



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2000

REINSPECTION FEBRUARY 2001

Puffins of Exeter

SUMMARY

Puffins of Exeter offers satisfactory training in health, care and public services. Trainees work in appropriate work placements, produce good portfolios, and progress to further positions in the organisation. The management of training is satisfactory. External communication is effective, and staff-development activities are extensive. At the reinspection training in equal opportunities was effective but there was insufficient monitoring of data. Trainees' progress is effectively reviewed. Personal support is good but initial assessment is inadequate. There is a new framework for quality assurance and analysis of performance data is well used. Strong action planning is contributing to continuous improvement.

As a result of the reinspection of Puffins of Exeter, the original published report text for equal opportunities, trainee support and quality assurance have been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and inspection findings introduction have 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
Health, care & public services	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	5

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Quality Assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good portfolios produced by trainees
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good support to progress to further qualifications and into employment
- ◆ effective equal opportunities training
- ◆ good reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ effective external communication
- ◆ rigorous internal verification

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete initial assessment
- ◆ untried new quality assurance framework
- ◆ weak individual training plans

INTRODUCTION

1. Puffins of Exeter (Puffins) was established in 1990 to provide childcare in the Exeter area, initially at a day nursery. The organisation opened its first after-school and holiday club for school-age children in 1993. Puffins now owns seven day nurseries in Exeter and Torbay for children aged from three months to five years, and five after-school and holiday clubs. At the time of the first inspection, there were 72 full-time and 13 part-time staff caring for 400 children daily. At the time of reinspection, there were 120 full- and part-time staff.

2. In 1995, Puffins became a training and assessment centre for national vocational qualifications (NVQs), and obtained a contract through Prosper Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) the TEC for Devon and Cornwall to provide government-funded training in childcare. Sixty-two government-funded trainees were working towards NVQs in early years care and education and in childcare and education at the time of the first inspection. At reinspection, the number had dropped slightly to 60. Puffins also provides privately funded NVQs, training and development awards, and courses in play work and in management of early years care. Training and assessment are provided for New Deal clients, but none were enrolled at the time of either inspection.

3. Most trainees at Puffins live in Devon, a sparsely populated, rural county. Its total population of just over 1 million includes those who live in the main urban areas of Exeter, Plymouth, Torbay, Exmouth, Newton Abbot and Barnstaple. In 1999, the rate of unemployment in the county as a whole was 6.7 per cent, which was above the national average of 4.1 per cent. In east and mid-Devon, unemployment rates were lower than average, at 3.1 and 3.5 per cent respectively. Higher rates were found in Torbay, at 6.7 per cent, and in Plymouth, at 9.9 per cent. By October 2000 the rate for Devon had fallen to 2.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.4 per cent. Higher rates remain in Torbay with 3.9 per cent and Plymouth with 3.4 per cent. Agriculture and tourism make an important contribution to the county's economy, and there is much part-time and seasonal employment. Exeter has a strong service-based economy. Its large employers include the university and the county council. In Torbay, fishing is an important industry, but tourism dominates the local economy. Devon has less publicly funded provision for early years education and childcare than most areas. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 48.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2000, the proportions were 49.1 per cent and 49.2 per cent respectively. The proportion of people in the county from minority ethnic groups is less than 1 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Puffins' first self-assessment report was submitted to the TEC when bidding for its training contract. The second self-assessment report, which was considered by inspectors at the first inspection, was prepared by the organisation's directors along similar lines to the first and without reference to *Raising the Standard*. Other managers were not involved to any great extent in its production. The views of other staff, trainees, employers and subcontractors were not represented. The report was brief, and consisted mainly of description of the company's day-to-day activities in generic areas, rather than evaluation. After the first inspection, an action plan was produced and in November 2000 a further self-assessment report was prepared. The full management team produced this report. A first draft was circulated around the organisation's nursery officers for comment and shared with the TEC's staff. Input from trainees was derived from questionnaires. Employers were not involved. The report followed the format of *Raising the Standard* and was self-critical. An updated version of the first inspection action plan was produced the week before reinspection.

5. For the first inspection, three inspectors spent a total of nine days at Puffins in January 2000. They interviewed 21 trainees, 12 of Puffins' staff, and five employers and workplace supervisors. Inspectors visited 12 sites where training takes place, and observed one learning session and two progress reviews. They examined trainees' written work and assessments and records of their progress, training materials and records, the Puffins' documents, external auditor's reports and external verifiers' reports.

6. Two inspectors reinspected Puffins in February 2001 and spent a total of six days at Exeter. They interviewed nine trainees, and conducted 13 interviews with managers, supervisors, trainers and employers. They visited six children's nurseries reviewed the new procedures, and induction, training and promotional material, minutes and records of assessment and verification.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

7. Of Puffins' 62 TEC-funded trainees, 32 are modern apprentices, five are national trainees, and 25 are working towards other work-based training qualifications. Fifty-seven are working towards NVQs in early years care and education, and five towards NVQs in childcare and education. Twenty-eight trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2, and 34 towards level 3. Trainees mostly work in private day nurseries in and around Exeter. Some spend part of their working day in after-school clubs. One is a nanny in a private home. Forty-four trainees are employed and the remainder have work placements. Thirty trainees work in Puffins' nurseries. The remainder work for other local nurseries.

Training off the job is offered in Exeter, Plymouth and Torquay in the evening. Training for level 2 is provided for 26 weeks for two hours each week. Training for level 3 is provided fortnightly by a subcontractor. There are also training sessions on key skills, child protection and first aid. Trainees are also encouraged to attend local training courses on a variety of relevant topics. Assessment is carried out by work-based assessors and by a team of assessors from the company who visit the trainees in the workplace. Trainees meet assessors regularly, at least once a fortnight, to plan and review assessments. The company has found retention and achievement difficult to measure as many trainees transfer between programmes. Six of the 14 trainees in 1996-97 gained an NVQ, and four transferred to modern apprenticeships. In 1997-98, out of 17 trainees, 10 trainees left without a qualification, and seven obtained NVQs and then continued as modern apprentices. In 1998-99, out of 34 trainees, 10 trainees left without a qualification, 22 obtained NVQs and 24 continued as modern apprentices.

8. The self-assessment report identified many strengths and few weaknesses. Inspectors considered that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice, and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ well-planned and effective off-the-job training
- ◆ good portfolios of trainees' work
- ◆ frequent and thorough work-based assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress by some trainees
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training and assessment
- ◆ unsystematic internal verification

9. Trainees are employed or on work placements in good quality workplaces. Staff are well qualified. Many have NVQs in early years care and education and many staff are studying for specialist management qualifications in the early years field. Trainees have the opportunity to work with different age groups within the nurseries to gain the experience and evidence they need to gain their qualifications. Some trainees work in other nurseries and after-school clubs to gain additional experience. Off-the-job training takes place at different times of the year depending on the recruitment of trainees. The background knowledge required for levels 2 and 3 is taught during the evenings each week for 26 weeks at a local nursery convenient for the particular group of trainees. Trainees attend in their own time. There are also training sessions on key skills, some of which use the information technology facilities at a local library. Off-the-job training is provided at least twice a year for groups of approximately five trainees. Training programme schedules are planned in advance for the groups and for each individual trainee.

Trainees and assessors have copies of the programmes. Plans are also made for each training session. The plans require trainees to submit written work which is collected and assessed each week and is then placed in trainees' portfolios. The trainees evaluate each training session. Their comments are sent to the training manager, who takes action in response to trainees' views on their training.

10. Trainees' portfolios are well organised, detailed and show good knowledge of childcare. Trainees are proud of these portfolios, and have a good understanding of what they need to do next to complete further units. Most evidence for assessment is taken from the workplace, usually as direct observation of trainees' practice by assessors. Assessment in the workplace is readily available to all trainees either from a work-based assessor, who is given time by the employer to assess trainees, or from a visiting assessor who carries out assessments at least every fortnight. Assessments are thoroughly planned and recorded to make the best use of the time available. The assessment of written evidence is slow at times because of the workload of the team of assessors.

11. Some trainees progress slowly through their training programmes. Most modern apprentices complete the NVQ at level 2 before progressing to level 3. Some of those working towards an NVQ at level 2 have completed only two or three units in over a year. There are delays in the assessment of written evidence, and delays and other weaknesses in internal verification, which is unsystematic. External verifiers have recently reported that many aspects of the internal verification system require improvement. The company has recently taken action in response to some of these comments, for example, by changing its sampling systems and record keeping, and its arrangements for internal verifiers' meetings. It is too soon to see the results of these changes. Other improvements, such as the observation of assessors' practice, are planned but have not yet occurred. Key skills training is underdeveloped. Some off-the-job training in key skills has taken place, and more is planned. Work has been done to link key skills training and assessment to childcare, but assessors' awareness of key skills is low, and trainees' progress is slow. No trainees have achieved key skills qualifications, and little evidence of their skills is ready for assessment. Some trainees were unsure whether they were studying key skills. The company has recently obtained extra funding to support the development of key skills. In the time that Puffins has been offering modern apprenticeships, no modern apprentices have reached the end of their programme.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

12. Since the first inspection the company has undertaken a revision of its equal opportunities policy. The company has a policy for trainees and a policy for employees. An equal opportunities statement is now included on all publicity materials. A checklist is used for trainees who started from March 2000, to monitor whether they have received the relevant information and documents on equal opportunities, their training programme, trainees' rights and responsibilities, the

grievance and disciplinary procedures, health and safety, training allowances and travel. An updated staff handbook includes the revised equal opportunities policies for training and for the organisation's nurseries. The equal opportunities policy for training has been sent to nurseries and is displayed on training notice boards, which are usually located in the staff rooms. The organisation's equal opportunities policy for its nurseries is located in the nursery handbook, which is available to staff and parents and carers of children who use the nurseries. The organisation has appointed a human resources manager who has responsibility for equal opportunities, updating the policy, training for employees and trainees and awareness of legislation among staff. Puffins has 60 trainees, of whom six are men. The organisation employs 120 full- and part-time staff. Two members of staff have a disability and three are from minority ethnic groups. There are currently no trainees from minority ethnic groups and no trainees who have a disability. The organisation has inadequate access to some of its nurseries for people with disabilities, and so has identified alternative ways to meet trainees' needs, for example by using other venues for training within Exeter.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities issues among trainees
- ◆ little equal opportunities training for staff or trainees
- ◆ no monitoring or analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ no action planning to develop equality of opportunity

14. The new self-assessment report, produced in November 2000 identified two strengths, of which one was identified in the first inspection report. Two weaknesses were similar to weaknesses identified in the report at the first inspection. Inspectors agreed with one strength, and identified a similar strength and similar weaknesses to those identified by the training provider. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

TRENGTHS

- ◆ successful encouragement of men into training
- ◆ effective equal opportunities awareness training for all trainees and staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient evaluation of data on equal opportunities
- ◆ few checks on understanding of equal opportunities

13. There are currently six men on programmes, representing 10 per cent of the total number of trainees. Over the past four years, this proportion has varied between 3 and 11 per cent. The organisation encourages men to join the programme in order to provide a more balanced gender representation in its workforce. Many of the male trainees come from local schools and participated in work experience at Puffin's nurseries. One of the men was recently promoted to a

senior post in the after-school clubs following the completion of his modern apprenticeship. The involvement of men provides a positive role model for potential male trainees, and for boys in the nurseries.

14. Since the first inspection, all of Puffin's staff and trainees have received an awareness training session on equal opportunities. The responsibility for equal opportunities and training has been given to a member of the management team. This is in support of the organisation's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity. Each nursery now includes equal opportunities training in its staff meetings, and all trainees have attended child-protection training. The training has raised awareness of equal opportunities. New training materials have been used. Workshops for assessors have included training in equal opportunities. Questions have been set by assessors for trainees on working with children who come from different cultures. Trainees are aware of the policy and procedures to follow if they are subject to discrimination or bullying.

15. The training for trainees and staff is still at an early stage of implementation. Information on equal opportunities and the revised policy for training is included in an induction for trainees. Trainees remember the training and feel that it has given them a broad view. Training has been followed up in staff meetings which include trainees.

16. Some checks on the understanding of equal opportunities are made during trainees' progress reviews and meetings with trainees. This currently consists of checks on the receipt of policies and procedures provided at induction. The reinforcement of the understanding of equal opportunities is insufficient.

17. The analysis of the equal opportunities data which are gathered from the recently introduced quality-monitoring system is underdeveloped. Information from potential trainees' enquiries and initial interviews, is not yet evaluated. This means that the data are not used to shape an active equal opportunities strategy for recruitment.

Trainee support

Grade 3

18. All prospective trainees are interviewed and offered relevant advice by the training manager before starting on a training programme. Standard TEC marketing information from the TEC about the learning programmes available is used along with a basic information leaflet about Puffins. The only criterion for selection used at this stage is a request for honesty, reliability and a desire to work with children. All potential trainees are offered the opportunity to visit a nursery for a day. If the trainee enjoys the day and wishes to continue work experience, the training manager arranges a two-week trial at one of Puffin's nurseries. During the second week there is a review meeting with the trainee. The workplace supervisor gives feedback on the trainee's performance following a standard format, and a decision is made, in consultation with the trainee, about whether he or she will join the programme. If trainees decide that they do not wish to join the programme then

they are referred back to the careers service or to another training provider in the area. When trainees join the programme, they attend a two-hour staff induction at which they are given their uniform, staff handbook and the trainees' survival guide, which was written by a trainee. The induction covers basic health and safety topics, such as familiarisation with procedures in case of fire. At the reinspection, a copy of the equal opportunities policy for training was included, and an initial assessment of key skills was undertaken. Trainees are then placed in one of the nurseries, where they are allocated a member of staff as a mentor. Trainees observe their mentor at work, begin joining in with the work under supervision, and are gradually given more responsibility as they gain experience. NVQ assessment begins after three months. Throughout the programme, trainees are encouraged to discuss any problems or concerns with their assessor or nursery officer. If they feel unable to do this they can contact the training manager. The mentor, who is part of a personal support team consisting of assessors and trainers, offers trainees' support.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no initial assessment of basic or key skills
- ◆ inconsistent system for accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ individual training plans not detailed, individual or updated
- ◆ poor understanding of programme framework by trainees
- ◆ lack of comprehensive, regular reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ no recording or formalisation of trainee support arrangements

20. The self-assessment report written in November 2000 identified two of the strengths in the first inspection report and two additional strengths. One of the weaknesses which had been identified in the first inspection report was also identified in the new self-assessment report and two new weaknesses were identified. Inspectors agreed with one strength but expressed it differently and identified one additional strength, concerning support. Two new weaknesses, concerning initial assessment and individual training plans, were identified by inspectors. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support for trainees
- ◆ good detailed reviews of trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete initial assessment
- ◆ weak individual training plans

21. Seventy-five per cent of staff working in the nurseries have been on training programmes in Puffins and reached senior and management positions. All trainees are offered the opportunity to work towards an NVQ at level 3 after achieving level 2, moving from national traineeships to modern apprenticeships as appropriate. Trainees moving onto the modern apprenticeship programme become employed within the company as vacancies arise. All staff in appropriate posts are offered management-development training. The qualifications are used as opportunities for career development for staff and trainees within the nurseries.

22. Puffins organises a conference for staff every year at which staff and trainees from all the nurseries meet. Trainees who have achieved their qualifications are congratulated, and certificates are presented. This ensures that trainees' successes are recognised by the whole staff team. The programme also includes a discussion of the company's achievements during the year and its plans for the next year. The conference is well received by staff and trainees.

23. Good personal support is given by a named member of staff in each nursery who acts as a mentor. Meetings between the mentors from the work placements and the training manager are held to discuss and give guidance on the new arrangements. Assessors meet their trainee at least every two weeks to plan and set work, observe trainees and provide feedback. Extra sessions at the company's training centre are offered to trainees to complete work on their assignments and portfolios if they are not making good progress. Trainees' work is marked and good written comments help the trainees make links with the standards in the NVQ. Since the first inspection, new documents for interviewing prospective trainees have been introduced, providing clear guidance to staff on carrying out the initial interviews. All work placements now have a training notice board, where information is provided on training programmes, and the duties and responsibilities of Puffins and the work-placement provider. The training notice boards are an effective information point and reminder for the trainee about the dates, content and arrangements for training, progress reviews and staff meetings.

24. Trainees receive a progress review every month for the first three months. The individual training plan is updated at each progress review. After that, progress reviews are carried out every three months. Since the first inspection, new procedures have been introduced for recording trainees' progress on the individual training plan. There is space on the plan for the supervisor, the reviewer and the trainee to comment. Comments are relevant to the individual's progress and feedback is given and recorded following observation of the trainee's work. Copies of the progress-review record are provided for the trainee and the workplace supervisor. The reviewer provides detailed and clear information on the learning and training needs of the trainee and sets targets for achievement. Trainees understand the framework of their programme and whether they are modern apprentices or national trainees, whether they are employed or on placement and what are their intended qualifications.

25. Since the first inspection, new materials and support for trainees to undertake key skills training have been introduced. Five new computers have recently been

installed in a room at the administrative and training centre of Puffins. Trainees use the new computers to work towards their application of number and information technology key skills following a structured learning programme, which takes place one day each week over four weeks. The key skill of communication is undertaken, either through the support offered by assessors or through the assignments and presentations that trainees do for other key skills. A few trainees receive additional help through an extra learning session once a week at the training centre, at which a member of the training team is available to offer help with key skills or to work on completing assignments. Puffins has an assessor and advisor for the accreditation of prior learning. Since the first inspection, the accreditation of prior learning has become satisfactory. For example, a trainee who had achieved a certificate in childcare had this accredited to her NVQ in early years care and education.

26. Two members of staff have undertaken training for the initial assessment of key skills and, at the reinspection, all new trainees were receiving an initial assessment of their key skills during induction. Basic skills are not formally assessed. All trainees are able to discuss their own support needs when they join the programme. Other needs have been identified in the workplace or when a trainee begins NVQ assessment. When needs have been identified, arrangements have been made to support the trainee in the most appropriate way. The methods used have included the use of audio and videotapes, oral questioning and the use of a scribe. The responsibility for arranging and managing support to meet trainees' additional learning needs is not clearly defined. When additional needs have been identified they are not recorded. Because there is no record of how an individual's needs are being met, trainees have to re-establish ways to meet these needs when they move between nurseries, assessors and qualifications. The action plan submitted for reinspection did not include improvements to the process of initial assessment or support for the development of basic skills.

27. Initial and course assessments undertaken by a member of the training team, are not recorded on the individual training plan. Very few comments are made on the plan. Some plans have no comments at all. It is not clear, therefore, to other members of staff what trainees have achieved so far and trainees themselves do not have a record of their progress towards achieving their qualification. No record is made either of trainees' additional support needs or of what has been provided.

Management of training

Grade 3

28. Puffins achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1996, and were successfully re-assessed in June 1999. The company's senior management team includes two senior partners, a training manager, an after-school manager, a senior nursery co-ordinator, and six nursery officers and their deputies. There are regular meetings of the senior management group, and an annual meeting for all staff. All staff understand the management structures. All staff have an annual appraisal, a development plan, a job description and access to training opportunities. Most of

the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice. No weaknesses were identified. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective communication with a wide range of regional and national agencies
- ◆ extensive staff development opportunities
- ◆ comprehensive staff handbook

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ out-of-date management information
- ◆ no data used in action planning

29. Senior partners are executive members of a national occupational association. This gives them an opportunity to meet other managers and to compare and contrast methods of working. Recently, the executive members undertook a survey to compare hourly rates of pay, holiday entitlement and other benefits. This gave Puffins an opportunity to check the working conditions of staff, and provided a useful forum for discussion. Membership of this executive group means that partners sit on a number of working parties and national steering groups. In addition to this, Puffins are involved in the local community in a number of ways. For example, their after-school clubs in five local schools offer school pupils the chance to stay behind and help tidy up after the sessions and assist in other ways in return for a small payment. This provides the pupils with work experience and helps to promote working with children as a career or training option. The company's partners are also involved in the National Training Organisation and contribute to the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) scheme which aims to develop the current childcare qualification. These external contacts benefit the company and help it to keep in touch with developments in childcare. The company's work in the community raises local awareness of childcare issues in general.

30. The company offers its staff the training and development opportunities which are usual in childcare. These include NVQs and qualifications in first aid, child protection training and health and safety. In addition, the company provides numerous other development opportunities for its staff. These include courses in assertiveness, positive perspectives, and dealing with difficult people. Such opportunities allow staff to develop a broad range of skills, which add interest to their work, and improve their ability to do their job.

31. There is a comprehensive staff handbook which contains details of rights and responsibilities and outlines the company's policies and procedures in a number of areas. It includes the complaints and discipline procedures, and descriptions of development opportunities. A list of roles and responsibilities throughout the

organisation provides new staff with a broad and informative overview of the company, and helps them to understand readily their place in the company and in their own teams.

32. A new computer-based tracking system has recently been introduced to help with management information. However, it has not been kept up to date, and it does not give a true picture of trainees' progress. Furthermore, it does not give an overview of assessment details. Trainees' personal files also lack up-to-date information including details of their progress towards the NVQ. At present, neither the tracking system nor trainees' personal files provide managers with quickly obtained and precise information. Data from the management information systems are not used to contribute to action planning. When information has been collected, for example, when trainees' progress is slow, there is no systematic analysis of trainees' background or education, of the involvement of assessors or work-based supervisors or of work-placement details. This makes it difficult to determine the cause of the problem and its solution. Strategic decisions on a range of issues concerning training and assessment, from recruitment to career planning, are not based on accurate knowledge of current developments.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

33. A set of Puffins' policies and procedures is available at all sites and staff are given their own copy when they start work. The organisation's objectives are reviewed annually. Puffins complies with the TEC's operating procedures and is regularly audited. All learning sessions are evaluated. Since the first inspection, a new quality assurance framework has been written. Copies of this are held at all sites. The system of internal verification includes a system for sampling trainees' portfolios.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses were:

- ◆ no service level agreement for subcontracted training
- ◆ no systematic quality assurance
- ◆ no analysis of trainees' achievements
- ◆ no monitoring of trainees' destinations
- ◆ no effective action planning
- ◆ no use of self-assessment to continuously improve training

34. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the most recent self-assessment report produced in November 2000 concerning the use of feedback from trainees, sharing of good practice and the new framework, but found the use of monitoring to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with the weakness that the system is new and untested. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance framework
- ◆ strong action planning contributing to continuous improvement
- ◆ rigorous internal verification
- ◆ good use of data
- ◆ effective evaluation of questionnaires

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of established quality assurance framework tested over full training cycle
- ◆ lack of awareness of quality assurance among some staff

35. The new framework for quality assurance is clearly written and easy to understand. It sets out Puffins' aims and objectives, and explains how quality assurance will work for elements of the training cycle. Trainees are treated as customers and there is a customer-service policy and trainee charter. An annual review of the framework is built in. The system is cited as good practice in the most recent external verifier's report.

36. The self-assessment process is at the centre of Puffins' quality assurance system and strategic planning cycle. The action plan is a working document and has been reviewed and updated at every quarterly training managers' meeting.

37. Internal verification is rigorous. Effective sampling plans are used, and assessment by observation is witnessed routinely. Assessor meetings are held every three weeks. Good practice is shared. There is a series of meetings at different staff levels. The annual meeting of all staff and trainees includes a guest speaker talking about current issues in childcare, a session at which all staff introduce themselves, and some group work. The day finishes with supper. Trainees' representatives are also invited to meetings of the social and welfare club and participate in its decisions. This helps trainees feel that they have a voice within Puffins.

38. The training development manager is responsible for the database on trainees. Accurate and reliable data are available and a range of reports can be easily produced. Data have been evaluated during a recent audit of data carried out by Puffins' partners and decisions taken. For example, the number of trainees with additional learning support needs has been noted and the impact of this on staffing levels for the future is being calculated. Changes in social services regulations mean that the number of children within the nursery will change. The impact on trainees has been calculated. An analysis of current trainees and those who have recently finished training, and left Puffins has led to a review of pay and a series of strategies to improve retention.

39. Puffins sends out questionnaires to trainers, employers and trainees every six months. The response from the first questionnaire in August 2000 was good. Fifty out of possible responses from 52 trainees were received back. The personnel

manager, who produced a report with conclusions and recommendations, has evaluated all the questionnaires. Mostly the trainees were content but two small improvements have been implemented. All formal training sessions are subject to evaluation and feedback given to the member of staff. Results are collated so that trends can be identified and staff development planned where necessary. Puffins has a contract and service level agreement with a local training company, which provides training in theory required for NVQs at level 3, which is relevant to seven trainees at present. Puffins' staff also observe this training, and trainees evaluated the learning sessions by means of a feedback form and identified a problem. Puffins took immediate action to rectify the weakness in the training. The learning sessions for the background knowledge required for NVQs at both level 2 and level 3 are evaluated by trainees using a feedback form.

40. Puffins has made significant progress since the first inspection in designing and implementing a framework for quality assurance. Although there are already some results, it will take at least a full year for the framework to be proved to be effective. Training managers have a good working knowledge of the quality assurance system. Some staff at nurseries away from the head office and employers lack awareness of the new procedures. Some also do not understand the concept of a quality assurance system.

41. The self-assessment report produced in November 2000 was self-critical and accurately graded the areas reinspected. Strengths and weaknesses were clearly expressed and most of those for equal opportunities and quality assurance were accurate. In trainee support, incomplete initial assessment was not identified as a weakness.