



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JULY 1998

North East Employment Training Agency Ltd

SUMMARY

North East Employment Training Agency Ltd (NEETA) offers good prevocational, training which is well adapted to meet trainees' needs. Training in hairdressing and advice, counselling and psychotherapy is satisfactory. Trainees are well supported throughout their programmes. The quality assurance system is well documented. However, there are some important gaps in the quality control process. There is a comprehensive staff training programme, but no evaluation of its effectiveness.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	3
Health, care & public services	3
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented quality assurance system
- ◆ good personal counselling for trainees
- ◆ good internal communications systems
- ◆ effective design and delivery of the foundation programme
- ◆ effective key skills development in hairdressing

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ no systematic analysis of data
- ◆ poor achievement in health and care programmes
- ◆ health and safety visits late

INTRODUCTION

1. North East Employment Training Agency Ltd (NEETA) was established in 1988. It provided action-plans for unemployed people. In 1991, NEETA purchased another company and expanded its provision. It now offers training in prevocational work, advice, guidance, counselling and psychotherapy (AGCP), which is subcontracted to the North East Council on Addictions (NECA), and hairdressing. NEETA has centres in Gateshead, Washington and Sunderland. There are 17 staff employed within the three centres. NEETA contracts with Sunderland and Tyneside Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). At the time of inspection, NEETA had 138 people in training, of whom 54 were modern apprentices. Unemployment in the Tyneside area is high, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent, breaking down as follows: Gateshead 6.4 per cent, Newcastle 8.6 per cent, North Tyneside 7.1 per cent and South Tyneside 9.6 per cent. The employment structure of Tyneside and Sunderland shows that 66 per cent of firms are categorised as small- to medium-sized enterprises, and most of the local placements used by the company fall into this category.

2. The population profile of the local area has a high number of white people, at 99.3 per cent. The largest programme area is hairdressing. The proportion of Sunderland and North and South Tyneside school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 34.4 per cent, 42.7 per cent and 35.7 per cent respectively.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. In July 1998, five inspectors spent a total of 12 days at NEETA. Inspectors visited all of the provider's sites, interviewed a total of 51 people, including managers, staff, employers, TEC representatives and 30 trainees and also observed 12 training sessions.

4. The self-assessment report was produced by the operations manager and was formulated by an external consultant. Many of the strengths identified are normal practice, and some weaknesses were accurately identified. Inspectors found additional weaknesses. Generally, the self-assessment report grades were higher than those awarded by inspectors.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hair & beauty (hairdressing)

Grade 3

5. There are 110 trainees on hairdressing programmes. Trainees work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3. Over a two-week period, trainees attend for one day at a training centre and for nine days in a salon placement. The day at the training centre is divided equally into sessions of essential knowledge and practical hairdressing. The company offers national traineeships (NTs) and modern apprenticeships (MAs). There are five trainers. All are qualified to NVQ level 3, all have assessor qualifications and two have teaching qualifications. Strengths identified in the self-assessment report were normal practice – one was not validated. Additional weaknesses were identified, and, consequently, the grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ development of key skills
- ◆ high number and a good range of clients available for practical training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no documented training schedule
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poor quality of accommodation

6. Requisite key skills are identified on the trainee's individual training plan (ITP) at induction. Key skills assignments are effectively integrated into the hairdressing training. Trainees have a clear understanding of how to gather evidence for the achievement of key skills within their portfolio. Trainers have undertaken key skills training which has helped to ensure a standardised team approach to delivery and assessment.

7. Each salon at the training centres has a high number of regular clients. There is a wide and varied range of models, providing valuable opportunities for trainees to increase their experience. Trainees perform tasks in a commercial environment and in an acceptable time and professional manner. Resources in the centres are adequate, and trainees have sufficient hairdressing equipment and consumables. There are, however, considerable differences in the quality of salon accommodation offered in the three centres. One centre compares favourably with the best of local salons, while the others require refurbishment. The ratio of trainees to trainers is good and involves double staffing when trainees are practising new skills. Trainees' success rates have risen over the last four years: in 1994-95, there were 34 NVQs per 100 leavers, and, in 1997-98, this figure had risen to 53 NVQs per 100 leavers.

8. There is no training plan which covers the whole training programme, and this lack limits trainees' autonomy in planning for specific assessments and employers' input into training.

9. Most assessment is completed at the training centres, although trainees can be assessed in the workplace by prior arrangement. Trainees are confused about the use of witness testimony. No systematic procedure exists to inform employers of trainees' progress. As trainees spend nine out of 10 days in the workplace, many opportunities are lost for them to gain evidence towards their qualification.

10. One senior manager has responsibility for the internal verification of all trainees' assessments. The verification plan fails to ensure that the random assessment sampling process covers all units and each of the trainees. There is no standardised assessment practice, mainly because some trainees are unaware that they can be assessed in the workplace, and this means that opportunities are missed. Four trainers are currently undertaking training, so that they can share responsibility for internal verification.

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

11. NEETA has seven trainees working towards Advice, Guidance, Counselling and Psychotherapy NVQ level 2. The course duration is between 12 and 15 weeks and is subcontracted to a specialist training provider. Trainees spend two days each week on work placement in the subcontractors' centres and one day each week in off-the-job training. At interviews, trainees receive only verbal initial assessments. Identification of additional learning support is based on information received from trainees on their application form, this relying on trainees completing the form

accurately. Trainees are not always able to do this successfully, and additional training needs are not always identified. There is no system in place to formally record and monitor trainees' progress. The self-assessment report was not accurate in identifying all strengths and weaknesses, but inspectors agreed with the grade awarded.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and supportive work placements
- ◆ productive weekly meetings with assessors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal initial assessment of trainees
- ◆ low retention and achievement rates

GOOD PRACTICE

In one training session, trainees were able to role-play situations relating to alcohol addiction. This taught them to more easily recognise these symptoms in clients.

12. Workplace supervisors are active and enthusiastic in helping trainees to progress with their work. They support and encourage trainees to develop positive relationships with a range of clients who come to centres for counselling. They also give trainees regular feedback on their performance. Trainees are given many opportunities to practise skills by dealing with clients and discussing case loads with workplace supervisors where appropriate. All staff working for the subcontractors who are involved in training and assessment have a wide range of counselling and assessor qualifications.

13. Assessors give clear and comprehensive guidance to trainees on a weekly basis. Assessment plans and observation records are signed and updated after each visit. Trainees then complete workplace records and assignments and discuss them with their supervisors to ensure that they are relevant and accurate.

14. Retention rates have been poor for the range of courses offered for the last 18 months. Of 43 trainees who started the qualification during the last TEC contract year, only 12 trainees completed it. On one course, 15 trainees started, only three completed and two of those achieved the NVQ level 2.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

15. This programme has been developed to meet the needs of adults who have been unemployed for a significant period and who have particular problems which inhibit their ability to enter or re-enter employment. The Employment Service refers trainees to the company. The main objective of the programme is to help trainees to address the problems which they have and which are acting as barriers to employment. There are currently 21 trainees on the programme which operates on a roll-on/roll-off basis at the company's centre in Gateshead. Trainees attend for 21 hours each week for a maximum of 13 weeks, or until they have achieved the agreed

goals. These goals are specific to the needs of each individual, but typically include developing self-confidence and personal effectiveness, production of a curriculum vitae, identifying appropriate jobs, applying for them and achieving a basic or key skills qualification. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were judged to be normal practice, however, several additional strengths and weakness were also identified. The grade awarded by inspectors for this programme is the same as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective design and delivery of training
- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ appropriately qualified staff
- ◆ frequent reviews of progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited use of work placements

16. A variety of methods is used effectively to deliver training, including whole-group, small-group and one-to-one training. These methods take into account the very diverse abilities of the trainees, which include poor or non-existent reading skills. In the sessions observed, training delivery was appropriately paced, at the right level, and captured the interest of trainees through good use of a range of audio-visual media.

17. All training is tailored specifically to the needs of each individual. These needs are accurately defined as a result of effective initial assessment procedures, and translated into relevant learning goals. Progress is frequently reviewed, and most trainees achieve their goals.

18. Only two of the current group of 21 are undertaking work placements. The TEC contract does require that, wherever possible, trainees be given this type of experience. This is a particular weakness for those trainees who have been unemployed for a number of years. They have a particular need to demonstrate to prospective employers that they are able to cope with the discipline of the workplace, and build their confidence in being able to sustain a job. Several trainees do not attend on a regular basis, and patterns of attendance are irregular.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

19. A comprehensive equal opportunities policy exists and complies with legislation and contractual requirements. Data are not systematically analysed, and there is no equal opportunities development plan. The self-assessment report did not identify all the strengths and weaknesses, but was accurate in terms of the grade awarded.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ practical implementation of equal opportunities
- ◆ original training methods meet trainees' needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no evaluation of policy effectiveness
- ◆ no analysis or use of data year on year
- ◆ limited access for people with physical disabilities

20. NEETA ensures equality of opportunity for all its staff in practical ways. Employees receive the equal opportunities statement when joining the company. Company policy prescribes the level of commitment required of all staff. This applies to written and verbal communications and appropriate behaviour. Staff ensure that these values are practically applied within all programme areas. Equal opportunities are an agenda item at the quarterly staff meetings. Issues arising from these meetings are addressed effectively.

21. Trainees receive an easily understandable equal opportunities statement at induction. They are given a clear and full explanation of their rights and responsibilities. Training methods are designed to ensure that trainees with wide-ranging needs can participate fully in training sessions. In classes for non-readers, a variety of techniques, including graphs and videos, is used (instead of text) to deliver the message effectively.

22. NEETA has access to some local equal opportunities data, but does not use it for evaluative or comparative purposes. Therefore, it is unable to monitor trends or identify future action-plans.

23. The equal opportunities statement is regularly reviewed. However, the equal opportunities policy is not monitored or reviewed, neither is it dated. A NEETA subcontractor is not given the company's policy and, consequently, is unaware of the company's equal opportunities values and procedures. Two of the three centres have no access for people with physical disabilities.

Trainee support

Grade 3

24. Trainees receive personal advice throughout their programme and are helped in practical ways to achieve their full potential. Initial assessment is not standardised, and additional support requirements are not formally recognised or recorded. All trainees receive a detailed induction programme. However, there is no formal guidance on progression to higher-level NVQs in hairdressing. The self-assessment report was not accurate in identifying all strengths and weaknesses, but was accurate in terms of the grade awarded.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular and constructive support
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ frequent and effective feedback to trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ no formal process for guidance on trainees' progression
- ◆ no structured recording of additional support requirements

25. Regular informal meetings are held between trainers and trainees. The support which is given to trainees on prevocational programmes surpasses contractual requirements. Hairdressing trainees are provided with cameras and film for their personal use at the training centre. This helps them to record evidence of units being assessed. Relationships between staff and trainees are strong and seen by trainees as a key reason for their successful progress. Feedback is sought from trainees and used to develop training activities and to improve quality.

26. The occupational analysis test used for hairdressing trainees is not comprehensive and does not include the systematic assessment of key skills. As a result, training in this area is not designed to meet individuals' needs. Hairdressing trainees completing the level 2 programme do not receive formal guidance on progression options. They do not have any form of induction into the new programme.

27. Those trainees with learning difficulties are not always identified early enough, and additional support requirements are not recognised. Although trainees complete an initial assessment, language support requirements are not recorded. Informal support is frequently given by assessors on a one-to-one basis, as required by individual trainees.

Management of training

Grade 3

28. NEETA is a small company which employs 17 people, including two managers and three administrative staff, with the remainder involved in the delivery of the hairdressing and prevocational programmes. Strategic management of the company is by the managing director, with responsibility for day-to-day control of the business resting with the operations manager. The company awarded a grade to this area above that of inspectors. Many of the strengths in the self-assessment report are normal contractual practice, and several additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of staff committee
- ◆ significant staff development
- ◆ effective staff motivation scheme
- ◆ managers responsive in developing new provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ feedback from trainees' evaluations is not provided to all staff
- ◆ limited range of indicators used to evaluate performance
- ◆ no analysis of effectiveness of staff training
- ◆ poor communication with employers
- ◆ limited co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

GOOD PRACTICE

The company has a bonus scheme in place to recognise the efforts of staff, where individuals have significantly added to trainees' training experience. The scheme encourages a highly responsive attitude to trainees' needs, and an example of this includes taking trainees to hairdressing competitions at weekends.

29. Managers have adopted an inclusive approach to the development of policies and procedures, which are reviewed and amended in consultation with staff, and communicated through a series of regular meetings. There are effective staff consultative procedures to ensure that they are up to date on all aspects of company performance, including TEC contracts. Systems are in place to successfully resolve problems related to working conditions.

30. Assessment practice and training delivery issues are regularly considered, and, where appropriate, effective changes to operating practice are introduced. The results of trainees' questionnaires are not systematically communicated to all relevant staff. As a result, staff are not able to fully review and evaluate their own performance.

31. There is an effective and well-established staff development policy. All staff have an annual appraisal which identifies training needs in relation to business objectives, and training records show that relevant training is regularly undertaken. Staff training is not systematically evaluated by management for its effectiveness in improving performance.

32. There are no targets set which measure the quality of the trainees' experience,

although the company has started to collect data which will enable it to do this. Equally, there are no targets for reducing the number of early leavers, although the company does monitor this and can quantify the problem. While there are good working relationships with employers, communication with them is not always effective. This is particularly apparent in relation to trainees' progress, where a significant number of employers indicated a complete lack of awareness. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is limited, reducing the overall effectiveness of the total programme.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

33. The company meets the external quality standards required by Tyneside and Sunderland TEC and has achieved ISO 9001, which is regularly audited. The system has been updated as a result of internal reviews and audits. In addition, the company achieved the Investors in People Standard several years ago, and this was accredited again in November 1997. Feedback is collected from staff on their training and development needs, and from trainees on the quality of their training experience. However, the information is not used uniformly to control quality, and data are not used effectively to improve training. Many of the strengths in the self-assessment report were judged to be normal practice. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and well-documented quality assurance system
- ◆ improved trainee achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete work procedures for staff recruitment
- ◆ performance of trainers is not systematically evaluated
- ◆ health and safety visits do not meet the organisation's schedule

34. There are clearly identified, documented and detailed procedures which regulate the training process, staff recruitment and other company functions. The procedures are effective and, with some exceptions, correctly and routinely followed. There are, however, some important gaps in the quality-control process.

35. The recruitment procedure for new staff does not include requirements to see copies of staff qualifications or to check their references. There is no procedure for formal evaluation of trainers' performance through observation. A questionnaire is issued to trainees periodically, to collect feedback on their overall training experience. There is no evidence that this information is systematically evaluated to analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of training delivery. Some, but not all,



trainers receive feedback on the outcome of these questionnaires.

36. Audit reports show that the quality system has few examples of non-compliance with quality assurance. Some salons are not regularly given health and safety checks. This has been recognised by the company, and corrective action is being taken.