



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JULY 1998

# Apprenticeship Training Limited

## SUMMARY

Apprenticeship Training Limited offers training in electrical installation and plumbing. The training in electrical installation is good, with trainees working to a high standard to achieve a range of nationally recognised qualifications. In plumbing, the training is satisfactory, but resources are not in place to provide the full range of skills required for trainees to achieve national vocational qualifications (NVQs). On- and off-the-job training are less effectively co-ordinated for trainees attending some further education colleges than for those based at the provider's training centre. The company has not developed a systematic approach to quality assurance and equal opportunities monitoring. Apprenticeship Training Limited works co-operatively with a wide range of employers to provide good training in the workplace.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction (electrical installation)	2
Construction (plumbing)	3

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' work is of a high standard
- ◆ achievement rates are high for trainees who complete training
- ◆ thorough reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ training is innovatively adapted for trainees with special learning needs
- ◆ good working relationship between provider and employers
- ◆ good practice is shared between occupational areas

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ resources are not adequate to meet the full range of NVQ units in plumbing
- ◆ communications with some subcontracting colleges are poor
- ◆ quality assurance is not systematic
- ◆ data on trainees' performance are not analysed
- ◆ no recruitment monitoring for equal opportunities

## INTRODUCTION

1. Apprenticeship Training Limited is a privately owned training company based in Eastleigh, Hampshire. It was formed in 1992 to provide training for young people employed in the construction industry as apprentice electricians. In response to demand from employers, the company has grown rapidly and has diversified its training provision to include plumbing. At the time of inspection, there were nearly 200 trainees undertaking training funded through Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), Hampshire TEC and AZTEC.

2. Most of the trainees are apprentice electricians working towards achievement of NVQs at levels 2 and 3, the City & Guilds electrical installation course 236 parts 1 and 2 and the trade's achievement measurement (AM) tests AM1 and AM2. All the plumbing trainees are on a modern apprenticeship programme working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. All of the trainees are employed and undertake off-the-job training on a day-release basis. About 40 per cent of the trainees do their off-the-job training in the provider's workshop and training centre based on three sites in Eastleigh. The remaining 60 per cent attend further education colleges, located in Surrey, Hampshire and southwest London, which operate as subcontractors to provide off-the-job training.

3. Across the predominantly green-belt and rural area from which the company recruits trainees, employment in the construction industry has shown a slight increase in the last year, and TEC projections show that this trend is set to continue for the next three years. In the Surrey TEC area, employment in this occupational sector accounts for about 4 per cent of the employed population. Apprenticeship Training Limited has recognised the growth in demand and has increased its provision to meet it year on year. Unemployment across the region has fallen from nearly 7 per cent in 1993 to around 3 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent in November 1997. The proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) passes at grade A\* to C in Surrey and Hampshire is 51 per cent and 49.4 per cent respectively.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Apprenticeship Training Limited produced its first self-assessment report a few weeks before inspection. The report was compiled primarily by the training director and the company's TEC contracts administrator. All training and support staff were involved in providing information for the report and had ownership of the findings which it contained. The report is an open and honest review of the company's provision under the headings of the Council's framework for inspection. Most of the judgements made by the company are sound; the grades proposed are in accord with those given by inspectors, with the exception of equal opportunities, where some norms have been assessed as strengths.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 18 days at Apprenticeship Training Limited in July 1998. Inspectors accompanied training managers on visits to 34 employers' premises and work sites, observing reviews of trainees' progress and trainees working with and without supervision. They held discussions with employers, workplace supervisors and mentors and with trainees in the workplace. Inspectors observed training in the provider's training centre and in the further education college with which the provider subcontracts for the largest single group of its trainees. They also met college staff and the provider's training and administrative staff. Company documents, external verifiers' reports and trainees' work and assignments were included in the documents examined.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction (electrical installation)		6	3			9
Construction (plumbing)		1	1			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction (electrical installation)

### Grade 2

6. At the time of inspection, there were 137 electrical installation trainees, all employed in the construction industry, 110 being modern apprentices working towards NVQs in electrical installation at levels 2 and 3. The remainder is on a programme of work-based training leading to the award of an NVQ level 2 in electrical installation. Many of these trainees will continue their training in order to achieve the NVQ at level 3. In addition to the NVQ, all trainees work towards achievement of the City & Guilds 236 electrical installation course at levels 2 and 3.

This qualification meets the requirements of the underpinning knowledge for the NVQs. Trainees are also able to demonstrate their practical competence by passing the achievement measurement tests set by the industry. These additional qualifications are highly regarded by employers. The training would normally take four years, but some trainees remain in training for a longer period to achieve all aspects of the qualifications.

7. Throughout their training, trainees record evidence of their competence in the workplace and undertake off-the-job training on a day-release basis either at the provider's training centre or in one of the 12 further education colleges to which the provider subcontracts training and assessment. At the time of inspection, the provider was awaiting the outcome of applications to the awarding body for approval to award the NVQ level 3 and operate as a registered centre for the City & Guilds part 2. Apprenticeship Training Limited works with over 90 employers to provide on-the-job training. The company's trainers are well qualified and experienced in training and assessment. The provider's staff and college staff assess off-the-job training in the training centre and colleges respectively. Work-based training is accredited through assessment of the trainees' portfolios of evidence. In its self-assessment, the company recognised many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors and included an action-plan designed to address the weaknesses. Inspectors endorsed the grade proposed in the self-assessment report for this aspect of provision.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ flexible training delivery in the provider's workshop
- ◆ trainees' reviews establish precise short-term goals
- ◆ high standard of trainees' work on and off the job
- ◆ wide range of well-documented portfolio evidence
- ◆ high success rates for trainees completing training
- ◆ high profile of health and safety in training
- ◆ good workplace training for most trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ provider does not yet have approval to award NVQ level 3
- ◆ standard of off-the-job training is not equally good for all trainees
- ◆ cramped, noisy classroom above the provider's workshop

8. The trainees, their employers and the provider agree on the most suitable location for the off-the-job component of training, based mainly on where the trainee lives and works. Some trainees are dissatisfied with the training received at college. Some off-the-job training delivered in colleges, where trainees represent a small percentage of the class, is addressed to the class as a whole and does not enable trainees to progress at their own pace. In colleges, where the group consists entirely of trainees

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*At each workplace review of trainees' progress, the trainee is required to fill in a self-assessment sheet which addresses issues including attendance, punctuality, general attitude to work, approach to colleagues, quality and speed of work and progress with training. The employer or workplace supervisor then completes his/her assessment of the same aspects of the trainee's performance. Together with the training manager, they discuss any disparity and agree on a course of action to improve the relevant areas before the next review.*

from Apprenticeship Training Limited, training is well delivered.

9. Trainers use a variety of approaches to maintain trainees' interest. Trainees work independently, all on different tasks, and trainers are quick to provide guidance and assistance when necessary. The work is carried out to a high standard and, when mistakes are made, trainers explain the problem and trainees are given fresh materials and encouraged to try again. Trainers use their experience of the industry to good effect in relating the work to the on-the-job experiences of the trainees. Every opportunity is taken to draw trainees' attention to relevant aspects of health and safety. The provider's workshop is small, but adequately equipped. Theory sessions are normally delivered in a suitable classroom at a second site a few hundred yards from the workshop. Conditions in other workshops are less satisfactory.

10. In the workplace, trainees work independently to a high standard and often, for third-year apprentices, at the pace expected of a qualified electrician. In many placements, a qualified electrician working alongside them is able to observe and guide trainees. Working on site does not generally afford this opportunity, but the work done by the trainees is checked, with any errors pointed out for trainees to correct. The wide range of opportunities available to trainees in most placements enables them to establish a broad base of portfolio evidence against which to claim competence towards the NVQ. Most of this evidence is well presented and supported by photographic evidence, witness testimony and the employers' documents which verify the jobs done and the competence demonstrated.

11. Training managers from the provider visit all the trainees to review their progress on and off the job. In order to maximise the appropriateness of trainees' progress reviews during the programme, reviews are carried out in the provider's training centre, colleges, employers' premises and on site. The reviews are thorough, and trainees are set achievable short-term goals, which are assessed at subsequent reviews. Employers and trainees are involved in agreeing on the progression targets set at these reviews. Success rates for trainees who complete their training are high. In 1997-98, 49 trainees achieved NVQs at level 2, which was the target agreed on with the TECs. At NVQ level 3, 60 per cent of the target was achieved. In the same year, 96 per cent and 100 per cent of those trainees who sat the AM1 and AM2 respectively were successful. Of the trainees who left before completing their training, almost all achieved success in at least one qualification.

**Construction  
(plumbing)****Grade 3**

12. Apprenticeship Training Limited had 36 modern apprentices working towards NVQ level 3 in plumbing at the time of inspection. All the apprentices are employed by companies based in Surrey, Hampshire or southwest London. There are national labour shortages in this occupational area which is reflected in the fact that over 90 per cent of the apprentices have remained with their original employer; those who become unemployed are quickly relocated to another employer. Trainees attend the provider's training centre or a local further education college on a day-release basis,

for the off-the-job component of their training. There are two full-time plumbing trainers at the provider's training centre. In the workplace, trainees are supported by three full-time training managers and a part-time health and safety officer who, among them, also support the electrical installation trainees. As yet, there has been no visit from a plumbing external verifier, and Apprenticeship Training Limited is not registered to award the NVQs required for the modern apprenticeship scheme. The company's self-assessment report listed many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors and proposed the same grade as that given by inspectors.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and delivered theory and practical training
- ◆ a wide range of training methods to suit different learning styles
- ◆ strong working relationships among trainers, trainees and employers
- ◆ good progress reviews, with clear targets for trainees' achievement
- ◆ high standard of trainees' work

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient opportunities for the assessment of the key skills information technology unit
- ◆ inadequate resources at the provider's centre for the achievement of the full range of NVQ units at levels 2 and 3
- ◆ failure by some subcontracted colleges to recognise the merit of workplace evidence
- ◆ provider not yet approved to award NVQ level 3

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*In one session, the trainer provided the basic information for an exercise in estimating. Trainees were then required to use trade journals and manufacturers' literature to determine the materials required and then telephone suppliers for prices and delivery times. The trainees undertook the task with enthusiasm, and some commented on how useful this experience would be to them in the workplace.*

#### POOR PRACTICE

*In one case, the college teacher would accept valid evidence that a trainee had completed a task at work only as supplementary evidence to the simulated task at college, which he regarded as the real job.*

13. At the provider's training centre, off-the-job training is well planned and tailored to the needs of individual trainees. It cohesively links practical and theoretical aspects of the job. Trainers use a variety of training methods to keep trainees interested in the subject. The trainers use their experience of the trade to make useful links between theoretical work and practice in the workplace. Trainees undertaking off-the-job training in some colleges experience poor links between on- and off-the-job training.

14. Trainees are aware of the requirements of the NVQ, but are not conversant with key skills or their part in the modern apprenticeship. There are no facilities at some work placements for the attainment of the key skills unit in information technology or some aspects of the NVQ, such as lead work and below-ground drainage. Some trainees are close to completion of the NVQ level 3, and, as yet, the provider is not approved to award the certificate, nor has any external verification occurred. Plans to provide for assessment and accreditation elsewhere have been discussed, but not yet implemented.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 3**

15. Apprenticeship Training Limited makes sure that all the employers with which trainees are placed are aware of the company's equal opportunities policy and the implications which this has for their practice in the workplace. The company's policy is clearly written and comprehensive and displayed at all of its sites. Many of the company's good intentions regarding the further promotion of equal opportunities are stated in its policy, but have yet to be implemented. The company proposed a grade higher in their self-assessment report than that given by inspectors.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ clearly stated and comprehensive equal opportunities and grievance policy displayed at all providers' sites
- ◆ targeted schools contacted to address recruitment of under-represented groups
- ◆ positive support for women and for trainees with physical disabilities

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees' gender and ethnicity not monitored or analysed
- ◆ equality of opportunity not part of trainees' induction
- ◆ company's literature does not seek to promote equality of opportunity and the recruitment of under-represented groups

16. The company's equal opportunities policy was issued in 1994 and extensively amended in 1997. However, there is no formal mechanism for policy review, and the policy is not explained during trainees' induction. There are well-documented procedures for grievances, trainee selection and placement with employers. The policy contains clearly expressed aims for the support of under-represented trainees, such as women, trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds, trainees with physical disabilities and ex-offenders who may be disadvantaged in the employment market.

17. There is no procedure for monitoring the ethnicity or gender of trainees in comparison with the community from which the company recruits. However, managers and staff are aware that they recruit few women or trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds. The company's policy states its intention to target under-represented groups through the use of promotional literature in languages other than English and that written specifically for a female readership. At the time of inspection, these initiatives had not been implemented.

18. Support given to under-represented groups by staff is good. The general awareness of managers and staff, regarding the difficulties faced by women and trainees with physical disabilities, in an industry predominated by men and demanding hard manual labour, has helped such trainees to succeed. As part of its



contracts. It obtained a list of all the girls' schools and schools with a high percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds in those TECs' areas. The company wrote to all these schools, stressing the importance which it places on the recruitment of trainees currently under-represented. It also proposed visits to schools and a presentation on training and employment in the construction industry.

privately funded training activities, the company has altered its training methods and presentation techniques to meet the specific needs of trainees from religious groups which are unable to take part in the company's normal training programmes.

## Trainee support

## Grade 2

19. Managers and staff provide a high level of support for trainees to enable them to fulfil their potential. The company identifies applicants, parents and trainees as customers and has documents relating to customer care. In its self-assessment report, the company graded this aspect of its provision accurately.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective help for trainees seeking employment
- ◆ carefully planned timing for trainees' reviews, to ensure support early in the programme
- ◆ well-implemented trainee reviews encourage trainees to progress
- ◆ good support and guidance help trainees to develop their portfolio
- ◆ innovative adaptation of training to meet trainees' additional learning needs

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to monitor initial assessments
- ◆ poor take-up of exit training provision
- ◆ some employers do not understand the requirements of NVQs

20. All applicants for training undertake an initial assessment, predominantly of their mathematical abilities and a colour vision test. They are individually interviewed. Any identified additional learning support needs are noted and suitable support agreed on with the trainee. When an applicant is identified as needing to revise or upgrade his/her mathematical skills, remedial workbooks are recommended, but there is no follow-up to determine whether the trainee does the work or benefits from it. The company works hard, using its good relationship with employers to secure employment for all trainees. Once on the training programme, each trainee is allocated a training manager who provides guidance and support and who remains in this role throughout the programme. In the first few weeks of the programme, all trainees undertake certificated first aid training in addition to the contractual requirements of the programme.

21. Training managers conduct regular and effective reviews of trainees' progress. The provider has identified the first few months of the programme as being the time when trainees most need the support offered through review and the frequency of visits is high during this period. The help given to trainees in developing their

### GOOD PRACTICE

When a trainee is known to have special educational needs, one of the company's training officers contacts that trainee's school and, where appropriate, develops a programme giving continuity of support for the trainee. In one example, for a trainee with dyslexia, the provider had obtained agreement from the awarding body and the employer to allow it to help the trainee to present portfolio evidence with pictures, photographs and audio tapes, in order to minimise the need for written evidence.

*his training manager and employer, on a series of short-term goals and dates for achievement in order to catch up. The trainee was confident that, with his employer's involvement, he would achieve his targets for the next review.*

evidence for the NVQ is good, and inspectors saw several examples of well-presented and comprehensive portfolios. Trainers visit trainees in the workplace regularly to review their progress. The reviews are effective in encouraging trainees to achieve.

22. Trainees with additional learning needs receive effective support from their training managers. Innovative teaching methods are used to meet trainees' learning needs. Through negotiation with employers, the company has successfully provided training for trainees with physical disabilities which would normally exclude them from the industry.

23. In addition to finding jobs for trainees at the start of training, the provider has a good record of placing trainees in new employment if they are made redundant or their company closes during the course of the programme. However, some trainees are less effectively supported in the workplace, despite the endeavours of their training managers, because their employers do not understand the requirements of the NVQ and regard the training as being solely the day-release component of the trainees' week. The company provides a programme of exit training to help trainees with the completion of job applications, the development of curricula vitae and interview skills. However, since all the trainees are employed, very few take up the offer of this programme.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 2**

24. The roles and responsibilities of managers and staff are clear and well understood. Lines of communication between staff and managers are good, with information readily shared. In its first three years, the company expanded rapidly and its staffing increased from one to the present full-time complement of training director, three training managers, four trainers and assessors, a workshop technician and four administrative support staff. Since then, staff turnover has been low, and the company has no written procedures for the recruitment of staff. Much of the company's growth has been in response to the demands of the local electrical installation industry. To further meet the demands of local industry, the company has expanded its training provision from electrical installation to include plumbing. It is currently developing new provision in refrigeration, heating and ventilation and gas services. The systematic approach to management has not developed at the same rate, and there is a reliance on informal mechanisms for identifying development needs. The off-the-job training is well managed at the provider's training centre, but less so in some of the colleges with which the provider subcontracts. The management of on-the-job training is good and the provider's strong links with employers benefit the trainees. Self-assessment by the company noted many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors who endorsed the grade proposed for this aspect of provision.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ managers and staff operate flexibly in response to trainees' needs
- ◆ individual and collective targets are regularly set and monitored
- ◆ information is effectively shared among managers, trainers and support staff
- ◆ challenging staff development targets are set through appraisal
- ◆ computerised tracking of individual trainees' progress

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ management information is not systematically collected or analysed
- ◆ communication between the provider and some colleges is ineffective
- ◆ procedures for staff recruitment are not documented

25. The training director meets formally with training staff each month, and clear short-term targets for the company and individual staff are discussed and agreed on. Achievement of these targets is monitored and addressed at each meeting. Informal communications among managers, trainers and support staff are good and serve to provide effective sharing of information and ideas. The company's policies and procedures are well documented and available to all staff. Communications with employers are good. The strong links which the company has with employers often enable training managers to influence the work which trainees undertake on the job, in order to maximise the opportunities for achieving NVQ units. Communication with some of the further education colleges which provide off-the-job training is less well established. Where the provider places only one or two trainees with a college, there is limited scope to influence the way in which the training is delivered.

26. Staff are committed to enabling trainees to progress. Their roles are flexible and often exceed their job description. Trainees can contact staff outside of normal working hours. There is a rigorous system of staff appraisal: administrative and training staff have undergone staff development to address any identified needs.

27. Trainees' progress is individually tracked on the company's computer system, but the information is not readily available to provide analysis, nor is it used systematically to identify trends. Many of the initiatives taken by the company result from familiarity of the managers and staff with the trainees, their employers and the industry, rather than from formal analysis of management information.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

28. Apprenticeship Training Limited is committed to the improvement of quality in its training. During its rapid growth, the company has developed a policy and several well-documented procedures for quality assurance, but it does not have a coherent system. In recognition of this, the company has employed an external consultant to review and rationalise its quality assurance procedures. Until recently, the company measured the effectiveness of its quality assurance both informally

(against trainees and employers' response to training) and formally (against the contractual requirements of the TECs and the requirements of awarding bodies). The company has recently developed a set of performance standards, but does not yet have a procedure for monitoring the extent to which they are met. The company's self-assessment recognised many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors and included an action-plan, with responsibilities and deadlines identified to address the weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ informal quality reviews have led to improvements
- ◆ effective action-planning from trainees' self-assessments
- ◆ good practice shared across occupational sectors
- ◆ self-assessment report included good action-planning

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ procedures are not systematically reviewed to improve quality
- ◆ quality assurance system is not coherent
- ◆ data are not analysed adequately to ensure ongoing quality improvement

29. Although there are no formal mechanisms for the systematic review and improvement of quality assurance, spontaneous reviews of procedures conducted by the provider have led to several improvements in the quality of training. Where practical, common procedures and documents have been introduced across the training provision. A wide range of data is recorded relating to trainees' progress and achievements, reasons for leaving training before completion and the performance of trainers and trainees. However, these data are not analysed or used systematically to identify trends or improve training.

30. The views of trainees and their employers are sought through questionnaires on completion of training. During training, their views are sought at each progress review, and individual action-plans are agreed on in response to any issues raised, particularly through the process of trainees' self-assessment. Although trainees and employers express satisfaction with the prompt action taken to address any training issues raised, the views and issues are not recorded and analysed to determine patterns in performance which could be addressed systematically. Feedback from staff, on the quality of training and how to improve it, is noted at the formal staff meetings and appropriate action is agreed on. In addition, informal systems operate to share and address issues as they arise.