



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1998-OCTOBER 1999

# Sunley Management Centre

## SUMMARY

Sunley Management Centre provides unsatisfactory training in the occupational area of management and professional. The lectures do not stimulate trainees and are inappropriate in content and level. Trainees' individual needs are not assessed on entry and their prior achievements are not accredited. The marketing training session is well planned and effectively delivered but the training provided in accounts and business-planning is poor. It is insufficiently planned, and taught in an uninteresting, and sometimes confusing manner. Trainers give good business advice to those who continue on the programme, but there is little help for trainees who choose to look for a job. The main trainers are not trained in equal opportunities issues or practices. The programme is delivered in a well-equipped and professional environment. The trainers are accountable to the director of the centre. However, although the trainers are self-employed, there are no contracts or service-level agreements, and their individual performance is not monitored or reviewed. The centre has a system of quality assurance, but this new training programme has yet to be fully evaluated.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	4

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and -delivered marketing training session
- ◆ good business advice through one-to-one counselling
- ◆ good-quality training environment and resources
- ◆ some recent good achievement
- ◆ clear accountability of staff

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some lectures do not stimulate trainees
- ◆ inappropriate and poorly delivered accounting training sessions
- ◆ no initial assessment
- ◆ training sessions not tailored to meet individual needs
- ◆ staff not trained in equal opportunities
- ◆ no advice for trainees seeking jobs
- ◆ little evaluation of training programme to date
- ◆ ineffective communication between programme leaders and trainers

## INTRODUCTION

1. Sunley Management Centre is part of University College Northampton (formerly Nene College). It is a residential training and conference centre, which offers management training for corporate clients. Since 1982, it has also offered training for unemployed people aiming to return to employment or become self-employed. Most of these training programmes are funded through the European Social Fund; a small number are funded through Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). Sunley employs 22 staff, of whom eight are responsible for training and the administration of training. Sunley also employs a number of consultants as associate trainers.

2. The Enterprise Rehearsal programme is new to the centre, although Sunley has offered similar business enterprise programmes for over 12 years. The Enterprise Rehearsal programme's designer and trainer has worked for Sunley as an associate for 15 years and is also a business counsellor with Business Link, part of the CCTE. The Enterprise Rehearsal contract for 1998-99 is for 40 trainees, and to date two programmes have taken place and a third is due in February. The aim is to recruit unemployed people who wish to start up their own business.

3. The unemployment rate in Northamptonshire is low at 3.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent. The majority of employees in the area work in manufacturing, distribution, hotels and catering, public administration, education and health, banking, finance and insurance. Nearly half of the employment in the county is concentrated in Northampton, where the banking and financial sectors are particularly strong. Corby has a concentration of manufacturing employment, while Daventry and Wellingborough are strong in distribution. Registration levels of new companies suggest that the growth of new businesses is only moderate in Northamptonshire; the survival chances for new businesses are statistically close to national and regional averages. The level of self-employment is 11.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 12.9 per cent. The county as a whole has a minority ethnic group population of 3.5 per cent; for Northampton the figure is 5.9 per cent.

4. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grades C and above was 44.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Sunley's self-assessment report was produced in June 1998 by the administration manager. It was based on the analysis of previous enterprise programmes because the Enterprise Rehearsal programme had not yet started. The report identified many strengths related to the college generally and not specifically to the programme. Only one weakness was identified in the whole report, namely that associate trainers experience difficulties by not being based in the centre or not always present at programme meetings.

6. Three inspectors spent a total of six days at the centre during July, September, October and December 1998, and January 1999 in order to follow trainees from the start of the first programme through to its completion. Inspectors observed one day out of the four formal training sessions, and eight counselling sessions. Trainees from both the July programme and the September programme were also interviewed, some by telephone. Interviews were held with 15 trainees and eight staff. A further team of two inspectors spent a total of four days at the centre in October 1999. They observed two full-day training sessions and held formal discussions with five trainees. Informal discussions were held with all trainees. Inspectors reviewed documents relating to all trainees on the programme and those relating to the recruitment to, and management of, the programme.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### **Management & professional (business enterprise)**

**Grade 4**

7. The Enterprise Rehearsal programme consists of a three-hour introduction, four one-day training sessions on how to produce a business plan, and six weeks to prepare a plan. Counselling meetings and 13 weeks to operate the business, while receiving a training allowance in addition to unemployment benefit, complete the programme cycle. There are four off-the-job training days to provide technical input. The training delivery is subcontracted to two self-employed trainers, and one subcontracted business counsellor. The counselling meetings are held with both the principal trainer and the associate business counsellor, who assess the viability of the plan and advise on business issues such as marketing or accounting. Normally, responsibility for the trainees is divided equally between the principal trainer and this associate counsellor. During the 13 weeks, trainees have to produce monthly profit and loss accounts, and open an account with a bank. The trainer and counsellor are joint signatories for their respective trainees' bank accounts and no withdrawals may be made without their prior approval. The principal trainer is also the programme designer. He prepares the budget and is responsible for recruitment, training, counselling and monitoring. He is also the main business counsellor and an associate of the centre. One other associate trainer provides one day's training on

marketing. The centre's administration manager is responsible for maintaining records, reviewing quality, agreeing dates and booking the venue. Both the principal trainer and the administration manager report to the director of the centre, who negotiates the annual contract with the CCTE. Over the period of inspection, trainee numbers varied, from 21 to 23, out of 40 who applied. The self-assessment report identified few strengths and no weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that given by the centre.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-planned and -delivered marketing training sessions
- ◆ some recent good achievement
- ◆ accessible trainers
- ◆ good-quality training environment and off-the-job training facilities
- ◆ realistic advice on finance

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inappropriate language and input in some training sessions
- ◆ inadequate business resources
- ◆ no use of personal development plans
- ◆ inappropriate level of intensive training in accounting
- ◆ lack of practical activity in accounting lectures

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Trainees are provided with a pack which they work through and which forms the basis of their business plan. Trainees have six weeks to complete the plan. The pack is well laid out and easy to follow. It includes simple but effective ways of calculating business costs.*

8. Sunley Management Centre was purpose-built in 1981. It is well furnished with a large lecture room and separate small syndicate rooms available for training. The lecture room is well equipped with a wide range of training resources. The syndicate rooms are bright and all the rooms are air-conditioned. There are residential bedrooms and catering facilities. The centre has an atmosphere which is professional and businesslike. Previous enterprise programmes at the centre have a good record of trainees achieving new businesses: 51 per cent in 1997-98, 27 per cent in 1996-97 and 24 per cent in 1995-96.

9. Trainees on the Enterprise Rehearsal programme receive a detailed business plan pack which is both simple and informative. One of the primary objectives of the programme is to produce a viable business plan. They have to complete the plan to be eligible for the counselling support and the bank account facility. The trainers are particularly good at advising on the financial implications of setting up and running a business. They are available outside office hours, and trainees have their home telephone numbers; trainers stress their availability in counselling meetings. Counselling meetings focus on the profit and loss accounts, and trainers are cautious about withdrawing funds from the newly established bank account.

10. The programme aims to make trainees self-employed, although some trainees achieve jobs. The centre is not contracted to offer any national vocational

qualifications (NVQs) as part of the training, and misses an opportunity to reference the national standards on which management NVQs are based, to develop trainees as managers of a business. Trainees complete an application form and attend an introduction and four days of training. After a six-week period spent producing their business plan, they meet with a trainer and the plan is assessed for its viability. The plan must be viable in order for trainees to continue with the programme.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*The formal training days are long, intensive and cover a lot of detail. Inspectors observed one session on taxation and accounting which went into great depth. Most of the trainees were a long way from starting their own business and found the session irrelevant and hard to absorb. Several trainees showed signs of losing their concentration.*

11. The trainer responsible for the accounting and business-planning training does not hold any training qualifications. Those sessions are poor. The training plan is no more than a list of topics and a timetable. This information is not passed to trainees and the objectives of the day are unclear. The timetable is not adhered to and many of the topics identified on the plan are not covered. The trainer does not treat the trainees with respect. The trainer uses a poor choice of words when describing people and situations which have the clear potential to offend female trainees. There are insufficient handouts for the number of trainees present. Those that are available are confusing, as they include different terminology than that used in discussion by the trainer. The training in the workshops is delivered at too fast a pace, too high a level and lacks interaction. Both the principal trainer and associate counsellor are vocal in their criticism of the length of the programme and the amount of business advice covered in such a short space of time. Trainees are demotivated. They are unable to use computing, fax or telephone equipment in the centre, nor do they have access to business directories and current trade literature. University College Northampton's facilities are mentioned at the induction, including the library and computing centre, and trainees on the September programme were given a copy of the college handbook. Only one trainee has used the facilities and most trainees are unaware that they can use the college's facilities, as availability is not reinforced throughout the training. Of the 11 trainees at the July introduction, 10 started on the programme; four are now self-employed, four achieved jobs with employers and two withdrew. The September programme recruited 12 trainees; one returned to the unemployment register, four trainees withdrew and seven are still in training.

12. Trainees receive letters of acknowledgement from the course trainer after the introduction. Letters confirming the next stages of the programme are sent after the four days' training and at the end of the programme. Trainees sign an individual development plan at the beginning of the formal training, but do not refer to it again. The plan is not used by the trainer to monitor the trainees' progress. The formal training sessions comprise lectures led by the course trainer. Lectures cover taxation, insurance, accounting, cash flow, pricing and profitability. The content of these sessions is too detailed for some trainees. Another trainer runs the training day on marketing, which has a number of successful practical exercises. The sessions are delivered in an interesting, motivating and informative way. Trainees are encouraged to contribute to, and participate in, all aspects of the session. Objectives for the day are discussed at the start of the session and reviewed at the end. Trainees' understanding of individual topics is checked at regular, appropriate intervals. At the end of the session, trainees are asked to complete a feedback

sheet inviting them to grade several aspects of the day. The sheets are collected by the trainer, and a copy of each sheet is presented to the centre's manager.

13. The bank account requirement for a counter-signature from the trainer is a barrier to trainees running their business. The requirement is part of the programme's design and trainees continuing with the programme agree to meet this requirement. Deposits can be made without counter-signature, but withdrawals have to be approved by the trainer or business counsellor. This has caused difficulties for trainees in meeting day-to-day expenditure, as they have to contact the trainer and arrange a visit to sign the chequebook before being authorised to withdraw money.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 3**

14. Sunley has an equal opportunities policy which applies to the whole college. The college has an equal opportunities working group and an equal opportunities officer. It maintains monitoring information on its students. The self-assessment report identified strengths which related to the college and were in fact standard practice. No weaknesses were identified in the report. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the centre.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ trainee recruitment monitored
- ◆ accessible premises for trainees with mobility difficulties

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ achievement and destination records not monitored for equality of opportunity
- ◆ little staff training in equal opportunities

15. Trainees are told about the centre's equal opportunities policy at the introduction and receive a copy of the policy. The college is currently revising the equal opportunities policy. The centre's administrative staff maintain attendance records of trainees by ethnicity and disability. In 1997-98, of the 38 trainees recruited on to the programme, five were from a minority ethnic group and nine had disabilities. Equal opportunities figures are regularly reviewed by the college working group and the results used to inform college policy. The centre is not set equal opportunities targets for recruitment, but incentive payments are made for recruitment of trainees with disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups. The centre is accessible for people with mobility difficulties.

16. The programme is promoted to job centres and a letter advertising the programme is mailed to a wide variety of agencies. The programme is also

advertised in the local evening paper. This promotion has had little effect on widening the recruitment of trainees, who are predominantly white men. There were no women on the July programme. There are two women and two trainees (one a woman) from minority ethnic groups on the September programme. The analysis of attendance monitoring on previous business programmes has not been used to target trainees for the current programmes. Records of achievement and destination are not monitored for equal opportunities. The trainers have not received any specific training in equal opportunities and do not hold any training qualifications. The trainer who delivers the marketing day has had some equal opportunities training. The centre has a complaints file; there are no recorded complaints about the enterprise programme. Trainees are unaware of the complaints procedure. Equal opportunities are not promoted on the programme literature.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

17. Trainees are recruited from the job centre or through local newspaper advertising. The introduction to the programme is carried out in groups. Trainees are enrolled on the programme if they meet the eligibility criteria. Trainees are seen on a one-to-one basis by the principal trainer or associate business counsellor. Trainees receive written advice and guidance on their business plan during the programme, but no other support is offered. The self-assessment report identified three strengths, one of which inspectors did not agree with. The report identified no weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ experienced self-employed trainers
- ◆ good business advice
- ◆ well-maintained records

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of careers advice and guidance on exit
- ◆ no initial assessment of trainees' basic skills
- ◆ no accreditation of trainees' prior learning or achievements
- ◆ trainees' successes not celebrated

18. The principal trainer and associate business counsellor have been designing and delivering enterprise courses for 15 years. Both are well experienced for the role. Trainees can also request additional business counselling from the CCTE's Business Link.



19. Trainees do not receive careers advice or help with finding jobs. There are no interviews with trainees when they withdraw or complete the programme to review the training or their progress. Trainees do not have an initial assessment of their basic skills, and they do not have an individual training plan. There are no systematic arrangements to record trainees' prior learning or achievements. Each trainee follows the same programme of training, irrespective of ability, prior achievement or business aspirations. Trainees' assessment is based on the quality of their business plan after the formal training has taken place. No formal additional support is offered for trainees on welfare or benefit issues, or up-to-date job opportunities. Reports are written on the counselling meetings, but are kept in confidential files at Business Link and are not part of the trainees' records, nor are they shown to the administration manager. The principal trainer designs, recruits, delivers and assesses the trainees' business plan, books the venue, maintains attendance records and reports results to the director of the centre. The success of trainees who achieve self-employment at the end of the programme is not celebrated. Their achievement is not acknowledged, and nor is their success used to influence the recruitment of potential trainees.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*In one observed counselling session, a trainee was depressed about his personal situation and felt a failure. The counsellor listened and responded sensitively and helped to re-motivate the trainee.*

**Management of training****Grade 3**

20. The principal trainer liaises with the administration manager and reports to the director of the centre. Centre staff are clearly focused on meeting the needs of business and provide a range of seminars, guest speakers and access to professional qualifications. The Enterprise Rehearsal programme is aimed at establishing new businesses. It was developed in response to the CCTE's annual request for a training proposal. The programme will change each year as a consequence of the annual request. Costs and volume are negotiated between the course trainer, the director and the CCTE. Once the programme is agreed, the schedule is finalised with the centre's administrators. The director, in consultation with the principal trainer, reviews the programme's achievements and monitors costs. The self-assessment report identified strengths specific to the management of the centre and not the programme. No weaknesses were identified in the report. Inspectors identified both strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ professional response to trainees
- ◆ clear accountability of staff

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ poor management of subcontracted training staff
- ◆ weak communication between programme leaders and trainers

21. The centre has held a contract for government-funded training in enterprise programmes since 1981 and with Northamptonshire CCTE since 1995. Trainees are normally treated as customers in the centre. Enquiries to the programme are responded to swiftly and efficiently. There is a clear reporting mechanism which consists of the principal trainer meeting the director regularly to discuss the programme's progress. The director subsequently meets with CCTE's staff part way through the contract to review it. Files and information on trainees are updated and maintained in the centre's administration department. The principal trainer has several operational files outlining the formal training days, contractual information and the aims of the course. The principal trainer is responsible for arranging and agreeing any additional trainers, with the director's approval.

22. The principal trainer has a standing invitation to management team meetings, but does not attend. The meetings include discussion of the programme. Centre staff maintain limited management information about the programme. This information consists of financial claims made to the CCTE and the total scores from the trainees' feedback forms from the four training days. The final figures for numbers of trainees on the programme are not easily identifiable. The trainer reports to the director of the centre during the programme. There are no subcontract arrangements or service-level agreements. The subcontracted trainers are not subject to a formal review or appraisal of their performance.

### Quality assurance

**Grade 3**

23. Sunley has a quality assurance system based on the ISO 9001 quality standard. There is a specific procedure for adult training and it is subject to the same monitoring and review as other procedures. The administration manager is responsible for the internal quality audits on the Enterprise Rehearsal programme. The self-assessment report identified three strengths and one weakness. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance procedures
- ◆ trainees' views sought using questionnaires

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ counselling quality not evaluated
- ◆ no systematic review of the programme

24. There is a schedule of regular internal audits. The Enterprise Rehearsal programme is new and is being treated as a pilot for other enterprise programmes. It has not yet been internally audited. In previous enterprise programmes, the centre

offered formal training for six days; this has been reduced to four days for the current programme. The impact of this change has yet to be evaluated.

25. Trainees complete a feedback form at the end of each day of formal training. The questions on the form relate to the environment, use of time, pace of programme, content, trainer's style, methods used and handouts. Each question has a scale of one to six with six being the highest. The results from the first programme scored between 4.9 and 5.4. The director reviews low scores with the principal trainer. The marketing session, which has remained largely unchanged in the last three years has never been observed by managers, and the trainer is not involved in discussions about the future development of the programme.

26. The training days are the only part of the programme formally reviewed by questionnaire. One-to-one counselling sessions are a significant part of the programme, but are not evaluated. Trainees receive a questionnaire from the CCTE on completion of the programme, to identify whether they are self-employed or should continue to receive unemployment benefit. Systematic monitoring of the full impact of the programme from the point of view of the trainees, trainers and the centre has not yet occurred. The reasons for trainees leaving the programme are not identified. The use of the bank account co-signatory process has not been evaluated. Trainees' destinations are not reviewed beyond the end of the programme, and no long-term data have been produced on the success of trainees in remaining self-employed for months or years.

27. The principal trainer was included in the self-assessment process and was given the opportunity to make amendments to the report. The report referred to previous enterprise programmes because the current course had not yet started. Most of the strengths related to the centre's general training programmes and procedures and not specifically to the enterprise programme. The report identified only one weakness and did not reflect the inspectors' judgements. The report was generally unself-critical with most aspects over-graded.