



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1998

# Sheffield Trainers Limited

## SUMMARY

Sheffield Trainers Limited (STL) offers training in four occupational areas. Catering is relatively new to the company and is satisfactory. All the other training areas are good, with efficient management systems. STL is careful to ensure equality of opportunity for all its trainees. STL's staff maintain regular contact with trainees; there is excellent trainee support. Quality assurance procedures are effective in securing consistency and steadily rising standards.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	2
Hospitality	3
Health, care & public services	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	1
Management of training	1
Quality assurance	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ a high level of trainee support
- ◆ a high degree of trainee and employer satisfaction
- ◆ good relationships among staff, trainees and employers
- ◆ effective individual training and assessment
- ◆ good control of subcontractors
- ◆ a high proportion of those who complete the training programme achieves employment

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not integrated with vocational training
- ◆ some employers uninvolved in training and assessment
- ◆ some trainees unaware of their progress and target date for completion

## INTRODUCTION

1. STL is a privately owned training provider. It was formed in 1984 in Sheffield, and it now offers training and assessment in other parts of the country through subcontractors. STL concentrated initially on training for retailers. The company now contracts with Sheffield Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for training in retailing, warehousing & distribution, business administration, care, catering & hospitality, customer service and programmes for people with learning difficulties. Most trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3 on youth training, modern apprenticeship and adult programmes. There were 425 people in training at the time of inspection.

2. Unemployment in Sheffield is high, at 7.9 per cent, compared with the average for the Yorkshire and Humberside region of 6.4 per cent. People aged between 25 and 44 account for a significant proportion of those who are unemployed. At the last census in 1991, minority ethnic groups made up 5 per cent of Sheffield's population. People from minority ethnic groups are twice as likely to be unemployed as those in the population as a whole.

3. The educational qualifications of local school leavers are below the national average. The proportion of 16-year-old school leavers achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades A\* to C is only 37.2 per cent compared with the national average of 53 per cent. STL competes, for trainees, with a large local further education college, sixth form colleges and other training providers in Sheffield.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. STL produced its first self-assessment report three months before inspection. The self-assessment report provided detailed information about the training provision at STL. Strengths and weaknesses had not been highlighted separately, and STL had identified areas for improvement and taken action to address them.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at STL during May 1998. All of the occupational areas offered by the company were inspected. Inspectors examined company and awarding body documents. They interviewed staff from the company, employers and trainees. Inspectors visited 31 workplaces and interviewed 75 trainees about their training. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### **Business administration**

**Grade 2**

6. STL has programmes for youth training and modern apprenticeships in business administration. At the time of inspection, there were 40 youth trainees, 50 modern apprentices and one trainee in adult training. The range of workplaces used for training is very wide, from offices of professional firms to manufacturing companies. Trainees are also able to change their workplaces to extend training opportunities. Those who wish to follow careers in administration find employment either during or at the end of their programmes, as well as achieving NVQs. Some trainees are already in full-time jobs when they join the programme. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ assessors visit trainees frequently
- ◆ most training and assessment is conducted in the workplace
- ◆ additional training is available for trainees who need extra help
- ◆ trainees' programmes meet their personal development needs
- ◆ training is monitored and evaluated
- ◆ computer software is relevant to employment

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some employers are not fully aware about NVQ programmes
- ◆ half of the staff are unqualified as trainers

7. STL staff make many visits to trainees in their workplaces. There are excellent working relationships between staff and trainees. Nominated staff monitor each trainee's progress thoroughly. Trainees have individual training plans. Action-plans are revised and checked regularly through discussion between trainees and their assessors. These review sessions help trainees to maintain steady progress through the programme. Trainees use their review records to organise evidence for their NVQs.

8. Flexible training arrangements help trainees either to attend STL's training centre, at intervals, or to undertake all their training at work. The STL training centre has facilities for trainees to work on their own or in groups. Training sessions are friendly and informal. Trainees work from their own action-plans and are well prepared for training sessions. The training room is well equipped. When a full group of trainees is working on the computers, the poor ventilation makes the room hot and uncomfortable.

9. Staff at STL are reluctant to make heavy demands on the time of workplace supervisors because they fear that this may compromise trainees' employment prospects. Workplace supervisors are not thoroughly briefed about NVQ or trainees' programmes. This can result in workplace evidence collection opportunities being missed. Assessment arrangements for NVQs are thorough. Instruction in key skills is underdeveloped. The integration of key skills with the NVQ programme requires further development. Key skills assessments have been kept separate. However, they are now slowly being integrated. There is a resistance among trainees in working for a key skills certificate, the relevance of which they find difficult to see.

10. Trainees work on a range of programs in STL's computer training room. This software was bought to match that used by trainees' employers. Training is relevant to both employers and trainees' needs.

### **Retailing & customer service (warehousing & distribution)**

### **Grade 2**

11. STL had 196 trainees at the time of inspection. They were working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3, in retailing, warehousing & distribution and customer service. Eighty-two per cent of trainees were participating on youth training programmes, 17 per cent were modern apprentices and one was on an adult programme. The majority of learning is carried out in the workplace, but some off-the-job training takes place at STL's premises. Employer placements include those with large national retailers, smaller independent companies and charity shops. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded by the company in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ assessors visit trainees frequently
- ◆ excellent working relationships between assessors and trainees
- ◆ rigorous internal verification processes
- ◆ the variety of good training and assessment materials
- ◆ employers and trainees have recommended STL to others

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some trainees are unaware of their own progress
- ◆ key skills are not integrated in modern apprenticeship programmes
- ◆ neither training nor assessment takes full advantage of opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ some employers are insufficiently involved in trainees' reviews

12. Staff care deeply for trainees' progress and welfare. They visit their trainees every two weeks. Both trainees and employers are very satisfied with the professional service which they receive. Staff are well qualified and experienced. The assessment process is monitored thoroughly by the internal verifier. Staff produce their own training and assessment materials and have produced a broad range. These are used flexibly to help both learning and revision. The use of open-learning materials in the workplace enables trainees to work through a variety of self-study packages, either in their own time or in the workplace at less busy times. These materials include videos, assignments and text packages. Trainees and employers liked this method, as they felt that it does not require trainees to attend regular off-the-job training. Trainees can work at their own pace, the time for study being decided by the trainee and employer. The regular visits by STL staff ensure that there is support for the trainee; also, targets are set and monitored to provide additional motivation. All trainees have a telephone number for their STL adviser, should they require assistance between one planned visit and the next. Trainees stated that they enjoyed using the learning materials.

13. STL has retail training subcontracts in other parts of the country which have resulted from recommendations by existing customers. Employers and trainees value the supportive and professional work done by STL.

14. Nearly half of the trainees who were interviewed were unable to say what units they had achieved on their programmes or what the expected date for completion of their qualifications was. Where modern apprentices have completed their programmes, key skills were added in isolation after achievement of every other facet of the NVQ level 3. With current modern apprentices, key skills are gradually being introduced earlier in the programme. Most modern apprentices are reluctant to undertake the key skills components of the programme because they have to go back through their earlier work, trying to identify suitable evidence. There is a lack of co-ordination between training and assessment. Naturally occurring opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace are sometimes missed through poor

planning. A third of the employers visited by inspectors was involved in reviewing trainees' progress, but, to date, not in planning future NVQ assessment opportunities.

### **Hospitality (catering)**

**Grade 3**

15. STL contracts with a large catering company to provide registration of trainees, training, assessment and internal verification. This company employs all of STL's hospitality and catering trainees. There are 30 modern apprentices taking food service. All of them were registered in the three months before inspection. Because the programme is in its infancy, it was not included in the company's self-assessment, however, inspectors judged the provision to be satisfactory.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough induction programme
- ◆ well-planned off-the-job training
- ◆ comprehensive staff development, in line with business plan training needs

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient assessment delaying trainees' progress
- ◆ workplace trainers and assessors are unfamiliar with STL's procedures
- ◆ narrow choice of options for trainees in differing types of catering
- ◆ workplace staff are unfamiliar with modern apprenticeship requirements

16. The company responsible for the training has achieved the Investors in People award and developed comprehensive training development plans which are operating well. The enthusiasm for training within the company was apparent from the management and staff. New good-quality training materials and documentation are being developed and were being effectively introduced during the inspection period. The off-the-job training sessions were found to be well designed and popular with the trainees. The training leader of the catering company was unavailable for some weeks after the start of the programme. This person is the only qualified assessor in the company. Nineteen of the trainees have been unable to start collecting assessment evidence, some three months after they enrolled.

## Health, care & public services (care)

## Grade 2

17. STL subcontracted all of its care training in April this year. Care provision has been available for two years and has been growing steadily. NVQs at levels 2 and 3 have been offered. A foundation level care award provides a useful entry point for those trainees with learning difficulties. Former trainees have progressed from foundation to NVQ level 2. The training and assessment staff have good professional qualifications, together with NVQ training and assessment qualifications. There were 73 trainees at the time of inspection, 41 of whom were modern apprentices, 26 youth trainees and six on national traineeships. All of these trainees are based in one of 28 registered residential care or nursing homes which provide either placement or employment. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed by the company.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ identification of prior learning
- ◆ flexible learning packages meet trainees' individual requirements
- ◆ good relationships between staff and trainees
- ◆ regular support from STL staff
- ◆ trainee progression and achievement are tracked and analysed
- ◆ regular off-the-job training for youth trainees

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistency in assessment
- ◆ erratic patterns of progression and achievement among some trainees
- ◆ key skills not integrated with the rest of the programme
- ◆ irregular off-the-job training for modern apprentices

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Before starting each unit, trainees complete a form to identify their current skills and knowledge compared with that required. This helps them to prepare a personal action-plan which staff match with individual learning packages. The issue of learning materials is recorded on a progression tracking system which prompts an assessment visit three weeks later. Trainees appreciate the structure and discipline which this approach brings to their work.*

18. The current arrangements for care training are new. There are open-learning packages available to all trainees to help them to meet their individual needs for new skills and knowledge. These packages are in addition to fortnightly off-the-job training sessions, run according to a programme which relates to specific NVQ units. While youth trainees attend these off-the-job sessions regularly, not all modern apprentices are able to do so because of the pressures of their jobs. Open learning packages go only some of the way towards compensating for training sessions. Training evaluation feedback forms show that trainees and employers feel that the care training being provided is high, and there are good relationships among trainees, trainers and employers. Recently introduced tracking systems are resulting in increased motivation, and better progress for trainees being assessed for the NVQ. Staff have been slow to incorporate key skills in the vocational programme. Trainees in care have only recently been provided with key skills learning materials. Staff



have started to map key skills against the vocational standards to find common assessment opportunities.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

19. STL meets the needs of trainees with special assessment or training requirements. Staff with the appropriate skills provide additional support with literacy and numeracy. Off-the-job training is conducted weekly, and drop-in support is available. STL has taken active steps to encourage young people from ethnic minority groups to train, and nearly 9 per cent of trainees in the company are from this background compared with their representation in the local community of 5 per cent. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ equal opportunities policy regularly reviewed and updated
- ◆ good recruitment from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ staff protected from harassment
- ◆ rights of candidates with learning difficulties are safeguarded

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ facilities for wheelchair users are inadequate
- ◆ no successful action to remedy traditional gender imbalances

20. Equal opportunity policies are explained fully during trainees' induction. They are regularly reviewed in staff meetings. A commitment to protect staff from discrimination and harassment has been translated into practice. The company responds quickly and appropriately to any incidents. The training accommodation at STL is not adapted for wheelchair users who have restricted access to it.

### Trainee support

### Grade 1

21. There is a strong ethos of support to trainees in STL. This culture is evident in the good initial assessment of potential trainees and the advice given, in the comprehensive induction, drawing up of training plans and discussion of how individual needs will be met on the programme. There are regular, effective progress reviews with counselling and further advice available, if required. Workplace visits and training are available for trainees with learning difficulties or disabilities. There is good pastoral support for trainees, both during and out of work hours. Inspectors

observed a session for school pupils who were considering care as a possible career. The tutor was careful to cover not only the positive aspects of the work, but also the less pleasant aspects, so that potential trainees had a balanced picture.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ tightly monitored recruitment
- ◆ comprehensive induction of trainees
- ◆ appropriate individual support for trainees during programmes
- ◆ outside agencies used where needed to provide specialist support
- ◆ regular progress reviews and monitoring

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ none was identified

22. Where trainees' problems are beyond the capacity of staff help, they are referred to specialist agencies for counselling and other care.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 1**

23. STL is a privately owned business, with a board of three directors responsible for the strategic planning and future development of the company. STL currently has 16 full-time and three part-time staff. The company is made up of three directors, three managers, nine tutors and four administrative staff. Two of the occupational training areas are subcontracted. The management of STL is clearly structured, with obvious lines for reporting. All staff have clear job descriptions. They understand their roles and responsibilities. The company has comprehensive procedures for staff recruitment, training and development which are in line with the business objectives. Subcontractors have clear contracts which prescribe the service levels required and lay down criteria and timescales for monitoring the achievement of the service agreements. There is an added incentive for subcontractors to achieve the agreed service levels through a payment penalty system, if the criterion is not achieved.

24. The company has an open style of management, in which staff are free to discuss issues with any member of the management team. There are effective management and evaluation systems to ensure that the company provides good training. STL uses a comprehensive management information system for tracking training. This system is specifically designed to provide statistical information about trainees, employers and the training programmes. The system is in the form of a database which is updated on a daily basis, enabling the company to provide management information for enquiries, statistical data and analysis. The system is

well utilised, providing management with information which is used to improve the quality of training. The company's self-assessment report did not identify all of the strengths in this respect, and inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ open management
- ◆ good relationships between staff and managers
- ◆ clear and measurable targets for operation
- ◆ STL premises are appropriate and well resourced
- ◆ subcontract arrangements are well documented and carefully controlled
- ◆ good staff development and incentive scheme
- ◆ management information consistently used to inform and improve training

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of formal documentation

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Queries or information received each day about trainees or employers is noted and filed. Reception staff pass it to tutors by placing it on their personal 'message pegs'. If it is uncollected by the end of the day, reception staff contact assessors on their mobile telephones, so that trainees' interests are*

25. Staff appraisals take place twice a year, at which performance is discussed and targets and plans for development are set. Staff view this process as an opportunity to share information and consider their progress with their managers. A bonus system operates for STL's staff and trainees, based on individual achievement. Staff helped to design the system. Trainees believe that a cash bonus when they achieve an NVQ helps to motivate them. Managers provide staff with the resources which they need to carry out their work effectively.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 2

26. STL meets the standards for Investors in People, the Basic Skills Agency kitemark and Sheffield TEC. The company has written working procedures for staff to follow, and inspectors observed these being correctly operated. Operational changes are made known to the quality manager by staff, in order that any required changes to the written procedure can be made. Systems are audited on a continuous basis, and any changes notified to relevant staff who sign to acknowledge the changes.

27. There is a comprehensive management information system (MIS) which is updated and operated by a dedicated team on a daily basis. The information stored on this system provides staff and managers with trainee and employer information and helps them to ensure that appointments, targets and planned progress are achieved. Information on the MIS was found to be accurate and kept up to date. Specific information requested by inspectors was quickly and efficiently provided via the MIS. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed by the

company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective quality assurance arrangements produce improvements
- ◆ questionnaires are analysed and used to improve programmes
- ◆ regular observation of trainee interviews to improve interviewing performance
- ◆ detailed quality assurance manual

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient feedback from trainees who have left their programme
- ◆ lack of statistical data on the effectiveness of training satisfaction

28. STL's quality assurance procedures are well documented and are comprehensive. Trainees are required to complete a questionnaire at the end of their induction, at the end of every training session held at STL and during the training programme. Opinion is also sought during interviews between trainees and staff. Adjustments are made to trainees' programmes as a result. Relevant parts of quality manuals are copied to staff, who sign the appropriate sections when they have read them. New staff receive an induction pack which includes quality procedures. Subcontractors are regularly monitored at agreed periods, which are written into their contracts, for the quality of their work. One of the areas monitored is the quality and effectiveness of training. Trainees' views are also sought, with feedback data regularly collated by the training manager who, at management meetings, provides reports and suggests action to be taken. Trainees' views on the quality of training are sought by STL, and trainees are confident that improvement action will be taken. There is no information available on the number of questionnaires which is sent out. Few trainees who have left STL before finishing their training complete questionnaires.