in foundation for work who provide supplementary training. Where local public transport facilities are poor, the brickwork tutor collects a number of trainees and transports them to the training centre for their off-the-job training.

12. Key skills training is still underdeveloped. Since the last inspection, the company has made considerable efforts to integrate key skills into the construction programmes. However, they are not yet fully established and some trainees remain uncertain about the nature and range of the key skills elements of their training. Few carpentry and joinery trainees gain work experience. There are insufficient work placements available.

### **Management & professional**

### **Grade 3**

13. The NVQ management qualifications are offered at the Bridgwater, Chelmsford, Derby, Gravesend and East London centres. There are six modern apprentices taking a pilot programme at Chelmsford, five youth trainees, based at Bridgwater, and 11 high-level skills trainees located at the East London centre. There are 25 adult trainees on the work-based training for adults programme, which are located at Bridgwater, Chelmsford, Derby and Gravesend. All trainees take management at NVQ level 3 to the new revised standards. It is planned that three trainees on the high-level programme will progress to management at NVQ level 4. Modern apprentices and youth trainees are all employed by local employers. NVQ assessment is carried out in the workplace by the company's staff based at each centre. The high-level skills trainees attend periodic modular training sessions, and assessment is carried out at the company by whom they are employed. Unemployed adult trainees attend the centre on a given number of days each week. Assessment is based on accreditation of prior learning, supplemented by assignments and, where appropriate, by work-based projects devised at the centre. The self-assessment report listed a number of strengths and weaknesses which could not be verified, and inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ key skills are integrated into occupational training programmes
- ◆ good-quality jobs for modern apprentices
- ◆ high adult job achievement rates

- ◆ good working relationships among staff, employers and trainees
- ◆ excellent training resources
- ◆ good use of accreditation of prior learning

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no structured off-the-job training for unemployed adults and modern apprentices
- ◆ some unemployed adult NVQ portfolios are partly evidenced by simulated activities
- ◆ no work placements for unemployed adult trainees

14. On modern apprenticeship training, key skills are fully integrated into the occupational training programme and assessed within the units. Working relationships between staff and trainees are good and employers provide very good jobs. Facilities in the workplace are extensive, and many employers supplement modern apprenticeship training with additional instruction. Such training not usually being part of any structured training plan. Accommodation for management workshops and seminars is good. Training rooms are well equipped, with good training materials. Trainees have access to other courses' facilities and seminars, and to good information technology resources. However, apart from induction and assessment workshops, there is no systematic or planned off-the-job training for modern apprentices and unemployed adult trainees. Workshops at Derby tend to focus on portfolio-building and assessment of NVQs. A training programme is planned for Chelmsford.

15. Assessment for unemployed adults is based upon accreditation of prior learning, assignments and a project set by the organisation. These arrangements do not apply to modern apprentices or high-level trainees, for whom work-based facilities are available to provide evidence for portfolios. Most unemployed adult trainees do not obtain a work placement, work placements at the appropriate level are scarce. Nevertheless, many trainees find suitable management appointments on completion of their training. The job achievement rate is currently 52 per cent.

### **Business administration**

### **Grade 3**

16. Using information technology has been in the Group's programme since early in 1998. There are 39 trainees split between Chelmsford and Derby. At the time of inspection final accreditation had not been given for any information technology portfolios. Inspectors found that self assessment was generally accurate, and awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent and thorough observations and assessments both on and off the job
- ◆ good resources in information technology
- ◆ clear initial guidance given for evidence collection

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited choice of optional units available in level 2 information technology
- ◆ planning of training not always formalised or recorded in all areas

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*In Chelmsford, the trainer has put together a skeleton file for NVQ level 1, which the trainees can use as a guide. The example lists the units and suggests what type of evidence can be used, and where this can be gathered. This is written in simple English and is accessible to all trainees. Dividers give the portfolio an order and give suggestions as to what should be put in each section. For example, the first three sections cover curriculum vitae, job descriptions (if appropriate) and assessment records. The portfolio also has an example page of the competence matrix, with arrowed boxes explaining what should be written in each. Trainees are initially taken through this portfolio on an individual basis and it is then left in the training room, where it can be accessed at any time.*

17. The framework for delivering using information technology NVQs is carefully planned. Documents used give trainees clear guidelines on the evidence which has to be produced and how this should be collected. Trainees are initially given a great deal of guidance but as they progress they are encouraged to take increasing responsibility for identifying and initiating evidence. Real work is provided by the administrative area of the company and from trainees on other programmes. Trainees value good-quality open-learning materials, which enables them to learn at their own pace, and to avoid repetition of areas they might have covered before starting the course.

18. Assessment and observation take place at regular weekly intervals. Action-plans are produced at these sessions. Constant monitoring encourages trainees to complete their portfolios quickly to a high standard.

19. Contact between the two assessors delivering using information technology is limited. Both are developing their own material. The options for this programme are limited. There are no e-mail or Internet facilities. The information technology refresher course, run in South London, does not lead to a formal qualification but familiarises trainees with four software packages. It does not have a planned structure. On completion, trainees are presented with a certificate of attendance, stating the generic titles of the software, but not the aspects covered. The primary purpose of this course is to enable people to gain employment, for which it has a high success rate of over 80 per cent.

## Retailing & customer service

### Grade 1

20. There are 406 trainees undertaking retailing NVQs at levels 2 and 3, with a further 98 taking customer service at levels 2 and 3 and a small number of trainees working towards NVQ levels 2 or 3 in distribution and warehousing. Most of the training occurs in Derby, Birmingham and London. The Group has good working relations with both large national employers and small, good-quality sole traders. The Group's staff have much expertise in retailing and customer service on which to build qualifications in training and assessing. Inspectors agreed with the contents of the self-assessment report but identified additional strengths. They awarded a

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*A modern apprentice at East London who has nearly completed his qualification joined the programme at level 2 and had communication and confidence difficulties. The Group gave him weekly support on a Saturday morning, where he received individual coaching for two or three hours. This helped to develop his personal and occupational skills. He is now deputy manager of a major record retailer, and is still able to benefit from individual attention, when required.*

higher grade than that proposed by the Group.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ high levels of trainee achievement
- ◆ thorough and well-structured training
- ◆ high quality of most employment placements
- ◆ assessors visit most trainees weekly and are very supportive
- ◆ high standard of trainees' portfolio work
- ◆ trainees progress quickly through NVQs
- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training for unemployed adults

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ some highly competent trainees start NVQs at too low a level
- ◆ pressure of work limits the time to develop portfolios at work

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*A group of 15 adult trainees from a broad mix of ethnic backgrounds, for most of whom English was a second language, attended a retail training session on health and safety. The tutor used a whiteboard to illustrate her points and distributed handouts to reinforce the essential points. She used good questioning techniques to explore trainees' understanding, and systematically made notes on the whiteboard to assist trainees with spelling. She also used several simple sketches instead of words during discussions on, for example, fire doors and exit points. Trainees contributed well to the session, which they appeared to enjoy.*

21. Assessors usually visit weekly. Trainees and employers are enthusiastic about the level and quality of their support. This has a major positive impact in encouraging trainees to progress quickly and achieve their NVQs. In 1997-98, the average time to achieve NVQ level 2 was three months; progression to NVQ level 3 took a further six to nine months. NVQs per 100 leavers stood at 110 in the first six months of 1998-99, and the proportion of adults gaining employment within, three months of completing programmes is 58 per cent.

22. The assessors in retailing and customer service have recently come from strong retailing backgrounds and are aware of best current practice in a fast-changing industry. Trainees benefit from this. Assessors carry out detailed and systematic observations, and give excellent feedback. All trainees and many employers regard NVQs as relevant to the workplace. The structure of the programme helps to ensure that all key retailing skills and knowledge are developed and applied. Most employers provide trainees with excellent opportunities to develop a wide range of generic retail skills in good-quality and stimulating environments. Particularly good working relationships have been developed with one large retailer, which recruits all trainees placed with it by the company.

23. Trainees working in charity shops gain limited exposure to normal retailing pressures. This pathway is used for trainees who lack self-confidence. Trainees in East London are given four to six weeks' stimulating training before gaining placements, and they are well-prepared for assessment. Several highly qualified and experienced trainees start programmes at NVQ level 2, when level 3 would be more appropriate. This is influenced by contractual demands and employer's preferences. The pressure of the retail environment, especially as stores prepare

for the busy Christmas period, means that trainees sometimes have limited time to develop portfolios in work time. This is accepted by most trainees as a fact of life and does not hinder progress. Trainees are enthusiastic about the quality and relevance of their training.

## Hospitality

## Grade 2

24. The Training and Business Group has 125 trainees registered on hospitality programmes, of whom 93 are modern apprentices, 20 are national trainees, and the remainder completing the former network youth training schemes. Hospitality training is comparatively new to the company, and most trainees are in Birmingham. Inspectors confirmed the grade awarded in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good working relationships with local employers
- ◆ effective monitoring of individual trainees' progress
- ◆ positive use of individual training plans
- ◆ strong support of trainees by assessors
- ◆ effective use of modern apprenticeship framework to encourage progression
- ◆ high standard of trainees' portfolios on NVQ level 3 programmes

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills delivery not fully integrated with vocational units
- ◆ lack of basic vocational skills to support NVQ assessment in a minority of cases
- ◆ restricted assessment opportunities in one geographical area

#### POOR PRACTICE

*In one kitchen, a trainee lacked both health & safety awareness and basic skills. He was observed slicing a tomato, which he held in his hand, rather than correctly using an appropriate chopping board.*

25. All trainees are employed predominantly in the hotel and restaurant sectors. The Group has established good networks with employers. Most trainees have sufficient vocational skills to support the accreditation of NVQs. In a few cases, basic training is poor, with some trainees not trained to minimum levels of competence. Achievements in 1997-98 for the Birmingham training centre, the first to offer training in hospitality, show that 51 per cent of trainees on the modern apprenticeship programme achieved the qualification and 58 per cent of NVQ level 2 trainees successfully completed the programme. Trainees' progress is effectively monitored. Assessors visit each trainee once a week. Trainees receive clear guidance on the assessment process and are able to comment on their own performance and achievement to date. Assessors provide detailed written feedback, following observations and assessments, and good use is made of trainees' individual training plans. Trainees' portfolios on NVQ level 3 programmes

being of a particularly high standard, are well organised and provide a wide range of evidence. This partially reflects the high standard of trainees.

26. Assessors encounter difficulties with maintaining a rigorous assessment schedule, when employers impose unexpected changes to work rotas. As far as possible they reschedule assessments, and use every opportunity to observe trainees at work. There has been, a lack of continuous assessment in South London, owing to a lack of a vocational assessor when a post was difficult to fill, but this is now resolved. Effective use is made of the modern apprenticeship framework to encourage trainees to progress to NVQ level 3 qualifications. As yet, key skills are not fully integrated in vocational units. Trainees on both the national traineeship and modern apprenticeship programmes can be accredited for level 2 key skills only, in line with the national framework, despite the fact that some trainees already have higher education qualifications. Not all assessors have completed the requisite qualifications, and few have received formal training for the delivery and assessment of key skills.

### Health, care & public services (security)

### Grade 2

27. Security-guard training courses were introduced in South London and are now offered at Chelmsford, East London, Gravesend and West London. Courses typically last two weeks and lead to the City & Guilds professional guard 1 qualification. Trainees must be unemployed for six months or more, to be eligible for the course. The two courses seen by inspectors had six trainees each. Inspectors agreed with the major strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and confirmed the grade proposed by the Group.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Prospective trainees are interviewed by the trainer at the South London centre. Staff take into account religious issues, such as attendance at the mosque on Friday afternoons, which could prevent some Muslim trainees from taking their final examination. Recruitment staff have taken the security guard training course themselves to enable them to give more objective advice to future security trainees.*

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of achievement by trainees
- ◆ well-structured and flexibly delivered course
- ◆ good use of job-related information throughout training
- ◆ staff's occupational backgrounds help trainees to obtain appropriate jobs

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ variable standard of training from centre to centre
- ◆ limited support for those trainees with language difficulties

28. Trainees come from a range of backgrounds. In 1997-98, 58 per cent of trainees were from minority ethnic groups. Trainees are usually referred by the employment service, or have seen adverts in local newspapers. All trainees are enthusiastic and see the course as a route to qualification and employment. In 1997-

98, of the 133 trainees who attended courses in South London, 85 per cent gained qualifications, while 72 per cent gained jobs.

29. Training takes place in small groups, enabling staff to keep all trainees actively involved. Directed questioning is generally well-used. Trainees with communications problems are actively supported within the Group. Staff are occupationally well qualified and maintain their links with the industry. Security companies come to interview trainees on each course, as part of the two-week programme. For trainees not successful in gaining employment during the course other interviews are usually arranged. Travel expenses are paid by the Group for the first such interview. The lead trainer has close links with the lead body and is on a working party rewriting learning materials. Each two-week course is adapted to meet the needs of the different groups of trainees taking it, with emphasis on gaining essential knowledge and learning the correct way to respond to incidents in the workplace. Over the first few days of the course, trainees grow in confidence and support each other.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*In one session, a trainee spoke few words of English. A trainee from the same country acted as interpreter for key information to be translated. This meant that the progress of the rest of the group and the trainee acting as interpreter was slower than it needed to be.*

30. A range of resources is available to trainers, including good-quality overhead transparencies, handouts, posters and videos. One room, used exclusively for security training, provides a positive environment, with posters, certificates and thank-you notes from previous trainees who have gone on to do well in the security industry. Training varies from one centre to another, and the Group has begun to address this, using observation of training to help to spread best practice. There is little language support available for trainees with limited command of the English language. Sometimes, they are taken on because, security companies need to recruit staff who speak languages other than English, even though they may not gain the final qualification.

**Foundation for work**

**Grade 2**

31. Prevocational training is offered to unemployed adults at seven training centres. Trainees are frequently referred by the employment service, but also respond to local advertising. They are usually aged 25 or more, and their length of stay varies according to the TEC area. The maximum length of stay is 26 weeks, including a 28-day work placement. Trainees work towards individual targets, depending on TEC requirements. They are also given practical help to find jobs on completion of their placement. There are 316 trainees across the training centres. The South London centre has held the Basic Skills Agency Kite Mark, which is an external quality standard, for over three years, meaning that training is carried out to a high standard, with group sizes limited to a maximum of 12 trainees. The self-assessment report accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses, and inspectors confirmed the grade given by the Group.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensively addressed individual needs
- ◆ effective monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ good accommodation and facilities at most centres
- ◆ good use made of links with employment services
- ◆ regular job-search activities

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ variable quality of training resources
- ◆ inappropriate induction material

#### POOR PRACTICE

*In one session, ESOL trainees at East London were given a list of 67 complicated interview questions. Trainees were asked to read out questions, such as 'Describe how your job relates to the overall goals of your department and company.' and 'How would you define a conducive atmosphere?', and then discuss their meaning. Many trainees were unable to pronounce the words and had to refer to dictionaries constantly, without fully understanding the meaning of the words they were looking up.*

32. At interview, trainees are assessed for basic skills and an individual learning plan is devised. Trainees are able to undertake wordpower and numberpower, as well as other qualifications, such as health and safety certificates, first aid certificates and computer literacy and information technology, depending on local funding. Three centres offer a vocational access certificate. Trainees can also progress to NVQ qualifications in areas such as retail, warehousing, customer service and information technology. At Gravesend, trainees take the STEPS programme, designed by the Pacific Institute, which aims to increase their self-esteem.

33. The pathway of each trainee is carefully tracked from referral to destination of their training programme. Progress is monitored weekly, at most centres, and learning plans are updated to show achievement of individual targets. Trainees are encouraged to display their work to demonstrate their achievements. Staff treat all trainees with considerable respect and enhance their self-esteem.

34. The training centres have extensive links with the employment services. Staff visit employment offices and local community groups to interview trainees and encourage and support them to start a foundation training programme. The company pays the bus fare of all trainees when they first visit the company. Trainees link with individual recruitment consultants throughout the training period to find short or long-term work placements and appropriate jobs. Sixty per cent of leavers find work placements, mainly in charity shops.

35. The quality of some handouts and training materials is poor. Many photocopies are badly produced and illegible including documents kept in candidates' personal files. Some spelling errors were found in learning packs given to trainees. One interview pack gave a list of words, containing errors, for trainees to use on their CV. Induction packs contain words which are difficult for foundation trainees to understand. Each training centre has its own bank of resources which is varied in content and effectiveness. Good practice is not always shared, leading to

inconsistency in training methods and the use of unsuitable materials in some training sessions. The Group is revising the pack.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 1**

36. The Training and Business Group's equal opportunities policy is clear and concise and is regularly updated. All trainees receive a copy of the policy as well as a client charter which clearly sets out the trainees' entitlements in terms of equal opportunities, in easily understandable language. The Group is effective in preventing any discrimination or unfair treatment of trainees and employees. A strong and genuine commitment to equal opportunities is demonstrated at all levels of the organisation. The Group has a profile of trainees which reflects, and usually exceeds, the local population in terms of ethnicity. The grade awarded by inspectors was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ clear and comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ regular monitoring of ethnicity and gender for employees and trainees
- ◆ effective use of monitoring to encourage increased participation by under-represented groups
- ◆ company documents and visual materials promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ company employees act as role models for trainees in promoting equal opportunities
- ◆ particularly high levels of participation from those in minority ethnic groups in some centres

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ limited wheelchair access to some centres

37. The Group's equal opportunities policy is clear and concise. Company documents and visual materials promote the organisational culture. Twenty-six per cent of the company's employees are former trainees and are good rôle models. All trainees receive a copy of the equal opportunities policy and a client charter which clearly sets out trainees' entitlements in appropriate language. There is regular monitoring of the ethnicity and gender of both trainees and staff. Statistical data on trainees effectively informs the strategy for increasing participation of under-represented groups.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Reception areas in every centre are used to welcome people from different cultures and educational backgrounds. Staff at all levels in the company can cite examples of trainees being helped to overcome adversity to succeed in gaining qualifications or employment. Past trainees who have been particularly successful in employment are used to help to boost the confidence of disaffected and long-term unemployed trainees.*

38. The company has strong links with a wide range of community groups and employs several multilingual staff to help to recruit minority ethnic trainees. The Group video, designed to inform potential trainees and the employment services, promotes trainees' success and the range and flexibility of courses, reflects the ethnic mix of trainees and is used as part of the induction process. All workplaces used by the Group are checked for adherence to health and safety standards and possession of an equal opportunities policy, but there is no formal monitoring of employers' equal opportunities performance.

39. The Gravesend centre recognised that trainees from minority ethnic groups were under-represented on its programmes. The unit visited several community organisations and liaised with Kent County Council and other external agencies. Subsequent participation on TEC-funded programmes of those from minority ethnic groups has risen from 4 to 19 per cent. There is limited wheelchair access at some centres. The Group has gradually upgraded the access arrangements at its new centres, as training needs expand, and staff do all they can to accommodate those with disabilities.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

40. Staff frequently interview trainees at the employment service's offices where they can provide information, advice and guidance. Initial assessment, including the assessment of key skills, is sporadic and not formally recorded in all occupational areas. All trainees receive a comprehensive induction to the Group and to programme areas. Careers and progression guidance is available to all trainees. Inspectors identified additional strengths to those mentioned in the self-assessment report, and awarded a higher grade than that of the Group.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good links with employment service results in effective advice for trainees
- ◆ effective employer links ensure trainees are well supported in gaining employment
- ◆ high level of individual support for trainees
- ◆ trainees' achievements celebrated
- ◆ social areas available at most centres

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ limited initial assessment, including key skills
- ◆ lack of formal accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ inconsistent application of formal guidance to employers

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*The Group pays fares for trainees when they first visit the company for interviews. In some instances, the company also provides money for extra travel expenses, so that trainees can use weekly travel cards over the weekend. They also give extra money to trainees to top up childcare payments. Trainers stagger trainees' attendance times in foundation groups to help with childcare problems.*

41. The Group has well-established links with local employment service advisers. Staff regularly visit employment offices. Open days are a regular feature of the centres to which client advisors and prospective trainees are invited. There are strong links with employers, who offer quality placements and jobs in most occupational areas. Trainers visit trainees weekly in most occupational areas. All trainees are well supported. One trainer visited a trainee who had broken her leg at home regularly to help her to achieve her key skills assignments. Recruitment consultants liaise regularly with trainees throughout the training period. Presentations are organised throughout the year to celebrate trainees' achievements. Managers frequently ask local personalities to attend. The company provides social areas where trainees are able to complete their work or to talk to other trainees.

42. In retail, initial assessment of basic skills in numeracy or literacy is not always picked up. This also includes key skills where information is informally recorded. Accreditation of prior learning is not used effectively across all programme areas. Accreditation of prior learning is used in administration and management but is not used in hospitality or construction. One hospitality and catering trainee on an NVQ level 2 programme had four 'A' levels, while another trainee on an NVQ level 3 programme had completed two years' teacher training. This prior learning was not recognised. There is no standard document given to employers about NVQs. Some employers have a poor understanding, while others are extremely knowledgeable.

**Management of training**

**Grade 2**

43. The Group operates from eight main locations. Each centre's manager reports to a senior director, who in turn reports to the managing director. There are functional managers at director level with a specific responsibility for human resources, quality assurance etc. Each centre manager has some autonomy. All operate in clearly defined limits set by the managing director. The Group achieved the Investors in People standard in 1997. The Group identified certain strengths in its self-assessment report, some of which were no more than contractual requirements. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified during the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the points made in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ high level of staff communication
- ◆ high standard of procedures for recruiting and inducting staff
- ◆ commitment of staff to organisational goals

- ◆ demanding targets for managers and staff
- ◆ high-quality management training programme for centre managers
- ◆ good marketing and promotional activities

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some staff appraisals are behind schedule
- ◆ some poor links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ lack of qualified assessors in some areas

44. Management control and co-ordination are achieved through regular communication with letters, memoranda and telephone calls, backed by visits and meetings. Formal and informal methods of communication are used. The formal communication is well structured and works effectively. Monthly senior management and operational meetings are supported by weekly staff meetings at each centre. Team work is good. Staff understand the organisation's values and the need to progress trainees at an effective pace. Managers and staff agree on targets; there is an effective system for monitoring and reviewing results, and taking remedial action. The system for the recruitment of staff is effective and the organisation has comprehensive and well-documented procedures for induction. Managers and other key staff are currently taking part in a significant management development programme. The organisation, promotes itself well in its local areas of operation.

45. Approximately 15 per cent of assessors lack appropriate qualifications. The progress of some appears to be slow. Some staff appraisals are behind schedule, in one case by almost a year. The organisation is currently recruiting both assessors and internal verifiers. There are some poor links between on- and off-the-job training.

#### **Quality assurance**

#### **Grade 3**

46. The Group's quality assurance system conforms to the ISO 9001 quality standard. Quality assurance manuals are distributed throughout the organisation, and staff have easy access to them. New procedures are being developed to improve trainees' experience but are not yet firmly embedded. An independent department in the organisation has nationwide responsibility for implementing and monitoring quality assurance arrangements. Training in quality assurance issues has been given to staff, who understand the system with which they have to comply. Inspectors considered that some strengths were overstated in the self-assessment report. Inspectors found additional weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the company in the report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ use of independent quality assurance team
- ◆ well-documented quality assurance procedures
- ◆ structured programme to continually improve provision
- ◆ effective tracking systems for trainees' progress
- ◆ contribution of all staff to self-assessment process

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped feedback systems
- ◆ monitoring of assessments by unqualified staff
- ◆ good practice not always shared
- ◆ unsatisfactory quality of some documents

47. Quality assurance has been given a high priority throughout the organisation . A separate team of 11 staff monitors key issues such as training and assessment practice, health and safety, basic skills provision and personnel and management systems. All staff have received quality assurance training or other appropriate training which is regularly updated. Regular visits are made to each centre to ensure consistent standards across the country. Quality monitoring visits are well planned, and staff have a good understanding of the company's quality assurance procedures.

48. The quality assurance manual is written to comply with ISO 9001. Additional manuals, clearly explain the various procedures of the organisation. There are specific manuals on management and personnel systems. Most occupational areas have manuals on delivery of NVQs and monitoring of trainees' progress. Others are being developed to ensure a consistent approach by assessors. Each centre has copies of these manuals, readily available to all staff. The quality of the provision is regularly reviewed, and new ideas and procedures are piloted. Assessors complete NVQ control sheets which record individual trainees' progress and unit achievement which are sent to head office. As trainees complete their training, the achievement is displayed in a bar chart to monitor the Group's general progress towards achievement of targets.

49. The company's self-assessment process was thorough and involved staff at all levels. Each centre conducted its own self-assessment and produced detailed strengths and weaknesses. Staff made a contribution to local reports which were collated at head office and a single report depicts the national situation. The final self-assessment report has evidence which is accurately referenced and action-plans are relevant and realistic. Trainees now have the opportunity to complete evaluation questionnaires after induction, during the training and on leaving programmes. In some areas, different questionnaires are still being used. The results of questionnaires are analysed locally. There is no central analysis to



establish national trends. The questionnaires contain complex language which is unsuitable for some trainees. There is no formal process to obtain employers' views. Internal auditors and verifiers will visit employers to discuss performance and gain feedback, but this practice has not yet started.

50. Staff without assessor qualifications often assess trainees' work. Arrangements for competent assessors to check and countersign their assessments are not in place at all centres, although internal verification takes place prior to certification. Good practice is developed at each of the centres but is not always shared consistently across the Group. Procedures have recently been adopted to remedy this problem but are not yet fully embedded. Some handouts and portfolio documentation given to trainees is barely legible. There are also examples of poor documentation in trainees' personal files.