



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1998

RPS Rainer City Training

SUMMARY

RPS Rainer City Training offers training in a range of occupational areas. Training in four of the seven areas is good. Training is generally well planned and of a high quality. Retailing, customer service and hospitality are satisfactory, although the assessment for some trainees on catering programmes is slow. The foundation for work programme is well established, with a high number of trainees progressing to mainstream education and training programmes. Trainee support is good, especially for those trainees with learning disabilities. The adult prevocational programme has started only recently and is still being developed. There has been a significant improvement in the number of trainees achieving national vocational qualifications (NVQs) over the last three years. Although quality assurance is good, the company does not have a framework to ensure that standards are consistent across all occupational areas.

GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS | GRADE |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Agriculture | 2 |
| Business administration | 2 |
| Retailing & customer service | 3 |
| Leisure, sport & travel | 2 |
| Hospitality | 3 |
| Health, care & public services | 2 |
| Foundation for work | 2 |

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good development and assessment of key skills in business administration
- ◆ high success rates from the foundation programme into mainstream education and training
- ◆ good support for trainees, especially those with learning difficulties
- ◆ use made of the national record of achievement to develop trainees
- ◆ regular observations of training to ensure consistent improvement
- ◆ strong commitment to staff development

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress of some trainees in care, sport & recreation and retail
- ◆ trainees not given copies of their action-plans
- ◆ trainees not involved in the evaluation of training programmes
- ◆ no formal quality assurance framework



INTRODUCTION

1. RPS Rainer City Training (RPS) has been offering training in the Portsmouth area for eighteen years. Until two years ago, the company was run by Portsmouth City Council. In 1996, it was taken over by the Royal Philanthropic Society (RPS) to become the training division of a charity which is dedicated to helping young disadvantaged people. The company has continued to receive some financial support from the city council up to this year. RPS City Training now has strong links with the community and is part of the Portsea Community Initiative and the Portsmouth Minority Support Group and works closely with the Vosper Thornycroft Southern Careers service.

2. The company operates from two centres in Portsmouth and offers training in seven occupational areas. The foundation training programme for young people is well established, whereas the adult prevocational programme is more recent. The company trains a high proportion of young people with additional learning needs and offers progression from the foundation programme on to NVQ level 1 or 2 in the majority of occupational areas. Its work is largely funded through a contract with Hampshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Other than the foundation and adult programme, all trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3 and through modern apprenticeship programmes. There were 126 people in training at the time of inspection. The company employs 36 staff.

3. Unemployment in Portsmouth is high at 4.9 per cent, compared with Hampshire's average of 2.3 per cent. The proportion of young people staying on in education is 69.4 per cent in Hampshire. The proportion of 16-year-old school leavers achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades A* to C is 32 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent. Of those aged 16 leaving full-time education in 1997, 10.9 per cent entered full-time employment, 4.1 per cent entered training and 4.9 per cent were unemployed. RPS competes for trainees with four local colleges and other training providers. Those beginning employment were primarily in engineering, science & technology, retail, care, hotel & catering, administration and IT. The occupational sectors offered by the company reflect the current employment trends.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. RPS produced its self-assessment report one month prior to inspection. Staff were consulted during the production of the report, but the report was primarily the work of the quality manager. The report did not fully evaluate the quality of provision or the impact of training on the trainees. The strengths and weaknesses were identified as being the same across all occupational areas. The draft self-assessment framework was used, and a single set of grades was given for all occupational areas.

5. A team of eight inspectors spent a total of 26 days at RPS during June 1998. Six occupational areas, foundation provision and the adult prevocational programme were inspected. Inspectors examined company and awarding body documentation. They met RPS staff and employers. Inspectors visited 28 work placements and interviewed 45 trainees. Inspectors observed progress reviews, training sessions and assessments.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|-----------|
| Agriculture | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Business administration | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Retailing & customer service | | 3 | 1 | | | 4 |
| Leisure, sport & travel | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Hospitality | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Health, care & public services | 1 | | 1 | | | 2 |
| Foundation for work | | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 4 |
| Total | 1 | 9 | 3 | 1 | | 14 |

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture (horticulture)

Grade 2

6. At the time of inspection, there were seven trainees in horticulture. Three trainees are working towards NVQ level 1, two trainees are on level 2 and two are on modern apprenticeship programmes. NVQ level 1 trainees attend training at the Greenfingers horticulture training site. Four trainees are employed in the industry and attend Greenfingers on a day-release basis. Trainees working at the centre

produce some goods for a small commercial market. The provider's self-assessment report did not accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses in this area, but the grade awarded by the inspector was the same as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good physical resources
- ◆ rigorous assessment procedures
- ◆ good rate of trainee progress
- ◆ challenging training programmes for NVQ level 2 and modern apprentices
- ◆ good communication among trainees, assessors and training supervisors
- ◆ effective assessment of key skills using work-based evidence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient support for trainees to complete portfolios
- ◆ trainees do not have copies of their development plans

7. The Greenfingers training site enables trainees to experience a good range of different kinds of horticultural work enabling them to develop skills and knowledge. It is a high-quality training environment. A key factor in the success of those trainees with additional learning needs is the successful development of their confidence and independence. Staff have a full understanding of NVQ qualifications, have relevant experience and are well qualified. Assessments are thorough and well documented. Trainees' work is good. For NVQ level 2 and modern apprentices, work placements provide stimulating learning opportunities and good use is made of comprehensive log books and training materials. Experience in the workplace is used effectively to develop and assess key skills. Staff meet regularly to discuss the trainees' progress. They work closely and co-ordinate their approach to the training.

8. Although trainees receive individual support in portfolio-building, there is no structured approach to this activity. This results in some NVQ level 1 trainees being unable to record current evidence on a regular basis. Trainees do not have a copy of their action-plans to monitor progress before their next progress review.

Business administration

Grade 2

9. RPS currently has 16 trainees working towards NVQ levels 1 to 3 in business administration, three of whom are on modern apprenticeship programmes. A further three trainees are working towards NVQ level 3 in customer service. The majority of the training takes place in the workplace, supported by comprehensive off-the-job training at the RPS training centre. Trainees will typically come into the training centre at least half a day each fortnight and work with a trainer in small groups of five to six people. The self-assessment report identified some of the strengths and weaknesses in this area. The grade awarded by the inspectors was the same as that

proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of NVQ achievement
- ◆ high standard of work placements
- ◆ good resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ exceptionally good working relationships between trainers and trainees
- ◆ trainees' portfolio work is closely linked to on-the-job training
- ◆ relevant key skills are integrated with occupational work
- ◆ well-staffed provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ feedback from trainees is not sought
- ◆ some qualifications inappropriate to trainees' needs

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainers use naturally occurring workplace evidence to identify key skill assessment opportunities. One trainee had compared cross-channel ferry routes with a range of accommodation in order to maximise value on a one-day and five-day return journey to the continent. The work involved gathering and analysing data, and the results were presented using a computer software package. This task provided opportunities to assess key skills in the workplace.

10. The level of support of training staff to trainees is exceptionally high, and staff are fully aware of trainees' abilities and support needs. In training sessions, trainers focus on the individual needs of each trainee and appropriate training plans are agreed on. Trainees are encouraged to share their work experiences with others in the group. This enlivens the work, and trainees learn from each other and are enthusiastic about their training. Key skills are integrated into the modern apprenticeship programmes with innovative and creative use of work-based situations. Work placements are of a high quality and provide trainees with a wealth of opportunities to develop good portfolios, as well as practising their new skills. Training staff regularly visit trainees in the workplace and monitor their progress effectively. Employers are fully involved in the training and progression of trainees. A good percentage of trainees moves into permanent employment. Trainees fully understand, influence and agree on their training programmes, achieving good results. In 1997-98, 69 per cent achieved NVQs in business administration.

11. Trainees are not consulted on the effectiveness of their training programmes, with no formal processes in place to collect trainees' views or to include their opinions in programme evaluations. At the time of inspection, some trainees were on the customer service NVQ level 3, which was inappropriate to their current job roles and levels of responsibility to enable them to complete the NVQ successfully.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

12. At the time of inspection, 19 trainees were registered in this occupational area, mostly for retail NVQs at level 1 or 2. One trainee was working towards warehousing level 2, another for customer service level 2, while one was studying for customer service level 2 in addition to retail. There were two modern apprentices. All trainees are on work placements. A small number is employed. Following induction, trainees quickly move into their placements. Off-the-job training is arranged for them periodically on general topics, such as health and safety, first aid and NVQ assessment. Assessment is carried out by observation of trainees at work. Training supervisors oversee trainees' welfare and general progress. In some cases, the training supervisor is the trainees' assessor. Achievements of NVQs have increased from 33 per cent of leavers in 1996-97 to 55 per cent in 1997-98. In 1997-98, 41 per cent of leavers went into employment and seven per cent progressed to further training. The company's proposed grade in its self-assessment report was higher than that awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective planning of assessments
- ◆ progress reviews linked carefully to assessment goals
- ◆ comprehensive training in health and safety
- ◆ achievements have risen significantly from 1996-97 to 1997-98

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited trainee support
- ◆ no use of learning materials
- ◆ slow trainee progress is not addressed
- ◆ assessment records are not fully documented
- ◆ workplace learning is unstructured

13. Trainers use customised national-record-of-achievement forms effectively during reviews to link trainees' progress carefully with the action-planning process. Short- and long-term goals are agreed on which are closely matched with NVQ outcomes. Trainees with learning difficulties receive additional support. Assessment planning is well organised. Assessments take place every two or three weeks for most trainees. Trainees are given written plans which contain all the necessary detail for them to prepare for assessments. There are weaknesses in the recording of assessments. Records contain insufficient detail about how trainees have met the range of skills and knowledge requirements of qualifications. The recording of observations results in bland, repetitive statements. No use is made of cross-referencing the evidence produced by the trainees.

14. Trainees receive no off-the-job instruction covering background knowledge to their occupations. RPS does not provide learning materials to supplement trainees' knowledge of their work. Trainees' learning is dependent on the quality of their workplace and the support of their employer. In some placements, employers provide good background knowledge to underpin trainees' assessments. In others, there is no structure to trainees' learning. There is no procedure to capture information about employer-provided training and integrate it with trainees' assessments.

Leisure, sport & travel

Grade 2

15. RPS has ten trainees working towards sport and recreation qualifications at NVQ levels 2 and 3; one trainee is a modern apprentice. There are three other trainees on the programme working towards a customer service qualification at level 3, having already achieved a level 2 qualification in facility operation. All trainees are placed in local leisure centres in and around the Portsmouth area. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed in the company's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of support for portfolio-building
- ◆ active employer network
- ◆ effective assessment practices
- ◆ frequent monitoring of trainee progress
- ◆ integration of NVQ programme with trainees' work roles
- ◆ high conversion rate from training to employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees do not achieve within planned timescales
- ◆ significant number of early leavers
- ◆ lack of initial assessment

16. Induction arrangements are effective. Training plans are accurate and regularly updated. Assessment is detailed, varied and thorough. Trainees have an excellent understanding of how and when they will be assessed, receiving high-quality feedback. Workplace supervisors are involved in assessment and regularly meet programme managers to share good practice and exchange industry-related information. Employers understand the assessment process and encourage trainees to collect meaningful evidence.

17. Workplaces are of high quality and provide opportunities for trainees to gain broadly based experience of the leisure industry. There is a good match between the work which trainees undertake and the requirements of their NVQ programmes.

GOOD PRACTICE

One leisure centre identified the need to replace its vending machine. Following discussion with the manager, one trainee designed and carried out a survey to determine customers' views on the possible product range and prices. The results were collected, presented in graph form using a computer and used to determine the type of machine to be purchased by the centre. A follow-up survey monitored changes in levels of customer satisfaction. This project gave the trainee an excellent experience of a real and valuable task that was followed through.

Trainees negotiate a range of optional units within their programme to ensure the best fit with the work which they carry out. Good use is made of existing employer staff training materials, for example in training for reception duties.

18. Trainees currently on the programme were not initially assessed. Prior knowledge and experience are not taken into account in determining individual learning programmes. Too many trainees leave the programme without qualifications, although this decreased from 1996-97 to 1997-98. Early leavers are monitored closely, and the company attempts to find ways of enabling trainees to complete their training. Progress towards the achievement of the NVQ level 2 in facility operations is often slow. Some trainees have recently started to attend workshops at RPS's premises in an attempt to overcome this problem.

Hospitality

Grade 3

19. There were 13 trainees in catering at the time of inspection. Of these, one is a modern apprentice, seven are working towards NVQ level 1 and five are working towards NVQ level 2 in food preparation and cooking. Trainees attend training at the Foyer (a low-cost restaurant), in the centre of Portsmouth, or are in work placements in the vicinity. The centre is well equipped to deliver training. RPS was approved to offer training at NVQ level 2 in April 1998, although trainees were accepted onto the programme in December 1997. The grade awarded by the inspectors was lower than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ resources for the delivery of catering training are good
- ◆ individual learning needs are met effectively
- ◆ initial assessment is effective and leads to appropriate training programmes
- ◆ trainees work well independently

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ assessments do not take place regularly on the NVQ level 2 programme
- ◆ there is no formal tracking system of trainees' progress
- ◆ trainees do not have copies of their development plans

20. NVQ level 1 trainees are particularly well supported, and trainers develop good working relationships with the trainees. Trainers at the Foyer are especially successful in developing the independence of trainees with learning difficulties, and trainees were observed working confidently on their own. The initial assessment process works well in this area, and results in the clear identification of additional support needs, enabling individual learning programmes to be developed.

21. Trainees working towards NVQ level 2 have a good understanding of the qualification and have continued to develop their knowledge and skills in their work placements. The training programme ensures that trainees learn a range of skills in the kitchen before they are assessed. However, trainees on NVQ level 2 are not being assessed on a regular basis, and there is currently no formalised assessment programme in place. Trainees are unable to monitor their progress against their action-plans, which are kept by their training co-ordinator.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

22. There are currently 27 trainees in care and childcare, five of whom are on the practical caring skills programme. Eleven trainees are working towards NVQ level 2, and 11 are on modern apprenticeships programmes. Trainees are allocated a training supervisor who is responsible for monitoring their progress throughout the programme. Assessment is carried out by either full-time, peripatetic or work-based assessors. All assessments take place in the workplace. Key skills are assessed using work-based projects. Trainees on the practical caring skills programme attend off-the-job training once a week at the RPS training centre. NVQ level 2 trainees attend off-the-job training one day per month. The self-assessment accurately identified two of the weaknesses in this area.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training is well planned
- ◆ training resources and learning materials are good
- ◆ trainees' reviews of their own progress is particularly good
- ◆ effective monitoring of progress and achievement
- ◆ well-co-ordinated assessment practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees' action-plans are not effectively monitored
- ◆ achievement rate for 1997-98 was low

23. Training programmes are well designed, meeting the needs of trainees whose abilities range from those with learning difficulties to those on modern apprenticeship programmes. Learning materials are well written and are easy to understand for trainees at all levels. The materials support on-the-job training and the practical elements of off-the-job training by extending the trainees' knowledge and understanding of the theoretical aspects of the qualifications. Trainees are encouraged to reflect on their progress throughout the programme and to develop detailed action-plans. The personal and professional skills of the training team are fully utilised to build strong relationships with trainees whose earlier history and experience with adults and education are poor or even traumatic. Training co-

ordinators, assessors, including peripatetic assessors and internal verifiers, meet regularly, with rigorous assessment practices in place. The quality of work in the trainees' portfolios is of a high standard.

24. The rate of some trainees' progress is slow. A few trainees have taken a year to achieve two units. Trainees' progress is monitored and result in action-plans, but these plans are not always being followed up effectively. NVQ achievement levels for the last contract were poor but changes have been made in the qualifications offered to redress the situation.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

25. The prevocational training for adults has begun only recently. It is a 20-week programme which includes vocational tasters and employment skills for a small group of trainees from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds. The foundation programme is delivered at three training centres. Additional support for trainees with learning difficulties is provided by RPS. Some trainees also attend the local college for language, numeracy and literacy support. Trainees follow the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) numberpower and wordpower programmes.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training is effectively planned
- ◆ training sessions are well delivered
- ◆ success rates are good
- ◆ good use is made of vocational tasters
- ◆ additional training is provided to support trainees seeking work placements
- ◆ good progression to mainstream education and training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ monitoring of employer visits is not formally recorded
- ◆ additional support for those with learning difficulties on the adult prevocational programme

26. Training sessions are effectively planned, and trainers encourage the trainees to share their experiences and to work with each other. Trainees are motivated to complete their tasks. Trainees carry out activities to develop additional skills, for example researching and gathering information. Training sessions on the foundation programme are well structured and particularly effective. The learning materials used are relevant to the programme. Staff are well qualified and many have counselling qualifications. The number of trainees on the foundation programme progressing to mainstream education and training is high at 85 per cent. Trainees undertake vocational tasters to identify and focus on possible employment pathways.

Effective tracking systems are in place to monitor progress. Trainees' portfolios are good and contain evidence compiled by the trainee to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

27. There is no formal recording of employer visits. This prevents effective monitoring and evaluation of work placements. Trainees attending the adult prevocational programme come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Some have difficulties understanding some aspects of the training sessions.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

28. RPS trains its staff in awareness of equal opportunities and changes in legislation which affect its work. Equal opportunities issues are included in staff training days and induction for new staff. RPS's policy is clear and comprehensive. It was reviewed in August 1997, and a complaint procedure was added. Much of the work in promoting equal opportunities is managed by a designated trainer. There is a fair representation of gender and ethnic origin among staff. The company hosts a programme to research career destinations of minority ethnic school leavers. The company did not identify any weaknesses in its self-assessment report and, consequently, inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ commitment demonstrated through staff development and training
- ◆ rigorous complaints procedure
- ◆ links with community groups promote company's policy
- ◆ all materials carefully checked for bias
- ◆ multilingual materials have been used for marketing

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ information not used effectively to monitor equal opportunities policy
- ◆ ethnic minority and gender representation issues among trainees not addressed
- ◆ limited access for disabled trainees to training centres
- ◆ trainees not provided with current equal opportunities policy

29. The company demonstrates a serious commitment to equal opportunities throughout its provision. Staff are knowledgeable about, and act on, potential areas of discrimination. Complaints by trainees are dealt with thoroughly by staff. Good records are kept of the details of complaints, and action is taken to remedy them.

Changes are made to written materials, such as the employer contract, to keep the language used free from bias. Subcontractors' knowledge of equal opportunities is not checked, nor are the materials used by them. Employers are provided with the equal opportunities policy as part of an information pack. There is no procedure to ensure that employers have received, or been made familiar with the contents of, the material. The company does not carry out systematic monitoring of its performance in line with its own policy. Procedures are not in place to capture data from sector teams for analysis. For example, selection of trainees for placements is not monitored.

30. RPS maintains two databases of information on trainees. Neither is used to analyse data on recruitment, achievement and destinations. Despite the under-representation of ethnic minority trainees, and the unfair balance of males and females, which can be detected in the data, there is no evidence of positive action to redress these. Although external funding has been used to write multilingual literature, its effect on recruitment has not been measured. In two of the training centres, there is limited access for trainees in wheelchairs. The catering centre does offer alternative facilities on the ground floor.

Trainee support

Grade 2

31. RPS is committed to providing effective guidance and support to all trainees. Trainees are given a standard assessment test, and the results are used to inform the individual training plan. The assessment test is used in conjunction with interviews to determine the initial entry level of provision and the level of support needed to achieve the intended outcome. Each trainee is allocated a training co-ordinator and an assessor. The team works together to help the trainees to develop their occupational and personal skills. For trainees with additional learning needs, support is provided on a weekly or two-weekly basis, depending on the needs of the trainee. In most cases, additional support is provided for trainees with specific learning difficulties. The local college is also used to provide additional language, numeracy and literacy support for adults on the prevocational training programme. The company did not identify any weaknesses in its self-assessment report, and, consequently, inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective initial assessment process using a standardised test
- ◆ comprehensive induction programme for all trainees
- ◆ good use of national records of achievement
- ◆ strong links with careers service and employers
- ◆ high levels of support for trainees in the workplace

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ results of the initial assessment are not always communicated to training staff
- ◆ trainees not issued with their national record of achievement action-plan

32. All trainees receive a standardised initial assessment on entry. The assessment is detailed, and the trainees are given immediate feedback on their strengths and weaknesses. All trainees attend a comprehensive induction programme, during which individual training plans with short-term goals and targets are negotiated. Trainees are encouraged to seek advice and guidance from the staff and are able to discuss progress and future career plans whenever they wish. The national record of achievement has been developed effectively and is used to record trainees' progress and personal development. Potential trainees referred from the careers service can access a duty supervisor to get help and advice immediately. Regular support for trainees is also provided in the workplace by staff and employers.

33. Training staff responsible for foundation trainees are not routinely provided with the results of the initial assessment. Trainees are not issued with copies of their national records of achievement and are unable to monitor their own action-plans effectively.

Management of training

Grade 2

34. RPS has undergone considerable change over the last two years. It is acknowledged that a change in leadership has been responsible for the development of the company's business plan and the setting of measurable targets. There has also been a dramatic improvement in the NVQ achievements over the last three years, from 36 NVQs per 100 leavers in 1995-96 to 55 per 100 leavers in 1996-97 and 68 per 100 leavers 1997-98. Clear objectives are set, and every member of staff knows the contribution which he/she makes to the achievement of the company's aims. There are clear staff structures in place. A comprehensive appraisal system is carefully linked to staff development. Self-assessment by RPS was largely accurate in this area and inspectors awarded the same grade as proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ continuous improvement in NVQ achievements over the last three years
- ◆ comprehensive staff appraisal system
- ◆ good staff development system which is linked to business objectives
- ◆ staff participate in decision-making processes
- ◆ business-planning and target-setting are clear and understood by staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistencies in communication result in lack of action
- ◆ training and assessment staff are not effectively deployed

35. RPS has a clear system of business planning which includes strategic and operational policies and target-setting. The business-planning system works well and is both supported and understood by staff. All staff have personal development plans which are carefully linked to the company's core business objectives. Staff are appraised annually and are reviewed every six months. At reviews, staff discuss their progress and re-assess their training and development needs. Management information systems are good and are used effectively to support business decisions. Staff are encouraged to contribute to and take responsibility for the direction of the company through regular staff meetings.

36. Communications are generally good, and staff are well informed, although there are some areas of the organisation in which the communication system is less effective. Team meetings are minuted and distributed, but there are no action points identified and no monitoring of action taken. This results in a lack of co-ordination among staff, with some teams interpreting and implementing procedures differently from others. The ratio of training staff to trainees is exceptionally high, and, on customer service qualifications, there is a doubling-up of assessment staff visiting trainees in the workplace.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

37. RPS meets a number of external quality standards, including Investors in People and the requirements of Hampshire TEC and the awarding bodies. The company does not have a formal quality assurance framework. There is a quality assurance policy statement and a quality procedure statement which are issued to all staff and regularly updated. They do not state how quality assurance systems are managed or how they are linked to the staff appraisal system or the review of training programmes. The company seeks feedback formally on the quality of its training through the use of questionnaires when trainees leave schemes. The self-assessment report did not accurately reflect the key strengths and weaknesses of the company. However, inspectors agreed with the overall grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive scheme for observing staff training
- ◆ quality assurance leads to steadily improving performance
- ◆ programme reviews have led to changes in training
- ◆ good internal verification processes across the company
- ◆ targets are set at a company and programme level for trainee achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ there is no formal quality assurance framework
- ◆ trainees' views are not formally used to inform the development of training

38. Employer questionnaires are used to seek feedback on work placements. Analysis of leaver and employer questionnaires takes place. Only limited use has been made of the conclusions drawn to improve training and trainee performance. Informal feedback from trainees is collected during off-the-job training and monitoring visits, but this information does not feed into programme reviews formally. Trainees attend a number of short courses on subjects such as health & safety and first aid, and these are formally evaluated by participants, using a questionnaire.

39. A comprehensive scheme to observe staff training is carried out by senior managers and is linked to the staff appraisal system. The system was put in place during the first half of 1998. Standard observation forms are completed by the observers which highlight the strengths and weaknesses of training. This is a real strength of the company in ensuring the quality of training delivery. Internal verification processes are thorough and completed regularly. They are particularly good in the foundation provision. Each programme area is profiled to achieve a set number of points, linked to TEC funding, annually in April. Programme leaders meet every two weeks and monitor performance against targets on a monthly basis. At the end of the year, performance is reviewed against the annual targets. Action has been taken to improve training as a result of programme review in sport & recreation and customer service. These improvements include the introduction of off-the-job training for employed trainees. Good practice in training, such as induction for trainees with learning difficulties, has been introduced in other areas.

40. The standard of tracking of trainees' progress on different courses is variable. Management information is available to managers in a user-friendly form, but such statistical data are not routinely used to inform debate among managers and trainers about areas for improvement. Poor practice in training, such as not giving trainees copies of agreed targets resulting from monitoring visits, have not been identified by the quality assurance procedures.