



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1998

Marshall Group Training

SUMMARY

Training for aerospace and component manufacture apprentices is outstanding and that for motor vehicle trainees is good. Trainees are set demanding targets and these relate to their achievements beyond the contracted training period. Off-the-job training is good. There are, however, no arrangements for collecting trainees' views on the quality of training. Most trainees are highly motivated, complete their training and achieve good results. Links between the provider and local employers are strong. Trainees benefit from work placements on premises which are clean, modern and well equipped. Links with subcontracting colleges are good. Trainees from groups which have been under-represented in vocational education and training achieve high levels of success. The training provided by the company is held in high esteem by trainees, employers and the local community.

GRADES

| OCCUPATIONAL AREAS | GRADE |
|---|-------|
| Engineering (aerospace/component manufacture) | 1 |
| Engineering (motor vehicle) | 2 |

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ training exceeds contractual requirements
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ high retention and achievement rates
- ◆ good-quality work placements on well-resourced premises
- ◆ high standard of trainees' work
- ◆ good representation of women in a traditionally male occupational area
- ◆ high reputation of company's training among trainees, employers and the local community

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ opportunities missed for assessment
- ◆ promotional literature does not target under-represented groups
- ◆ no arrangements for gathering trainees' views on initial assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Marshall Group Training is a privately owned company in Cambridge, run by the third generation of the family. The group employs 3,500 people in various occupational areas, including aerospace engineering, specialist vehicle design and manufacture and motor-vehicle sales and service. The company was formed in 1909 and began training its first motor-vehicle apprentices in 1920. In 1929, the company's first airfield and flying school was opened, and, during the Second World War, Marshall's trained over 20,000 pilots for the Royal Air Force.

2. Marshall Group's training centre was opened on its present site in 1965 and has built an enviable reputation among local companies for the quality of its training. Government-funded training is contracted through Business Link, central and southern Cambridge. At the time of inspection, there were 83 trainees. All aerospace trainees are on a modern apprenticeship scheme leading to an NVQ at level 3. Motor-vehicle trainees are on work-based training programmes, also leading to achievement of an NVQ at level 3. In addition, all trainees are pursuing other qualifications, which range from City and Guilds craft certificates to degrees. The group employs all the aerospace and component manufacturing trainees in its Cambridge Airport hangars and associated workshops. Many of the motor-vehicle trainees are employed in Marshall Group's garages around Cambridge, the remainder being placed with other local employers. The company carries out work for the air forces of several countries and many of the major international airlines. Through its own resources and its extensive contacts with employers, including European and Japanese car manufacturers, the company is able to provide trainees with work placements of a high quality.

3. Although the group recruits from a wide, national area, most trainees live within the Business Link area of central and southern Cambridge. In this area, 39 per cent of the working population work in the city of Cambridge. Over 70 per cent of local businesses employ fewer than ten staff. Thirty-two per cent of employment in the area is concentrated in public administration and education. There is a large number of high-technology and service industries in need of highly skilled engineering, management and administrative staff. The area's economic performance has been consistently higher than that of the United Kingdom as a whole. This trend is forecast to continue, although there are skills shortages developing, especially in technological occupations. Unemployment is low in Cambridge, at around 3 per cent. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 45.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Following training provided by Business Link, central and southern Cambridge, Marshall Group Training produced its first self-assessment report in May 1998. Production of the report involved all members of the training staff, through the training group's regular quality assurance meetings. The report is an open and thorough assessment of the group's training activities. All the evidence supporting the self-assessment was well documented and available to inspectors. Some of the specific strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were not detailed in the self-assessment report, and the provider was overcritical in all areas except the management of training and quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with the grades proposed for management of training and quality assurance, but, in all other areas, inspectors awarded grades higher than those proposed in the self-assessment report.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at the Marshall Group's training centre during July 1998. Inspectors met staff from the training centre, trainees, employers, subcontracting colleges, representatives of Business Link and the local government office. They visited one college, 12 employers' sites and all the relevant hangars and workshops at the provider's premises. They observed seven training sessions and eight progress reviews. They also examined assessment records, training plans, movement plans, trainees' files and portfolios and numerous documents relating to the training and its management. The following table shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed by inspectors.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

| | GRADE 1 | GRADE 2 | GRADE 3 | GRADE 4 | GRADE 5 | TOTAL |
|---|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Engineering (aerospace/component manufacture) | 1 | 3 | | | | 4 |
| Engineering (motor vehicle) | | 1 | 2 | | | 3 |
| Total | 1 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 7 |

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering (aerospace/component manufacture)

Grade 1

6. At the time of inspection, Marshall Group Training had 31 modern apprentices in aerospace trades and component production, including airframe fitting, avionics and technician trades. All are employed by the Marshall Group of companies. The first six months of their four-year apprenticeship are spent in the group's training centre, learning basic engineering skills which will equip them for the workplace. Training is of the highest quality. On completion of their initial training, the trainees move to

the workplace to continue their training and attend a further education college on a day-release basis. In addition to the achievement of an NVQ at level 3, the trainees are working towards additional qualifications. The key skill components of the modern apprenticeship are delivered jointly with a local college of further education. On-the-job training is carried out in the group's well-equipped and professionally managed aircraft hangars and workshops. The self-assessment report did not identify any significant weaknesses, but proposed a lower grade than that awarded by inspectors.

GOOD PRACTICE

The trainers develop an individual trainee movement plan, which maps out the entire training programme. It constitutes a clear and effective schedule of dates and periods of training, in all the departments relevant to the particular apprenticeship. The schedule is flexible and is revised should it be necessary for a trainee to change direction or trade at any time during training. Skills already acquired are credited in the revised plan.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training which exceeds the modern apprenticeship requirements
- ◆ careful placement of trainees in suitable employment
- ◆ challenging goals set for trainees to achieve
- ◆ pride taken by trainees in their company and their training
- ◆ well-motivated trainees who demonstrate high levels of competence
- ◆ high quality of resources
- ◆ good training opportunities afforded by the high quality of work undertaken

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor understanding of NVQ requirements among some workplace mentors
- ◆ lower regard by trainees for their review process than for other aspects of training

7. Following extensive initial assessment, trainees are placed in the particular occupational trade to which they are best suited. They are also set the aim of achieving a demanding qualification. During and following their apprenticeship, trainees are encouraged to pursue qualifications to help them to fulfill their potential and to continue studying to degree level. Training is organised and managed flexibly. Trainees receive thorough and regular reviews of their progress and, as a result of these, they can be transferred among trades and have their qualification aims adjusted accordingly. The quality of work undertaken by the group is high and includes aircraft from the armed forces of several countries, as well as major international airlines. The retention rate for trainees over the last four years is almost 100 per cent. The Aviation Training Association awarded the first 12 modern apprenticeships which were completed. Eleven were from Marshall Group.

8. Trainees work to a high level of competence, and their training extends them beyond the requirements of the NVQ at level 3. During initial off-the-job training, individual training plans are developed, and a schedule is devised for moving trainees around the company to ensure coverage of all the skills needed in order to obtain their NVQ. As trainees move around the company during on-the-job training, they are allocated a mentor in each area. Although the training is of a good standard, some mentors have little knowledge of the NVQ requirements and miss opportunities for trainees to demonstrate requisite competencies. During the regular progress

reviews, however, the provider's instructors identify gaps in the trainees' coverage of competencies and ensure that these are satisfactorily addressed. The trainees have a high regard for the company and their training, although successive surveys show that they generally regard the review process as satisfactory and all other aspects as excellent.

Engineering (motor vehicle)

Grade 2

9. There were 52 motor-vehicle trainees at the time of inspection, all on a programme of work-based training leading to the achievement of an NVQ at level 3. They are all employed in the motor-vehicle industry, with the Marshall Group of companies or with other local employers. Trainees undertake an initial 13-week block of off-the-job training in Marshall Group's training centre, which equips them well for the workplace. The training instructors develop a good working relationship with the trainees during their time at the centre. This is maintained during the subsequent on-the-job training, through regular review visits to the workplace. The training group's instructors carry out assessment of the trainees' competence in the workplace. In addition to the NVQ, all trainees attend a further education college on a day-release basis, in order to gain another nationally recognised qualification. Inspectors identified weaknesses which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report, but awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned off-the-job training which prepares trainees for the workplace
- ◆ highly motivated and well-qualified training staff
- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ frequent progress reviews in the workplace
- ◆ high-quality work placements for all trainees
- ◆ good retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some missed opportunities for assessment in the training centre
- ◆ lack of understanding of NVQ requirements by some employers
- ◆ no observation of assessment by the internal verifier

10. Off-the-job training is well planned and effective in preparing trainees for the workplace. Instructors make good use of the centre's well-equipped workshops in

demonstrating and clearly explaining each task prior to trainees undertaking the work. For some of the work, trainees are split into two small groups, so that they can all observe the demonstrations closely. Inspectors observed that, while one group was observing the demonstration, the other group was chatting and not doing anything worthwhile. On-the-job training takes place in employers' premises which are clean, modern and well equipped. In each workplace, trainees have a mentor or training supervisor to guide their training. Some of the mentors have little understanding of the requirements of the NVQ, and trainees do not always make best use of their opportunities, gathering evidence to claim competence. During regular review visits to the workplace, Marshall Group Training's instructors negotiate with employers to move trainees within the company, to ensure they have the opportunity to cover the range of skills required by the NVQ. The trainees are well motivated, and, over the last three years, over 80 per cent of the trainees stayed on to complete their training successfully. A local college of further education provides internal verification of the training, but observation of assessment has not been part of this process.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

11. Marshall Group Training has a clearly written and regularly reviewed equal opportunities policy, covering current legislation and meeting contractual requirements. The policy is implemented at all levels throughout the company, with staff attending regular training to bring them up to date with the latest legislation. Particular attention is paid to equality of opportunity during prospective trainees' systematic and well-documented initial assessment and selection. The number of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds is appropriately proportionate to the number of those from ethnic minorities in the local population. Female trainees are well represented in this traditionally male-dominated occupational area. The company does not have equality of opportunity as a standard agenda item for its quality review meetings; the group's advertising and promotional literature does not target under-represented groups. Inspectors identified weaknesses in the company's equal opportunities practices, which were not mentioned in the self-assessment report, but agreed with the grade given.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and well-documented policy and procedures strictly implemented
- ◆ speedy and effective response to identified problems
- ◆ high proportion of female trainees
- ◆ regular, in-house equal opportunities training for all staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ promotional literature does not target under-represented groups

- ◆ potentially gender-offensive material displayed in some work areas

12. Equality of opportunity is demonstrated at all levels of the training group's activities. A far greater percentage of female applicants is recruited than is the case for males. Once recruited, they are well supported towards achievement and express a high regard for both their training and the environment in which it takes place. The group's commitment to equality of opportunity is further exemplified by an employee from a minority ethnic background, taken on as an apprentice airframe fitter, who has completed his apprenticeship and has been further supported by the group to achieve an honours degree in engineering.

13. Although the company seeks to recruit from under-represented groups, the advertising and promotional literature does not target these groups. Much of it portrays white males, even when being used in recruitment directed specifically at females, for example. Staff regularly receive training in equal opportunities and associated issues. When issues concerning equality of opportunity are raised at the quality review meetings, they are dealt with swiftly and effectively. In some work areas, on and off site, calendars and posters are displayed which do not serve to promote the group's commitment to equal opportunities.

Trainee support

Grade 2

14. The training group's straightforward mission statement is to provide quality training. This statement is taken seriously, and staff work hard to support trainees in all aspects of their training. The group's training manager carries out all recruitment. The provider recruits through the work carried out with the local careers service, visits to local schools and through recommendation by previous trainees, many of whom are now in senior positions with a variety of companies. Initial assessment involves aptitude testing, basic skills assessment and testing for numeracy and mechanical ability. All prospective trainees are interviewed. All trainees receive a thorough induction to training and a period of off-the-job training in the training centre. Inspectors awarded a higher grade for this aspect than that proposed in the provider's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough initial assessment and guidance
- ◆ thoughtful matching of trainees to occupations and qualification aims
- ◆ thorough induction to training
- ◆ good pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ frequent and effective visits in the workplace by provider's staff
- ◆ training programmes adapted to meet trainees' aims
- ◆ regular and frequent review of trainees' progress

- ◆ prompt resolution of trainees' learning difficulties

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no evaluation by trainees of induction prior to work placement
- ◆ no recording or structured analysis of trainees' reasons for leaving

15. Marshall Group Training places great importance on support for its trainees and has recognised that good support leads to good results and motivated trainees. Almost all trainees complete their training and achieve their learning goals. From the rigorous initial assessment, trainees are skillfully advised by training staff to ensure that they are placed in the area of work to which they are best suited, and challenging learning goals are agreed on. All trainees undergo a comprehensive induction programme prior to training, although their response to this induction is not formally sought. From then until completion of training, staff review trainees' progress frequently and agree to adapt the training and academic aims of trainees. When trainees experience difficulties with practical or theoretical aspects of their training, the reasons are quickly detected and measures put in place to maximise the chances of success. These measures tend to be suited to the individual case, and have included additional support with numeracy, change of trade area and alteration of learning goals, facilitating slower progress and smaller achievement steps, where appropriate. Careers advice and counselling are a feature of the training, and trainees are encouraged to apply for professional status, wherever possible. Few trainees leave prior to completion of their training and, although training staff generally know the reasons for early leaving, are not formally recorded or analysed.

Management of training

Grade 2

16. Management and staffing structures are clear and well understood, with areas of responsibility clearly defined. Policies are clear, widely known and generally adhered to by staff, trainees and, where appropriate, employers. Management decisions are made in the light of accurately recorded data on trainees and their achievements. Marshall Group Training has a well-established system of staff appraisal and development. The group's mission statement is prominently displayed and understood by staff. Managers make effective use of both their experience and the group's reputation in securing high-quality work placements for trainees. The group's self-assessment report recognised many strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the findings and the grade proposed in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and thoroughly documented policies
- ◆ well-managed work placements
- ◆ setting and achievement of clear and measurable targets
- ◆ twice-yearly staff appraisal
- ◆ extensive programme of staff development

- ◆ well-defined management responsibility for on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ rigorous complaints procedures which include trainees, staff, employers and subcontractors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective communications with a subcontracting college
- ◆ some procedures not updated in line with policy
- ◆ best practice not shared across occupational area

17. Training is well managed at Marshall Group Training. Staff are well qualified in their own vocational areas. All have their vocational assessor qualifications and, in one case, a recently undertaken certificate of education. They understand their respective responsibilities and discharge them effectively. Clear, measurable targets are set for a wide range of the group's activities, including trainees' achievements, staff roles, financial & developmental planning and contractual agreements. Progress towards these targets is closely monitored, and appropriate action is taken to enable their achievement. Policies and associated procedures are well documented and shared with all appropriate staff and external bodies. There is a system of six-monthly review and updating of procedures, but, in a few cases, the reviews have not been that regular. The managers are aware of this omission, and action has been planned to address it.

18. All staff and managers take part in a comprehensive appraisal process twice a year. Part of this appraisal identifies the group's staff development needs and provides an opportunity for staff to flag up their own development needs. Wherever appropriate, these needs are met. Internal lines of communication are clear, and regular formal meetings between managers and instructors result in agreed action-plans. Communications with employers, awarding bodies and most subcontractors are usually good. In one instance, however, there is insufficient feedback from a subcontracted college to ensure that relevant and timely information is available for some management decisions affecting motor-vehicle trainees. A comprehensive complaints procedure is in place, and all issues raised by staff, subcontractors, trainees or their employers are recorded, addressed at regular quality review meetings and action taken to deal with them. On-the-job training is well managed for all trainees, but the different requirements for managing aerospace trainees on site and motor-vehicle trainees off site have meant that staff in different vocational areas do not necessarily have the opportunity to meet and share good practice.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

19. Marshall Group Training meets several external quality standards, including ISO 9002, Investors in People Standard and those of Business Link, central and southern Cambridge, with which it contracts. The group's training centre has delivered government-funded training since 1981. The strong links, built over many

years, between the group and local employers, are used to good effect by training staff in ensuring that trainees in all work placements experience a consistently high quality of training. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and with the grade given for quality assurance.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-established and clearly documented quality assurance system
- ◆ quality assurance system is understood and implemented by all staff
- ◆ effective reviews of quality leading to action to improve training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ external verifiers' reports not fed back to motor-vehicle trainers
- ◆ trainees' views not formally sought in the development of initial training

20. Marshall Group Training focuses its attention on the trainees and the training which they experience. It has thorough, long-established and comprehensively documented quality assurance procedures which support its system. All training staff are aware of the company's mission statement and work to fulfil its aim of high-quality training. Most aspects of training are closely monitored. All employers, subcontractors, trainees and staff contribute to the quality assurance process, both formally and through procedures. The group responds to these inputs, and improvements to training are the result. In the light of their reviews, the company takes action to improve the quality of provision. There is no formal review of trainees' views regarding initial training. This omission was noted in the provider's self-assessment report, but has yet to be addressed. For motor-vehicle programmes, external verification is carried out through a local college of further education, for which the training centre is a satellite. The process is thorough, and centre staff are notified of any particular issues raised. However, they do not receive a copy of the report from which their action-planning might benefit.