



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

Hull City Services (Building Services Division)

SUMMARY

The Building Services Division (BSD) of Hull City Council provides satisfactory construction training. Trainees develop high levels of occupational competence. Procedures ensure that equality of opportunity is enforced during recruitment. Trainee support arrangements are monitored regularly and are effective. Pastoral support for trainees is good. The management and quality assurance of on-the-job training are satisfactory. Off-the-job training is not well monitored. Opportunities to carry out assessments in the workplace are missed. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training is weak.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good opportunities for skill development at work placements
- ◆ high levels of occupational competence shown by trainees
- ◆ positive action to provide work experience for disaffected groups
- ◆ regularly monitored, effective support arrangements
- ◆ thorough and effective on-the-job induction
- ◆ effective communication between all parties
- ◆ well-managed on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ improvements in training quality from action planning and monitoring

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ no on-the-job targets set for progression towards qualifications
- ◆ weak internal promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ weak co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient staff development to improve on-the-job training
- ◆ no inclusion of subcontractors' training in quality assurance arrangements

INTRODUCTION

1. Hull City Services, Building Services Division (BSD) is a division of the Direct Service Organisation of Hull City Council. It was established in 1991, following the government's introduction of compulsory competitive tendering. Hull Council has trained young people and adults for many years. In 1988, the council established a construction training initiative in response to local skills shortages in construction crafts. Prior to the initiative, the council trained young people largely to meet its own needs. The initiative enabled the council to establish other objectives for its training programmes, including the supply of skilled craftspeople for the Hull area and training opportunities for local school leavers.

2. BSD has 118 trainees in six main construction craft areas. Up to 45 new trainees are recruited each year and there are around 10 applicants for each traineeship. Up to 35 trainees complete their national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 3 training programmes each year. About half of them are then employed directly by BSD and the others enter the local labour market. BSD has a contract with Humberside training and enterprise council (TEC) to deliver modern apprenticeships and work-based training for young people in construction. While on programmes, trainees either attend colleges or other subcontracted training providers, on a day- or block-release basis. The length of training programmes is linked to national agreements for specialist trades such as plumbing, and electrical and gas engineering, but can also be arranged to meet the requirements of individual trainees on programmes such as brickwork, painting and decorating, and timber trades.

3. BSD has subcontracting arrangements with two colleges of further education and two private training providers. One college is approximately 50 miles from Hull and the other college and the two training providers are in Hull. Another important partner is Hull City Vision, a Hull City Council initiative responsible for attracting funding for urban regeneration from the European Social Fund (ESF). Hull City Services employs 3,000 people; BSD employs 750 people and has an annual turnover of 35 million pounds.

4. The construction division is divided, for operation purposes, into eight sections covering a range of activities such as plastic window manufacturing, building maintenance and minor works. The training section is part of the quality, productivity and administration section. The training team consists of a training officer and a training advisor, neither of whom have construction training. The training officer is responsible for the planning and co-ordination of the training programmes. The advisor and the training officer both conduct trainee reviews. The trainee bricklayers, joiners, plumbers and gas fitters are not employed during their first year of training, which is regarded as a probationary period. Employment is only offered to trainees who demonstrate commitment to their training programmes and who successfully undergo a first-year appraisal. The electrical installation

apprentices are employed from the start of training, in-line with national training agreements, but the first year is still regarded as a probationary year.

5. Hull has a population of approximately 266,000. Unemployment in the Hull area is 8.7 per cent compared with a national average of 5.2 per cent. Over 30 per cent of unemployed people are under 25 years old and 21 per cent have been unemployed for over a year. Thirty two per cent of jobs in Hull are in public administration, education and health and 21 per cent are in manufacturing.

6. Hull has a low GCSE achievement rate. Over 18 per cent of school leavers achieve no graded GCSEs. Twenty four per cent of school leavers progress to further education and over 12 per cent become unemployed. One third of the employed workforce have no NVQ or equivalent vocational qualification. A quarter of the Hull population aged over 16 receive income support.

7. Minority ethnic groups form only a small proportion of the community in Hull, and are estimated to constitute only just over 1 per cent of the total population. There is evidence that the number of people from eastern European countries, particularly Croatia, is growing. Statistics relating to disability in the Hull area are not available. Hull City Council estimates that about 15 per cent of people have a disability of some kind and that around 0.1 per cent fall within the scope of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

8. BSD's initial self-assessment report was completed by the training officer in April 1999. Humberside TEC supported the self-assessment process by providing advice and training. An advisory working committee consisting of supervisors, trainees, operatives and the training team was set up in May 1999. An up-dated self-assessment report and action plan was prepared for the inspection in September 1999. The report contained insufficient data on trainees' achievements and no analysis of year-on-year trends. It did not take sufficient account of the views of trainees or subcontractors. Each section of the report identified strengths, weaknesses and the actions required for improvement. Sources of evidence were given for strengths but not weaknesses.

9. The inspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors working for a total of 12 days. They examined subcontractor assessment procedures, service level agreements, trainees' files and portfolios, staff qualifications, and quality assurance and management arrangements. Inspectors interviewed eight college tutors and 21 trainees. Inspectors also visited nine training sites across the Hull area and conducted nine interviews with BSD and subcontracting staff. Two off-the-job training sessions were observed and both awarded a grade 2.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

10. Hull City Services has 118 trainees in construction. All are working towards NVQs at level two or three. Seventy-one are modern apprentices and 47 are youth trainees. Thirty-nine are bricklayers, 49 are in wood occupations, five are painters and decorators, eight are gas servicing engineers, nine are plumbers and eight are electricians. Trainees work on a variety of building sites and refurbishment schemes in the Hull area. Plumbing trainees attend college on a day-release basis every week for the 36 weeks of the academic year. Painting and decorating trainees attend college on a block-release basis for a total of 36 days each year. Bricklaying and wood occupation trainees attend a college mobile training facility, which is situated next to one of the company's building sites. Electrical and gas servicing trainees attend one of two training subcontractors on a block-release basis. Off-the-job training involves a combination of classroom-based theoretical studies and practical workshop activities. Continuous assessment of trainees is carried out until competence is achieved. Specialist tutors undertake the delivery and assessment of key skills. The self-assessment report identified strengths relating to on-the-job learning and health and safety, but failed to recognise the absence of target setting during trainees' reviews as a weakness. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good opportunities for skills development at work placements
- ◆ trainees' high levels of occupational competence
- ◆ trainees' clear understanding of key skills requirements
- ◆ high priority given to health, safety and trainees' welfare

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient assessment in the workplace
- ◆ lack of knowledge of NVQ requirements by workplace supervisors and operatives
- ◆ failure to set on-the-job targets for trainees

11. Achievement rates for NVQ level 2 and 3 have improved from an average of 48 per cent in 1995-96 to over 60 per cent in 1997-98. Retention rates have also improved but 40 per cent of trainees still leave the programme early, usually during the first six months of training. Most trainees gain employment, either with BSD or with other local companies, at the end of their training. The different construction projects undertaken by BSD enable trainees to experience a broad range of jobs and tasks, while under the guidance of qualified operatives or craft trainers.

12. Whenever possible, trainees are given the opportunity to work on new building projects as well as housing refurbishment schemes. BSD aims to provide realistic working environments that promote rounded skills development. This objective is achieved for most trainees, who demonstrate a good standard of occupational competence across all occupational areas. For example, one building site has 29 trainees and nine operatives who are responsible for the trainees' day-to-day training. This site provides opportunities for bricklayers and joiners to work in a commercial context and to commercially acceptable standards, as measured by a BSD clerk of works. Joinery and bricklaying trainees complete a work evidence book in which they record the jobs they undertake on a weekly basis. These books are countersigned by a craft trainer to authenticate the record of work. However, BSD and college staff do not make good use of the work evidence books to support trainees' progression towards their qualification. No assessments are undertaken on site. They are undertaken within simulated conditions at subcontractors' premises. The mobile training facility is not used to provide BSD with opportunities to integrate on- and off-the-job training or to carry out assessment in the workplace.

13. There is an appropriate emphasis on health and safety. Trainees undergo an induction at every new site. Equipment used by trainees, such as ladders and scaffolding, is checked regularly. BSD staff monitor and enforce the mandatory wearing of personal protective equipment. Trainees' attendance is closely monitored. There are financial penalties for lateness or unauthorised absence. Internal verification of assessment procedures is sound and complies with awarding body criteria. Trainees are made aware of the key skills requirements for their target qualifications during induction programmes. They have a good understanding

of key skills, including the assessment requirements. Training in key skills is provided by subcontractors and those trainees who attend college can make use of a key skills learning resources centre.

14. BSD's site supervisors carry out trainees' reviews, with support from the training advisor. Occupationally qualified council staff, known as 'operatives', work closely with trainees on-site, and are given the opportunity to comment on each trainee's performance prior to the review. The review itself is structured around these comments and the trainee has the opportunity to respond to them. Reviews are effective in ensuring the health, safety and welfare of trainees and also promote their personal effectiveness. However, the supervisors and the training advisor lack knowledge of NVQ or key skills requirements. As a result, reviews are not used to set targets for trainees, or to monitor their progress towards the achievement of their target qualifications.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

15. Hull City Services has an equal opportunities policy and a grievance procedure which apply to all staff and trainees. The policy is currently being revised. BSD monitors the gender, ethnicity, disability, age and referral source of all trainees. At the time of inspection, BSD had one female and 117 male trainees. No trainees were from a minority ethnic background. The proportion of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the Hull area is just over 1 per cent. Hull City Council has an equality focus group which evaluates and determines the council's policies and strategies on equal opportunities. Staff awareness of equal opportunities legislation is evaluated through an annual staff survey. BSD's training staff visit local schools, participating in industry days for the purpose of recruitment. The self-assessment report identified key strengths including the fair and non-prejudicial recruitment process. Weaknesses were also identified, including the weak promotion of equal opportunities. The report did not identify the weak monitoring of subcontractors' equal opportunity arrangements. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by BSD in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ non-discriminatory recruitment and selection procedures
- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities during induction
- ◆ work experience provision for disaffected groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring of subcontractors' equal opportunities procedures
- ◆ weak internal promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ no equal opportunities recruitment targets

16. BSD receives applications for training from a geographical area which exceeds the local authority boundary. Care is taken to remove bias throughout the recruitment process. BSD's personnel department receives all completed application forms. The personnel department only sends details of applicants' qualifications and previous experience to the appropriate division within the company. This ensures that the process of choosing applicants for interview is free from discrimination by gender, disability or ethnicity. The personnel department only releases further details after the training team has selected applicants for interview. All staff involved in trainees' interviews have been trained on fair selection and recruitment procedures to ensure that their knowledge and understanding of relevant legislation is up to date. The application form includes an equal opportunities monitoring section, where information on ethnicity, gender and disability is recorded. Equal opportunities data is monitored but not evaluated. The data are not analysed to inform planning or to target promotion of training to under-represented groups.

17. BSD has developed an effective method of discussing equal opportunities during trainees' induction. An interactive session called 'prejudices and assumptions' helps to stimulate trainees' understanding and promote discussion. The inclusion of case studies on victimisation and bullying helps to ensure that trainees are aware of their responsibilities. Trainees receive an induction booklet which contains BSD's equal opportunities policy statement and disciplinary procedure and rules. The company produces a number of other relevant policies including one on personal harassment, one on HIV and AIDS and one on employment. Trainees have a basic but clear understanding of their responsibilities with respect to equal opportunities. They act appropriately when liaising with a broad cross-section of council tenants.

18. Equal opportunities are not discussed as a standing agenda item in management meetings or team briefings. There are no targets set for equal opportunities in the division's business plan. No equal opportunities information is displayed on notice boards. Senior managers have not explained the role of the equality focus group effectively to other staff, many of whom are unaware of the group's existence or of BSD's equal opportunities strategy.

19. The service level agreement BSD has with its training subcontractors does not specify any requirements in relation to equal opportunities. While BSD requests a copy of each subcontractor's equal opportunities policy, no systematic monitoring is undertaken to identify to what extent subcontractors adhere to their own policies, or reflect BSD's policies in their working practices.

20. BSD's training officer has responded to the government's 'Excellence in Schools' white paper. By offering itself as a work placement provider, BSD has been able to allow 14-16 year olds to participate in work-related programmes. This initiative has established links with a number of local schools to provide work experience for both mainstream and disaffected young people. These young people

work alongside other trainees on a variety of supervised projects, some just for a day and some for longer. At least two young people have taken up training programmes with BSD on leaving school having attended such 'tasters'. BSD has also agreed to provide work experience for a female painting and decorating trainee who is a member of a minority ethnic group and is currently attending a local college on a part-time basis. Training staff attend school careers events and, following the careers service's decision last year not to hold a central careers event, BSD contacted every secondary school in the area, including all girl schools, offering to discuss training opportunities in construction.

21. Wheelchair access is possible into BSD's offices and into subcontractor's premises, but access to construction projects is difficult, mainly due to ground conditions and safety requirements.

Trainee support

Grade 2

22. BSD has many more applicants than places for construction training. Applications for training as electricians, plumbers and gas service engineers have GCSE entry requirements and applicants are required to complete an aptitude test. Those applying for training in other trades, who are selected for interview, receive offers on the basis of that interview. Numeracy and literacy tests are then given as part of the initial assessment of the trainees after induction, and are used to inform and produce appropriate individual training plans. Initial induction takes place at BSD's offices in Hull. This covers BSD's procedures, health and safety, equal opportunities and recognition of prior experiences. Further induction, in particular for health and safety, is held each time a trainee is moved to a different site. On-the-job support for trainees is provided by BSD's site supervisor. Further support, particularly for trainees with learning or personal difficulties, is given by BSD's training officer and training advisor. BSD's staff visit subcontractors to discuss personal, as well as training-related, support needs. The self-assessment report identified strengths relating to initial assessment and induction but did not mention the effective support provided for trainees with learning and other difficulties. Inspectors identified some minor and main weaknesses in addition to those in the self-assessment report, including there being little accreditation of prior learning, but awarded a higher grade than the one given by BSD in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular monitoring of support arrangements
- ◆ thorough and effective on-the-job induction
- ◆ outstanding pastoral support by training officers
- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ no overall strategy for trainee support

23. BSD has well-advertised open days to recruit trainees. On average, there are about 400 applicants for 40 training places each year. Unsuccessful applicants are referred to a local college. When vacancies arise, applicants have the opportunity to reapply. Prior experiences and qualifications are recorded and have an influence on individual training plans. However, there is no formal accreditation of prior learning. Some trainees have completed relevant level 1 units in construction at school, but such qualifications are not always accredited. Initial assessment is thorough. Literacy and numeracy tests are administered by the training officer, who is a registered basic skills assessor.

24. If staff identify that a trainee requires additional support, they record the details on the trainee's individual training plan. Any relevant subcontractors are notified and given a brief description of the learning support required. When appropriate, the trainee's learning goals are altered to make them more realistic. Trainees receive excellent occupational and pastoral support throughout their training programme. They are supported in the workplace by supervisors and operatives and their general progress is monitored weekly. If necessary, training officers visit trainees at home to discuss particular difficulties with parents or guardians. These visits are followed up in writing and recorded on the trainee's file. Trainees are encouraged to telephone the training officer at any time to discuss any issues affecting their training. The training officer has the authority to refer trainees to welfare officers within the council's occupational health unit. This referral process assures confidentiality. The level of pastoral support thus provided is outstanding, and highly effective in helping trainees to complete their training.

25. Trainees remember their induction activities and show a particularly good understanding of health and safety and equal opportunities issues. However, the company has not scrutinised the induction programmes provided by subcontractors to remove unnecessary duplication. The timing and content of the separate induction events are not synchronised to ensure the most effective reinforcement of key issues. There is a job-search programme for all trainees as they come towards the end of their training programme. When leaving, trainees are asked to comment on the support they have received. These comments are noted and have been used for marketing purposes. Trainees say they would recommend BSD to their friends. While BSD regularly monitors trainee support arrangements, it does not have a written development strategy for trainee support. Any improvements are a result of the training officer's actions rather than the outcome of a strategic plan.

Management of training

Grade 3

26. BSD has a clear management structure. There is a director supported by one deputy and three assistant directors. Each assistant director is responsible for different divisions within BSD. The training section is located within the quality, productivity and administration division. The training team consists of two female members of staff. They have no clerical support. They have a great deal of construction-related experience but are not vocationally qualified in construction. The training section has a range of policies and procedures covering all aspects of its work. Some procedures, such as those relating to recruitment of staff, are council-wide procedures. Others relate only to managing the training programmes. These include trainees' review arrangements and procedures for induction.

27. BSD was re-accredited for the Investors in People Standard in 1998. Each member of staff at BSD undertakes an annual appraisal. From this, staff training needs are identified which take account of individual as well as organisational needs. The analysis of individual training needs and the broader objectives of the training section form part of the division's annual management and business plan. The self-assessment report identified strengths related to the audit of subcontractors and effective communications. It did not identify weaknesses in management-information systems and the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by BSD in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective communications
- ◆ realistic business plan with appropriate targets
- ◆ well-managed on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ encouragement and celebration of trainees' success

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak co-ordination between on- and off-the job training
- ◆ underdeveloped use of management-information systems
- ◆ insufficient staff development to improve on-the-job training

28. BSD has developed effective communications between all the key partners in on-the-job work experience and off-the-job training and assessment. There are monthly management and training team meetings which are minuted, actioned and circulated to all relevant staff. The quality assurance manager for BSD has prepared a list of key activities linked to the management of training programmes. The person responsible for each activity is named.

29. The training officer undertakes an annual audit of all subcontractors against the terms and conditions of the subcontract agreement. Regular internal updates are circulated to staff and trainees regarding policy or procedural changes. The results of the initial selection tests undertaken by BSD at the recruitment stage are summarised for each trainee and forwarded to the relevant subcontracted training provider. This information augments the basic skills testing undertaken by the subcontractor. Each year, the division prepares a business plan. Targets for recruitment and achievement are set and improvement plans are outlined for all the division's work, including that of the training section.

30. On-the-job training is well organised. Each trainee is assigned to a supervisor, who then allocates the trainee to a qualified operative on site. Each trainee keeps a diary record of what they do at work each week. Throughout their training programme, trainees are scheduled onto different building sites and projects to maximise their exposure to different experiences. Off-the-job training and assessment are also well managed by the different subcontractors. There are clear schemes of work and well-organised training sessions. Assessments are carefully planned and internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. Trainee records are up to date and well organised. They contain accurate information about individual training plans, completion of induction, support arrangements and progress reviews.

31. The council has a good record of collaboration with a local college. BSD, in partnership with the college, won a National Skills Award in 1995 linked to a project where trainees worked on real houses and college staff conducted training on the same site. The project is still operating. This success, and other successes by individual trainees, are used to promote BSD and the college as training providers. These successes encourage trainees, and they are proud of their achievements.

32. Co-ordination between on-the-job work experience, and off-the-job training and assessment is weak. There are no integrated training and assessment plans, and workplace reviews do not cover trainees' progress towards their target qualification. Opportunities to link the knowledge and understanding gained in the workplace with the skills and competencies practiced and assessed off the job occur on a daily basis, but these opportunities are not exploited. Management information is not used as a tool to systematically inform action planning by staff and decision making by managers. Current data analysis is confined to summative reports for senior managers, and to fulfil TEC contractual requirements.

33. Training has been provided to ensure that workplace supervisors are clear about their role and responsibilities regarding the training programmes but there are still areas for which training has been lacking. For example, there is no training for on-site assessment or to make operatives and supervisors more aware of key skills and NVQ standards.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

34. BSD's quality assurance arrangements are well recorded. The range of procedures satisfies the requirements of Hull City Council and Humberside TEC. There are procedures covering all aspects of induction, training and support, and most are reviewed at least once a year. All external quality assurance requirements are met by subcontractors. Feedback is sought from trainees and employers and the responses are analysed at least once a year. The training programmes and quality assurance arrangements are co-ordinated by the training officer and quality assurance manager for the division. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses but did not identify important weaknesses in data analysis and the monitoring of off-the-job training and assessment. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by BSD in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ careful monitoring of set standards for on-the-job work
- ◆ improvements in training quality from action planning and monitoring

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no inclusion of subcontracted training in BSD's quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ insufficient analysis of achievement and destination data
- ◆ little integration of self-assessment with other aspects of quality assurance

35. BSD's training officer has developed a comprehensive set of quality assurance procedures that cover all aspects of the training programme. Some of the procedures require further development, such as those relating to subcontracted training providers. Nevertheless, the procedures are robust and well understood by training staff, trainees and supervisors. The procedures are regularly reviewed by the training officer and action planning has started to improve key aspects of the training programme. For example, new subcontracted training providers are being tried out as part of an attempt to improve the co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training. Internal training workshops have been run to raise the supervisors' awareness of their role and responsibilities as mentors in the workplace. Key skills delivery and assessment have been improved and a newsletter for trainees has been introduced to improve internal communications. BSD does not set on-the-job targets for progression towards target qualifications. They do, however, pay appropriate attention to the quality of trainees' work, and the effectiveness of supervision. For example, during trainees' reviews there is a focus on the work recently undertaken by the trainee; the supervisor asks the trainee, and the operative they have been working with, questions about the quality of this work. Supervisors' performance in monitoring the quality of trainees' work is reviewed as

part of their annual appraisal. A clerk of works assesses the work done on each building project to ensure it is completed to the required standard and specification.

36. BSD has no systems to assess or influence the quality of training or assessment carried out by the four subcontracting training providers. The subcontractors' internal verification arrangements are not monitored and copies of internal or external verifiers' reports are not seen by BSD's staff. BSD's service level agreement with subcontractors does not include any requirements relating to standards or quality of training.

37. BSD collects data about trainees but makes little use of it for quality improvement purposes. For example, the reasons why trainees leave programmes early are not analysed, and year-on-year trends in achievement rates are not produced for each of the building trades.

38. The views of staff and trainees, but not of the four subcontracting training providers, were used as part of the evidence base for the self-assessment report. The report identified a number of weaknesses and actions have been taken to remedy these. For example, initial assessment results and additional support needs are now included on individual training plans and monitored from the start of training. Some aspects of training identified as strengths were found by inspectors to be no more than normal practice or TEC contractual requirements. Overall, the self-assessment grades were a fair reflection of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the report. However, self-assessment is not yet fully integrated with other aspects of BSD's quality assurance arrangements.