



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

# Gordon Franks' Training and Personnel

## SUMMARY

Gordon Franks' Training and Personnel offers a satisfactory level of training in the foundation for work sector. Working relationships between trainees and the provider's staff are good and staff have an extremely positive attitude to ensuring equality of opportunity for all trainees. At the time of the first inspection, training in retailing and customer service was less than satisfactory. Trainees did not have a clear overview of either the content of their programmes, or the progress that they were making. Trainees' reviews were irregular and poorly documented. Management of the assessment process was weak, and the roles and responsibilities of staff were unclear. Quality assurance statements were written, but were not regularly reviewed or updated. The company was reinspected 14 months after the original inspection. Improvements had been made in all of the areas that were reinspected. Retail trainees now receive well-planned and effective training and assessment. They are highly motivated and have excellent work placements. Trainee support is good. All trainees receive effective induction and initial assessment. Procedures for trainees' progress reviews are effective. They involve the setting of clear targets for trainees. Internal communications are particularly good. Staff are fully aware of their individual roles and responsibilities. Staff teams are well organised and training and assessment across the company are effectively managed. Some management and quality assurance systems have only been introduced recently and they have yet to prove their effectiveness.

**As a result of the reinspection of Gordon Franks' Training and Personnel, the original published report text for retailing and customer service, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the introduction to inspection findings 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
Retailing & customer service	4
Foundation for work	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	2

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

## KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work experience opportunities for foundation for work trainees
- ◆ well-planned and effectively implemented off-the-job training
- ◆ effective induction for all trainees
- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment
- ◆ excellent review procedures
- ◆ broad programme of staff development
- ◆ excellent internal communication
- ◆ rigorous internal verification

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities not effectively promoted or managed
- ◆ no updating of training plans

## INTRODUCTION

1. Gordon Franks' Training and Personnel (Training and Personnel) was founded by Gordon Franks in September 1983 to provide training for young people in the retail and distribution industry. Gordon Franks & Associates Limited was founded in 1985 to provide an occupational guidance and assessment service and vocational training for adults. In 1995, the services of both companies were brought together under one management system operating as Gordon Franks' Training and Personnel. The company employs 28 staff, all of them working from the company's premises in central Birmingham. The company provides its training through four departments, which focus on the following areas: assessment and guidance, prevocational training, retail and wholesale training and business administration training.

2. Within each area, a range of training and development programmes are offered to meet the needs of identified client groups. Prevocational training is delivered under a contract with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and through a New Deal contract. All trainees receive their training at Training and Personnel's offices in the centre of Birmingham, and take part in work experience programmes at companies and training providers throughout the Birmingham area. At the time of the first inspection, a guidance and assessment programme was provided for adults aged 16 to 58 that was designed to help individuals to make career decisions. A bridge programme was offered to young people aged between 16 and 24 who needed help with basic skills prior to entering further training programmes. There was also a prevocational programme for those aged between 18 and 58 who needed basic skills training and vocational guidance. At the time of inspection, there were of 59 trainees on TEC-funded programmes in prevocational training. By the time of the reinspection, the company had changed the programmes. Two programmes now focus upon the provision of guidance and assessment to trainees up to the age of 24. The first is a life skills programme, offered as part of the Learning Gateway, that aims to help young people aged 16 or 17 find out in which vocational area they would like to work. The second is a basic skills programme offered under New Deal that is designed to assist those aged between 18 and 24. A prevocational programme is offered for adults aged 25 and over. At the time of the reinspection, there were 50 adults on the prevocational programme, 65 young people on training programmes within the Learning Gateway and five receiving basic skills training under New Deal.

3. Most of the training within the retailing and warehousing, and business administration divisions of the company is offered through TEC-funded contracts. Trainees are on modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other youth training programmes. They are placed with companies across Birmingham and attend off-the-job training at Training and Personnel's premises in the city centre. At the time of the first inspection, 97 trainees were working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in retailing and warehousing, and five trainees were on business administration programmes. At the time of the reinspection, there

were 95 youth trainees, and six New Deal clients receiving training within the retailing and customer service sector. Ten youth trainees and six New Deal clients were working towards NVQs in business administration.

4. In the past six years, the unemployment rate in Birmingham has fallen from 18.8 per cent to 6.9 per cent. This rate is substantially higher than that for the West Midlands of 4.5 per cent, and that for the country as a whole of 4 per cent in February 2000. Young people aged between 18 and 24 account for 26.5 per cent of the city's unemployed people. Almost 50 per cent of these young people have been unemployed for over six months and 23 per cent for over 12 months. These figures are higher than both the national and regional averages. Employment opportunities within the retailing and warehousing sector are increasing within the Birmingham area, in line with national trends. There is an increase in the number of part-time vacancies within this sector.

5. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 38.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Figures for 1999 show that 68 per cent of school leavers aged 16 progressed to further education against a national average of 69 per cent. Birmingham is a multicultural city, with a strong minority ethnic community. People from ethnic minorities make up 21.5 per cent of the city's population. Participation in training within the ethnic communities is high. Figures produced by the city's economic information centre in 1998 show that 30 per cent of men and 38 per cent of women on government-funded schemes are from minority ethnic groups.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. The company produced an update to its self-assessment report in January 1999, prior to the inspection in March 1999. Its first self-assessment was prepared in early 1998 for inspection as part of the Training Standards Council's pilot phase. The report was prepared by the company's management team, but all staff were aware of the report and contributed towards the self-assessment process within each occupational area. The self-assessment format was not changed after the pilot inspection, and the company still assessed trainee support within the separate occupational areas, and graded resources as a separate area in its own right. The self-assessment report did not accurately identify strengths and weaknesses in any of the areas. The grade for equal opportunities was confirmed during inspection; however, lower grades were awarded in all other areas. For the reinspection, the company's management team produced a report that outlined progress made in implementing its post-inspection action plan. New self-assessment grades were determined. Inspectors agreed with the finding in the self-assessment report that progress had been made in implementing improvements. They identified further strengths during the inspection and awarded higher grades for three areas than those given by the company. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed for quality assurance.

7. A team of six inspectors spent 17 days at the company in March 1999. They inspected training offered within the retailing and foundation for work occupational sectors. Business administration was not inspected because of low trainee numbers. Inspectors observed training, assessment and review sessions. They visited trainees in the workplace, where they spoke to trainees, line managers and employers. In the company's training centre, inspectors were able to speak to trainees and the training provider's staff. Trainees' portfolios and other documents relating to the training and development process were reviewed.

8. Three inspectors spent a total of nine days with the company in May 2000. They reinspected retailing and customer service, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance. During the reinspection, inspectors interviewed 31 trainees, seven employers and 12 staff from Training and Personnel. They observed training, assessment, coaching and review sessions. Inspectors examined trainees' portfolios and documents relating to the training and assessment process.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Foundation for work		2	1			3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Retail & customer service	1	3				4
Foundation for work		1				1
<b>TOTAL</b>	1	4	0	0	0	5

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Retailing & customer service

### Grade 2

9. Training and Personnel has 101 trainees working towards qualifications in retailing, customer service, warehousing and distribution. There are 13 modern apprentices, 49 national trainees, 33 trainees on other government funded youth training programmes and six New Deal clients. At the time of the first inspection, there were 97 trainees. Twelve were modern apprentices, 45 were national trainees and 40 were youth trainees. Trainees in this occupational area are working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3. They have good work placements with a wide variety of employers in the town centre and surrounding areas. Thirty-four per cent of the trainees are employed. Trainees who are not employed spend four-and-a-half days each week in their work placements, and attend half-day off-the-job training sessions at the training centre. All trainees are assessed in the workplace by the provider's own qualified assessors, who also act as tutors during the off-the-job training sessions.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ key skills not integrated into NVQs
- ◆ lack of formal feedback to trainees following assessment
- ◆ poor retention rates for retailing trainees
- ◆ trainees unaware of training content of their programmes and of progress towards their assessment goals
- ◆ some trainees following inappropriate training programmes

10. The grade awarded to retailing and customer service following the first inspection was a grade 4. Considerable improvements have been made, and all the weaknesses have been rectified to some extent. Most aspects of training programmes in this occupational area are satisfactory or good. Action taken on previous weaknesses has led to the achievement of new strengths. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the company prior to reinspection.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good and regular off-the-job training sessions
- ◆ effective integration of key skills training with occupational training
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ excellent work placements
- ◆ detailed action planning
- ◆ good planning of assessments

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees' low achievement and retention rates on some programmes
- ◆ some trainees' uncertainty about their progress

11. Non-employed trainees receive a five-day induction at the training centre, called 'Journey to a professional retailer'. This induction is highly valued by all the trainees and prepares them for their work placement. At the end of the week, they have to give a presentation to the rest of their group and invited guests about what they have learnt. Some of the work they produce is used as evidence of their acquisition of key skills. Half-day off-the-job training sessions on theory are held every Wednesday to support trainees through projects on health and safety, display (store layout) and customer service. Sessions are well structured and of direct relevance to the trainees' work roles. Currently, few employed trainees attend these sessions, as their employers are often reluctant to release them for training. To compensate, training is arranged for them when assessors visit their stores. Since the first inspection, improvements have been made to the training resources across all programmes within this occupational area.

12. Since the first inspection, the key skills co-ordinator has reviewed and updated all the key skills training, and assessment has become a fully integral part of training programmes. The key skills co-ordinator has reviewed and updated all the relevant procedures. At the beginning of their programme, trainees undergo a detailed initial assessment, which relates to their chosen occupational area. It tests their current level of knowledge and skills and staff aim to ensure that trainees are placed on the correct level and type of programme of programme. It also helps staff to identify any training trainees may need to help them achieve their key skills qualifications. Assessors encourage trainees to look at all the evidence they produce for their NVQ and to discuss how it can be cross-referenced to one or more of their key skills units. Some trainees are making excellent progress and are achieving key skills units before they have completed work for their main qualification. Workshops on key skills are held every Wednesday in the training centre. These are valued by the trainees and enable them to see how the work that they complete relates to their NVQs.



13. Trainees are particularly well motivated. They say that working towards their qualification is adding value and interest to their jobs. Assessors encourage trainees to gather evidence of their NVQ competencies through their everyday duties. Modern apprentices are producing an excellent standard of evidence, which has resulted in positive business benefits for their employers. Some new systems and procedures have been introduced as a result of their ideas and suggestions. Some trainees feel that they have achieved promotion as a result of their qualifications. Trainees are enthusiastic, proud of what they have achieved and are keen to continue with further training. Some modern apprentices are taking responsibility for looking after level 2 trainees in their workplaces and are helping them to achieve their qualifications.

14. Trainees are working with a variety of well-known high street retailers. They have a good opportunity to work in all areas of their stores. Many employers provide on-the-job training linked to their own company's training programmes. National trainees are able to progress quickly and some achieve their qualifications in less than a year. All assessment is carried out in the workplace. Assessors visit the trainees frequently to ensure they have plenty of opportunities to gather evidence of their competencies through everyday tasks. Workplace supervisors are well briefed on the content of the NVQ programme and are given a file in which to store information about trainees and their progress. They take a keen interest in their trainees' work. Some supervisors allow trainees who are performing well, to take on additional responsibilities. There are close working relationships between assessors, trainees and work-based supervisors. Any problems in the workplace that trainees may have are resolved as quickly as possible.

15. New action planning and review documents have been introduced and these are proving effective. Level 2 trainees complete an assessment plan with their assessor and this contains target dates for achieving their NVQ and key skills units. The plan is kept in the front of the NVQ portfolio. Progress towards reaching the targets is reviewed and the targets are updated regularly. Level 3 trainees produce an assessment plan for each unit and are encouraged to identify their own targets. The assessor produces an individual action plan for trainees at each visit to them. The assessor keeps a copy and copies go to the trainee and the supervisor. Assessors will often discuss this plan with supervisors if it involves the trainee in additional tasks or a move to a different department. The plan clearly lists the tasks to be carried out and the evidence to be gathered before the next assessment. Trainees understand exactly what they have to do and how they will do it. Full and clear feedback is given to trainees following all assessments. Any tasks, which are not completed, are added to the next action plan. Trainees have a clear understanding of their qualifications. They enjoy gathering evidence of their competencies.

16. Trainees' achievement rates on all programmes within this occupational area have improved significantly over the past 12 months. They are above the average

for the programmes of other TEC-funded training providers in the area. The achievement rate on the youth training programme is good and almost 70 per cent of leavers achieved an NVQ. On the modern apprenticeship programme, almost 63 per cent of leavers achieved their awards. The achievement rates on the national traineeship programmes have improved substantially although they are still low. In 1998-99, the proportion of leavers gaining an NVQ was only 9 per cent, but this rose to almost 44 per cent in 1999-2000. Assessors have made every effort to help and motivate trainees to achieve their awards. On the adult training programmes, the achievement rate is poor, with only 21 per cent of leavers gaining an NVQ, although this is an improvement on the rate in the previous year of 16 per cent. The company has identified this low achievement rate as a cause for concern and is exploring ways of improving the performance of adult trainees. The proportion of early leavers on national traineeship and youth training programmes has decreased. On the modern apprentice programme, it has increased from 57 to 62.5 per cent and on adult training programmes, it has increased from 67 to 89 per cent. The company is currently working with the TEC to implement a strategy that aims to improve retention rates in all programme areas.

17. Staff within the company have simplified the structure of NVQ portfolios. Some trainees however are still unsure of the extent of their progress. They do not have a summary sheet in their portfolios showing which elements and units of their NVQs have been signed off. Some trainees think they have completed units when, in fact, they still need to gather requisite evidence for them. The misapprehension of level 2 trainees in this respect is compounded by the failure of staff to give them any written feedback on their progress and performance. Differences in practice still exist between the way in which level 2 and level 3 trainees' evidence is recorded and checked.

## Foundation for work

## Grade 3

18. Training and Personnel offers a range of foundation for work training. The bridge programme for young people aged 16 to 24 lasts for 10 weeks and includes a period of work sampling. Trainees on this programme can progress onto mainstream training within their chosen vocational area. The prevocational programme is designed for adults aged between 18 and 58. This programme lasts for up to 28 weeks, during which time trainees have a period of work placement, and some have the opportunity to work towards an NVQ at level 1 or 2. An advice and guidance programme is offered which lasts 120 hours. This programme attracts funding through the European Social Fund (ESF) and is due to finish at the end of March 1999. There are 59 trainees on foundation for work programmes. Eighteen trainees are on work placement and nine in full-time information technology training. Achievement rates for the last two years for both the prevocational and the bridge programme have remained stable at approximately 55 per cent. Trainee retention rates within this occupational area are good, averaging 82 per cent for the current contract year. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses to

those noted by the company; a lower grade was awarded than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ development of generic records for basic skills
- ◆ effective use of work experience placements

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of work placements in information technology and care
- ◆ assessment of specific learning needs sometimes delayed

19. Youth trainees are usually referred onto the 10-week bridge programme either by the careers service or through schools. Trainees have the opportunity to work towards entry-level qualifications. The bridge programme includes two weeks of occupational tasters with a supportive employer; the aim of this is to develop trainees' confidence and encourage progression onto a mainstream training programme. Trainees are also able to develop an individual skills profile. The prevocational programme lasts for 28 weeks. Trainees on this programme are encouraged initially to achieve health and safety and first aid certificates, which are seen as 'milestone awards'. Many trainees value such achievements highly. Both the bridge and the prevocational programmes have a high retention rate and good achievement levels. Over a third of trainees are in work placements, either sampling the vocational area or working towards an NVQ in information technology, business administration, retailing or warehousing. The organisation is currently negotiating a contract for fork-truck and engineering training in order to increase the range of vocational provision available to trainees within foundation for work programmes. Trainees on foundation programmes are able to work towards wordpower and numberpower qualifications. In addition, they are offered personal development sessions where they can work towards a nationally recognised skills profile award. The TEC contract restricts the number of wordpower and numberpower qualifications which can be funded within this area. The organisation is developing a method for recording and recognising basic skills achievement. Trainees will be able to obtain a certificate of competence which can be carried with them when they leave, or used to indicate prior achievement if they work towards a further award.

20. Training and Personnel has good links with both local employers and training providers. Through these links it is able to offer tasters and extended assessment periods of work experience to its foundation for work trainees within appropriate training environments. Although no formal training plans exist, trainees are provided with the opportunity to sample a variety of tasks. Staff from Training and Personnel, who are trained assessors, review trainees' progress. Employers are

encouraged to participate in the review process and, at one placement, staff are undertaking assessor awards. During this period of work experience, trainees regularly attend the organisation's centre for additional training and support until they feel ready to move on to an NVQ programme. Training and Personnel staff give good pastoral support during off-the-job periods; trainees feel able to approach staff, and appreciate the level of support offered.

21. Training and Personnel's staff identify most additional learning and support needs; however, in some cases trainees are referred to external agencies. Sometimes, as in the case of support for trainees who are dyslexic, the company is restricted by the TEC as to the agencies it can use. This has resulted in delays of several weeks between the time that the assessment is requested and when it is carried out. The company has recognised this problem, and has a member of staff who is undergoing training to be able to identify dyslexia during the assessment process. Individual support needs for literacy and numeracy are not always met. This results in trainees feeling frustrated and demotivated.

22. Trainees attend a subcontracted local training provider for information technology training to NVQ levels 1 and 2. All of the training and assessment is carried out on the subcontractor's premises, and trainees are not placed with employers for work experience. Trainees are, therefore, unable to develop the work skills and competence under real working conditions. Company staff have difficulties placing care trainees. In one case, a trainee who has been on the programme for nine weeks has been encouraged to identify his own placement, with little result. Trainees recruited onto the foundation for work programmes receive training and support on the company's premises. One of the teaching rooms is inappropriate for group work because of its layout, and the décor in several is pale and uninteresting. Walls are bare and opportunities for display are missed. The layout of the rooms also leads to trainees quickly losing interest in the sessions; there is no space for group work or for trainees to move easily, and access to support individuals is restricted.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

23. Training and Personnel has a documented equal opportunities policy dated November 1998, which states that the company aims to provide opportunities to develop the employment potential of all people. Trainees within the company are representative of the minority ethnic groups within the local community. Twenty-nine per cent of the retail trainees and 69 per cent of the foundation for work trainees are from minority ethnic groups. Sixty-five per cent of the trainees are men and 35 per cent women. These figures are the only statistics relating to equal opportunities, which are included in the company's review of equal opportunities data completed in September 1998. Trainees and staff are familiar with the company's complaints procedure, but no records of complaints are kept. The self-

assessment report identified strengths in this area which are no more than normal practice, and additional weaknesses were identified during inspection.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ open-access recruitment policy in foundation for work programmes
- ◆ extremely positive attitude by staff to equal opportunities

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no effective promotion or management of equal opportunities
- ◆ no formal monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies
- ◆ no collection or analysis of equal opportunities data

24. Training and Personnel has an open-access policy for recruitment to its foundation for work programmes. All trainees are equally valued and supported. Many trainees joining the foundation for work programmes are identified as having special training needs. The company works closely with the careers service, the Employment Service and support organisations to offer assistance to these trainees, facilitating their entry into training. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is representative of the local area, although the company takes no direct action to ensure this. Equal opportunities are covered within the induction for retailing trainees, and they are given a summary of the company's policy. The policy is discussed with trainees on foundation for work programmes, but they are not given a written statement for reference. Staff have a very positive attitude towards ensuring equality of opportunity for their trainees. No staff have formal qualifications in this area, although last year a half-day staff development session was devoted to disability awareness.

25. Work placements are checked to ensure that they comply with health and safety regulations. However, there is no monitoring of either the wording or the effectiveness of employers' equal opportunities policies. Training and Personnel's staff do not see this as being their responsibility, although they are aware of the need to address any issues which might arise. Training and Personnel's premises consist of three adjacent buildings with three entrances and accommodation on three different floors. The premises are not suitable for wheelchair users. Although one ground floor is accessible, the entrance is narrow and lavatory facilities are in another building on a different level. Within walking distance (50 yards), a training room with facilities for wheelchair users can be hired by the company. This requirement has not been needed to date.

26. Training and Personnel's publicity and information literature lacks comprehensive information on equal opportunities and does not encourage applications from under-represented groups. There is a one-line statement on one information sheet stating that the company operates an equal opportunities policy.

Neither the equal opportunities policy nor the equal opportunities statement is displayed at the company's premises, and few trainees remember the policy, although staff are aware of its existence. The evaluations completed by trainees following their induction make no reference to equal opportunities, and trainees' understanding of the equal opportunities issues covered, is not tested. Advertisements for training staff state that the company is an equal opportunity employer.

27. Data relating to the ethnic background of trainees and their special training needs are only collected through the TEC and the careers service's monitoring records. The company does not analyse these figures to determine trends or identify where action such as the targeting of under-represented groups may be needed. It does not collect any additional data independently for analysis. No information is gathered to enable the company to analyse applications to training programmes, and there is no study of trainees who leave the company before completing their programmes.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 2**

28. Trainees are referred to the programmes offered by training and personnel by careers advisors, Employment Service staff, other training providers, social services and the probation service. Following their interviews, all trainees are offered an extended induction period lasting up to two weeks. They receive an initial assessment consisting of a presentation, a one-to-one interview and an assessment of basic skills prior to the start of their training programme. Trainees are given feedback on their interview performance, and on the result of their initial assessment. Trainees are offered additional support within the centre, and external agencies are sometimes used to meet specific support needs. Prevocational trainees spend a period of time in the centre before following their chosen occupational route and securing a work placement. Many trainees endorsed by careers advisors as having special training needs are able to access training in their chosen occupational area, following an extended period of occupational skills training within the centre. Trainees on programmes within the retail sector can access additional basic skills support as part of their regular off-the-job training sessions.

At the first inspection, the following weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ results of initial assessment not included in training plans
- ◆ weak induction in foundation for work
- ◆ irregular reviews and target setting
- ◆ copies of reviews not given to trainees and workplace supervisors
- ◆ little involvement of workplace supervisors in both review and assessment processes
- ◆ poor standard of resources to support wordpower and numberpower awards



29. Following the first inspection, the company has carried out a considerable number of improvements in accordance with the action plan. Inspectors awarded a grade higher than that given in the updated self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective induction for all trainees
- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment for all trainees
- ◆ excellent procedures for trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ effective target setting

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no updating of training plans
- ◆ missed opportunities for collecting evidence for wordpower and numberpower awards

30. The company operates an open-door policy for recruitment, allowing trainees to start their training programmes at any period throughout the year. Each trainee has a comprehensive induction, which can last for up to two weeks, covering all aspects of the training programmes. During induction, formal initial assessment takes place. The mode of assessment varies across the occupational areas. Trainees entering the foundation for work programmes complete a standard basic skills test, while those directly entering programmes within the retailing sector complete a customised assessment pack. More specific assessments are sometimes used; for example, where trainees are unsure of their vocational route, they are offered psychometric testing. Individual tests are given where trainees are thought to have additional learning needs. The results of initial assessments are recorded in the trainees' individual training plans.

31. Additional support is offered in a variety of ways to those trainees who are identified as having specific training needs. Numberpower and wordpower are used to assist trainees with their literacy and numeracy needs usually at entry level. Following assessment, external agencies may also be used to support individuals. A specialist agency, for example, has been involved in adapting worksheets for trainees with dyslexia, adapting computer hardware for disabled trainees, and counselling trainees in a range of areas. Trainees taking part in the retail programme at NVQ level 1 are offered the opportunity to attend the centre fortnightly for special training sessions to help them with their portfolios, and also to address issues affecting their personal effectiveness in the workplace. Close links are maintained with the local careers service and other local training providers. The company refers trainees to alternative training programmes if it feels they would offer a better level of specialist support. Trainees on the foundation for work programmes take part in job-search activities as part of their training; support from

careers' advisors is available if required. Training and Personnel collects feedback from trainees and reviews the effectiveness of the support it offers.

32. Procedures for trainees' progress reviews have been radically improved. New review and action sheets have been produced and are in use. This new documentation is designed to assist trainers to record trainees' progress clearly during reviews and set realistic targets for the achievement of the NVQ. The new documentation also allows copies of the record of reviews and action plans are given to both trainees and workplace supervisors. Progress reviews are now carried out both frequently and regularly, at least every two weeks. Review records and action plans now specify realistic, but challenging, targets for trainees. They give clear guidelines for trainees to follow as they work towards achieving NVQ units or reaching other milestones. Workplace supervisors have welcomed these improvements in progress review documents. Trainees state that supervisors are now better informed about their progress towards achieving their NVQ and the work they still need to do. Supervisors are able to offer more support and advice. Training and Personnel's staff give presentations to employers on particular aspects of training and NVQs. Breakfast meetings have also been organised. Feedback from employers on these initiatives designed to increase their understanding of the training programmes, has been positive and encouraging.

33. The company has no systematic arrangements for monitoring the extent and effectiveness of support given to trainees. Trainees' individual training plans are not always updated and modified to show the progress trainees make, the support they receive, and their achievement of NVQ units. Trainees' files, which contain copies of training plans, records of progress reviews, action plans, assessments, and other documentation relating to all aspects of their training, are generally untidy. Documents are not filed, for example, in chronological order to make it easier to identify trainees' progress through their programme.

34. The company's training staff do not always ensure that assignments for the numberpower and wordpower awards relate to the specifications of the NVQs towards which the trainees are working. Furthermore, they do not differentiate them to make them relevant to individual trainees' previous work experience or particular interests. On the foundation for work programme, trainees' assignments are not always made relevant to the occupational area, and are not used as an integral part of the overall training process. The portfolios of trainees on the foundation for work programme are unexciting and do not necessarily reflect or do justice to individual trainees' effort and achievements. The training materials used for basic skills awards are often undemanding and poorly produced.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

35. Since the first inspection, Training and Personnel has been reorganised. There is a new team structure. The company now has four departments, which focus on



achieving targets linked to TEC and Employment Service contractual requirements. There are also teams of staff, who take responsibility for cross-programme areas such as administration, internal verification, health and safety and equal opportunities. The company's management team has been responsible for identifying areas in need of development and making the necessary changes within the organisation. It decided not to work with the consultants who were involved with the company at the time of the first inspection. The company has a well-publicised mission statement and documented company policies, which cover key areas such as health and safety, and staffing. The company achieved recognition as an Investor in People in 1997 and it is seeking re-accreditation in May 2000.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ lack of clarity about individual roles and responsibilities
- ◆ ineffective tracking of trainees' progress
- ◆ poor management of the assessment process
- ◆ no evaluation of performance data

36. Significant progress has been made in implementing the company's action plan that was approved in November 1999. Inspectors awarded a higher grade for management of training than the company gave in its regrading of this generic area prior to the reinspection.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good staff awareness of business plan and operational targets
- ◆ broad programme of staff development
- ◆ excellent internal communications
- ◆ good external networking links

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some management systems and processes too new to be fully established

37. The company's business plan is developed annually in response to targets set by the TEC. Each department has its own plan containing objectives for the team to achieve. All staff are fully briefed about the content of the business plan, and are aware of how the objectives are set. Some goals refer to the achievement of performance targets set by the TEC and the Employment Service, others relate to more specific programme goals such as the development of key skills training. All staff have an annual performance review, during which their performance over the past 12 months is discussed and new development targets are set. Individual goals relate directly to both team and company objectives. Staff are familiar with, and understand, both the business plan and operational targets.

38. All staff have development plans to ensure that they receive training for their roles in the company. Staff have access to a broad programme of personal training and development. There are regular team development days when staff receive training as a company. During sessions on these days, topics such as internal communication are discussed and goals for the company are set. Other training is organised for groups of staff, such as delegation workshops for the team leaders. Just before the first inspection, there had been a high level of staff turnover within the company. Some staff had moved into new roles but did not have formal job descriptions. The responsibilities of individual members of staff had become unclear. All staff now have clear job descriptions and are fully aware of their individual roles, responsibilities and the part they play within their team.

39. Staff have ample opportunity to meet in teams. Communications across the company are excellent. Staff regularly review progress towards meeting targets at their weekly team meetings during which various issues relating to trainees' progress are discussed. Monthly meetings of assessors are held to discuss assessment and verification. Trainees' progress is carefully monitored and recorded and staff have ample opportunity to identify and tackle any problems. Managers monitor assessors' workloads, to ensure that responsibility for assessing trainees is shared equitably between the team and members. Staff in each department meet every month to review performance against contractual requirements. At these meetings, staff are kept fully informed on how their work is helping the company to meet externally set targets. Whenever possible, senior managers attend these meetings. Staff discuss standard agenda items such as progress in implementing the action plan for improvement and staff training and development, and they can also raise any concerns they have about equal opportunities and health and safety practices. Fortnightly management meetings are held to review overall company performance, address operational issues and to ensure standardisation of working practices across all programme areas, where appropriate.

40. Training and Personnel has well-established links with local employers, schools and support agencies. The company uses these links effectively to benefit its trainees. Potential trainees are informed about the training options open to them, and placements are sought to match their individual requirements. External agencies work with both trainees and staff to ensure that additional support requirements are swiftly met. The company has a good working relationship with the local TEC and Employment Service, and has been involved in delivering staff development to other training providers on the TEC's behalf. Since the first inspection, the company has increased its efforts to make employers better informed about the content of training programmes. Regular breakfast meetings with employers and other agencies are now organised and employers are invited to events involving their trainees.

41. At the time of the first inspection, responsibility for trainees who move from the foundation for work programmes onto NVQ awards was not clearly defined. NVQ assessors assumed responsibility for assessing trainees in the workplace, but foundation for work tutors retained some involvement in the pastoral monitoring

process. No one had clear responsibility for linking the two elements. This weakness has now been rectified. Responsibility is devolved to the NVQ assessors and members of the two teams meet to discuss trainees' progress fully. Since the first inspection, the two teams of staff have moved into the same office, and can discuss issues about trainees on an informal basis.

42. The company has access to management information through the computerised system used to process its TEC claims. At the time of the first inspection, it used this information as part of its financial review. However, the company did not evaluate or use the information produced. Information on trainees' performance is now analysed and findings are discussed. Where necessary, action plans are drawn up to address problems identified. Staff now seek information from trainees to supplement existing management data. For example, retail trainees now carry out an evaluation every six months during their training and this yields a wide range of information on their programmes. At the time of the reinspection, the second such evaluation had just been completed.

43. Significant improvements have been made to the management of training within the company. Most changes have been introduced since the action plan was ratified in November 1999 and have not had time to prove their effectiveness. For example, the current meeting calendar was not standardised until November 1999. Job descriptions for the key role of team leader and the final definition of the new management structure were not completed until the end of January 2000. At the time of the reinspection, it was too early to ascertain the impact of these changes and developments.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

44. Training and Personnel meets the quality assurance requirements of Birmingham and Solihull TEC and the awarding bodies. Training and Personnel was recognised as a preferred supplier by Birmingham TEC in 1995. The company is currently working with the TEC to gain the adult literacy and Basic Skills Agency kitemark for literacy and numeracy training. The company's quality assurance policies and procedures have all been updated since the last inspection. All staff have been involved in this process. The main focus of the new quality assurance process is the trainees' experience. During the first inspection, there was little sharing of good practice across the organisation and assessors applied different standards of assessment and used different documentation. Staff are now encouraged to review the new quality arrangements continuously. These new arrangements are in a very early stage of development and it is too soon to evaluate their effectiveness.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ no regular review of quality assurance policies

- ◆ weak internal verification procedures
- ◆ no evaluation of training
- ◆ no analysis of information as part of a continuous improvement process

45. After the first inspection, the company took effective action to rectify weaknesses in its quality assurance arrangements. It has implemented new quality assurance processes but these are not fully established and they have yet to prove their effectiveness. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the updated self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong commitment of staff to continuous improvement
- ◆ rigorous internal verification

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of subcontractor
- ◆ some employers' reluctance to release employed trainees for training

46. Since the last inspection there has been a total review of the company's quality assurance system. The managing director set up a series of workshops involving all staff. Staff were invited to review and question whether existing policies and procedures were fully effective. They then produced a set of policies and procedures, which clearly outline the new quality system. All the staff have a good understanding of their own roles and responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and continuous improvement. They are enthusiastic about quality assurance and show strong commitment to providing a high standard of customer service. The ensuring of a quality learning experience for the trainee is the key focus when planning training and assessment.

47. A more effective and structured timetable of staff meetings has been introduced. Clear minutes and action points are produced and good practice is now being shared across all programmes. Action for improvement is identified and implemented. For example, new assessment documentation has been introduced and its effectiveness and ease of use by trainees are being evaluated. Progress reviews and action plans are now produced on a carbon sheet so that all trainees, assessors and employers can have a copy. A copy is also given to workplace supervisors who are now more involved in the NVQ process. Some trainees feel that this dissemination of information about their progress and training plans has led to their completion of their training programmes in a shorter timescale.

48. There is a clear internal verification policy. All assessors are issued with a copy of the policy. Feedback from external verifiers is communicated to the assessment team. Meetings of assessors are held every month and minutes and action points

are produced. A 'fishbowl' meeting is held every Monday to discuss trainees' progress. The internal verifier keeps detailed records of the progress of all the trainees. Assessors record trainees' progress on wall charts in the centre. These charts are easy to understand and give a clear picture of trainees' achievements. Assessors summarise this information and give it to the internal verifier on a regular basis, every 1 to 4 weeks. Every month each assessor has to bring in three trainees' portfolios for internal verification. One portfolio belongs to a trainee making slow progress, one to a trainee making rapid progress, and one to a trainee with special requirements. The internal verifier then samples a fourth portfolio at random from each assessor. In this way, internal verification takes place during the programme and upon its completion. Currently, about 60 per cent of each portfolio is sampled at the end of the programme and this proportion exceeds the awarding body requirements. Assessors are observed carrying out assessments once every four months. Assessors are given clear, constructive feedback. They have to sign that they have carried out any action points highlighted by the internal verifier.

49. Since December 1999, trainees and employers have been asked to reply to questionnaires about the quality of the company's training programmes. The questionnaires are given to employers twice a year, and to trainees four times a year. A summary analysis is made of responses. Assessors discuss this at their team meetings and they are encouraged to suggest ways of improving training. Improvements have included an initial skill scan document that is now agreed by workplace supervisors, a manager's placement file, re-structured key skills workshops, and changes in assignments and lesson plans. Trainees' views are also collected at the end of the induction week. This questionnaire has recently been re-designed to encourage trainees to make suggestions for improvements. The new questionnaire will be introduced after the next induction.

50. Subcontracting arrangements are poorly monitored. Training and Personnel subcontracts a national wholesaler to provide training and assessment for trainees working towards qualifications in distribution and warehousing. Training and Personnel's staff sign up the trainees and complete the TEC paperwork but do not subject the subcontractor's programme to quality assurance. They collect details of trainees' attendance but do not receive copies of the records of trainees' progress reviews or trainees' records of achievement. The contract states that records of reviews must be available for inspection by the provider at any time. The company, however, does not maintain any records centrally, or in trainees' files, of any monitoring of trainees' training and assessment. For example, Training and Personnel's staff have no records of the progress and achievements of a trainee who joined the subcontractor's programme as long ago as November 1997. The contract was last reviewed in April 1999.

51. The new quality assurance system has been introduced within the last five months. The system is not well established and has not yet proved its effectiveness. The company compares its own performance with that of others as published in the TEC league tables. Trainees' achievement rates are improving, but it is too early to assess the impact of the new quality improvement strategies. Significant numbers of

adults have left their training programmes without obtaining their awards. Last year, of 22 trainees who began their programme, only one achieved a qualification and 17 left early. The company has taken action to improve trainees' achievement and retention rates on this programme, but it is too early to know whether these are proving effective. On the retail programme, employed trainees are not currently receiving the same amount of training as the non-employed trainees. Some managers are reluctant to allow employed trainees to attend training sessions during their working week. Training and Personnel's staff have taken action to help these trainees but it is too early to know whether this is proving effective.

52. In the recent self-assessment report prepared for the reinspection, the company gave a clear, self-critical overview of how they had addressed the weaknesses identified through the original inspection. Although some actions to rectify weaknesses have not been carried out yet in full, many have already proved successful. Inspectors found strengths the company had not identified and considered that the company had not realised the full extent of the improvements it has made in some areas.