



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1998

# Heathercroft Services

## SUMMARY

Heathercroft Services offers satisfactory training in care and customer service. The company also offers good training in management. There are good working relationships between staff and trainees, and trainee support is good. The management information system is underdeveloped. The company has a quality assurance system, but it is not yet well established. Its approach to equal opportunities is good.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	2
Retailing & customer service	3
Health, care & public services	3

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good equal opportunities
- ◆ good monitoring and assessment procedures
- ◆ good opportunities for staff development
- ◆ good trainee support
- ◆ good-quality work placements

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor initial assessment
- ◆ some poor induction
- ◆ quality assurance procedures not embedded

## INTRODUCTION

1. Heathercroft Services was founded in 1991 in response to an identified need for training in the areas of care and customer service. The company's modern offices and accommodation are located in Eastbourne. Historically, Heathercroft was managed by two directors, but, in March this year, a general manager was appointed and a new staffing structure was introduced. There are now 13 full- and nine part-time employees. A variety of training courses is offered and includes those for government-funded trainees. The company provides modern apprenticeship and youth training programmes in care, customer service and management. Trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 to 5. At the time of inspection, there were 233 trainees, of whom 177 were on the modern apprenticeship scheme. This work is funded through contracts with Sussex Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE), Kent Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and SOLOTEC.

2. In mid 1997, unemployment stood at 3.8 per cent in Sussex and 5.4 per cent in Kent, compared with a national average of 5.9 per cent and 3.2 per cent in the southeast. The Sussex economy continues to grow, with average annual growth rates estimated at 3 per cent, compared with a national average of 2.5 per cent. This strong performance has been driven by a healthy growth in financial service operations, improved occupancy of hotels & attractions and strong performance by technology manufacturing exporters. In overall terms, the Kent economy is also expanding, although it is still lagging behind the rest of the southeast and the United Kingdom, as a whole. Growth in mid and west Kent is more rapid than that in north and east Kent. In sectoral terms, business services, communications, chemicals & pharmaceuticals and transport & distribution are expanding more quickly than the national economy, whereas land-based industries, paper, packaging, printing and publishing, food processing and healthcare are lagging behind. The number of school leavers in Sussex achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 45.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997. Two of the company's TEC areas are rural, with some urban conurbation, and have a relatively low representation of minority ethnic groups, while the third is largely an urban and inner-city area and has a significantly higher representation of those from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of minority ethnic groups in Sussex stands at 2.25 per cent of the population.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Heathercroft Services produced its first self-assessment report approximately three months before inspection. All members of the management team contributed to the report, and all members of staff were made aware of its contents. In the occupational areas of management, and the generic areas of equal opportunities and trainee support, inspectors identified more strengths than were identified in the self-assessment report and awarded higher grades. In other areas, weaknesses were either understated or not identified during the inspection process. The grades given by inspectors for management of training and health, care and public services were lower than those proposed in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with most of the company's judgements in customer service and quality assurance, including the grades awarded in the self-assessment report.

4. Inspectors gathered evidence from a wide range of sources. They held interviews with 12 employers, 42 trainees and most staff at Heathercroft Services. Six assessment sessions were observed, and inspectors looked at documentary evidence, including trainees' portfolios, assessment records, individual training plans and learning materials. Two training sessions were observed.

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Management & professional

**Grade 2**

5. Trainees on this programme are following NVQs at levels 3 to 5. There are presently 12 trainees on the youth training programme, all of whom are employed in suitable management positions. Eleven trainees are working towards NVQ level 4 and one is at NVQ level 5. Heathercroft Services also takes private trainees at all levels; these are not government-funded trainees. Training involves attendance at a series of 10 workshops, delivered at monthly intervals. Between training sessions, each trainee receives a personal tutorial appointment to support individual progress. There are presently two members of staff, who both have teaching qualifications and experience, as well as a relevant occupational background. One member of staff delivers training and the other carries out assessments. The style and method of training and assessment are changing following the recent introduction of the new NVQ standards for management. The self-assessment report successfully identified some of the strengths, but overstated others. Weaknesses highlighted in the self-assessment report have already been addressed. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly qualified and experienced trainers and assessors

- ◆ thorough initial assessment and induction
- ◆ good trainee understanding of the NVQ
- ◆ frequent and individual trainee support

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped learning materials for current NVQ standards
- ◆ lack of variety in learning methods at off-the-job training sessions

6. The staff comprises a trainer and an assessor, to comply with awarding body requirements. Both members of the team have considerable occupational experience. They have long employment records in business and project management. One is a Fellow of the British Institute of Management. Both have teaching and training qualifications and experience. All trainees are rigorously checked for their suitability to be accepted on the management programme. This involves a close inspection of their work rôle, oral examination of their knowledge and understanding of the NVQ requirements, as well as written summaries of their work experience to date.

7. Trainees attend an induction session where they are briefed in detail about the course content and structure, nature and purpose of assessment, portfolio guidelines, personal development opportunities and optional units available. They each receive an induction pack which summarises these aspects, as well as explaining other areas, such as the appeals procedure and organisational structure. Trainees' understanding of induction is formally checked and recorded.

8. Each trainee is invited, monthly, to attend a training session at the company's premises which helps him/her to develop an overview of the whole qualification. Those who cannot attend are seen on an individual basis to ensure that they also benefit from this training. Trainees are then visited for a personal tutorial, once a month, to support them in achieving their goals. Some trainees decide to follow the pattern of the training sessions to complete their programme. Others prefer to use the sessions to further their understanding, but concentrate instead on elements which are most appropriate to their work at that time. Trainees choose how they want to proceed, with guidance given by trainers, as appropriate. As a result, trainees are well aware of the content and requirements of their programmes. They speak knowledgeably about the different elements of the course, the evidence which they need to produce, and readily give examples of how they have applied their learning to introduce improvements in practice at their own places of work.

9. There is a large bank of learning materials and resources available for the former NVQ standards. These are no longer entirely appropriate, since the introduction of the new standards. Training sessions for new trainees are presently delivered as lectures. There are no handouts, exercises or activities to give variety and depth to the training sessions.

## Retailing & customer service

## Grade 3

10. Heathercroft Services recruits about 30 trainees each year, most being employed when they join the programme. Training is available at NVQ levels 2 and 3 in customer service. In the current group of 25 trainees, 19 are working towards modern apprenticeships. Training is delivered on employers' sites, where appropriate, and at Heathercroft Services' training centre. One training adviser is responsible for the delivery of the programme, providing training workshops, assessments and trainees' reviews. Trainees' placements are provided through a diverse range of employers, including multinational manufacturing organisations, service-sector organisations, retail companies and care establishments. The strengths and weaknesses identified through self-assessment were different from those found by inspectors. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good-quality training
- ◆ demanding progress targets set
- ◆ effective peer group support for some trainees
- ◆ most employers support trainees' achievement

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some trainees lack awareness of their programmes
- ◆ prior learning and achievement not always accredited
- ◆ lack of work-based assessors

11. Training workshops are provided in the workplace, where there are groups of trainees in the same work location, and at the Heathercroft Services' training centre for other trainees. The training is of a high quality and is supported by effective learning resources. The training promotes trainees' progress and is subject to regular internal quality monitoring. Heathercroft Services has sought to promote the delivery of training and assessment to groups of trainees in the same work location. This provides opportunities for trainees to benefit from peer support and supports the identification of sources of portfolio evidence. Trainees agree with the realistic, but demanding, progress targets set. Trainees have a clear understanding of the assessment process and are encouraged by the training adviser to meet their targets successfully, thereby enhancing their enthusiasm and motivation. Heathercroft Services has developed good working relationships with employers, most of which support trainees on the programme, and several provide trainees with the opportunity to work on their NVQ portfolios during working hours. One employer is working closely with the training adviser to provide extensive support for trainees with particular needs, ensuring that trainees continue in employment and progress towards NVQ achievement.

12. Several trainees do not know whether they are on a modern apprenticeship

programme. Others do not know towards which level of NVQ they are working. Modern apprentices have a poor understanding of the framework and requirements of their programmes and, in particular, the key skills requirements. Some trainees are not consulted by Heathercroft Services, or their employer, on fundamental changes to their programme. This lack of programme awareness has an adverse effect on the progress and commitment of some trainees. The prior learning, qualifications and experience of trainees are not consistently accredited. This results in delays in the achievement of some trainees and in others working towards NVQs at a lower level than their experience and qualifications. The lack of work-based assessors results in the loss of naturally occurring assessment opportunities for some trainees, delaying their progress. In addition, some supervisors' lack of understanding of the NVQ structure and standards inhibits their ability to work with the training adviser and trainees in partnership, to identify assessment evidence effectively and to support trainees' learning and progress.

### **Health, care & public services**

### **Grade 3**

13. There are 196 trainees involved in the care programme. This includes 157 modern apprentices, 33 youth trainees and six adults on the work-based training for adults programme. Heathercroft Services has three contracts with different TECs to deliver care training. All trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3, in direct or continuing care at residential homes. The company has written its own textbooks to accompany the NVQ training.

14. Most training is completed on placement. The training advisers are occupationally qualified and hold assessor awards. The self-assessment report identified some strengths which are no more than contractual requirements and normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ frequent workplace visits made by training adviser
- ◆ good-quality placements
- ◆ trainees are well motivated and make good progress
- ◆ good support given to work-based assessors

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ incomplete initial assessment process
- ◆ trainees' awareness of key skills is poor
- ◆ trainees' progress is not effectively documented
- ◆ some poor induction

15. On-site support for trainees is very effective. In addition to regular monitoring

visits, workplace visits for assessment or additional support are made fortnightly.

16. Progress reviews result in clearly identified short-term targets. Trainees are confident that NVQ units will be completed within achievement dates, and tracking records shown confirm that these are being met. Trainees' portfolios and internal/external verifiers' reports show that trainees make good progress. Employers provide good work placements and opportunities to progress. Heathercroft Services actively supports employers by training and offering mentoring support to work-based assessors. When they are training and still new to the rôle, work-based assessors have continual contact from the company's training advisers.

17. The company has recently introduced an initial assessment document for trainees to complete, in which they have the opportunity to identify any needs which they may have, including key skills. Induction is not organised in a consistent manner across the different TEC areas. Some induction sessions are short, lasting less than one hour. This results in some trainees not remembering Heathercroft Services' policies and procedures. Explicit training for key skills at NVQ level 3 does not start until trainees have been on their programme for two to three months. Some trainees do not have a full understanding or awareness of key skills. Some excellent training materials have been developed, additional resources and information collated. This best practice is not always shared among trainers.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

18. Heathercroft Services has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which meets legislative, TEC and awarding body requirements. The policy is detailed and is renewed on an annual basis. The company has clear procedures for the policy's implementation, including data-monitoring systems. The number of trainees and employees from minority ethnic groups broadly reflects the composition of the company's TEC areas. The representation of trainees and employees with disabilities exceeds that in the communities served. Heathercroft Services is a member of the Equality Exchange run by the Equal Opportunities Commission. The strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report differ from those identified by inspectors, who awarded a higher grade.



### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good understanding by staff of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ good facilities for those with disabilities
- ◆ effective promotion, of equal opportunities, through publicity material
- ◆ effective review and documentation of equal opportunities procedures

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of equal opportunities training for staff
- ◆ some lack of awareness of equal opportunities among trainees

19. Heathercroft Services promotes antidiscriminatory practice at all levels within the organisation, and this commitment is deeply embedded within the organisation's culture. Selection procedures are fair and take account of trainees' previous experience. The company promotes the achievement and development of individuals, irrespective of ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation or other traditional barriers to equality. An equal opportunities questionnaire is sent to trainees, employers and staff. Equal opportunities procedures are effectively documented and reviewed. The training centre has good facilities for wheelchair users, including a video system (to alert reception staff to the arrival of those with disabilities), parking facilities and wide doors to accommodate wheelchairs. The company has recently changed the style of its publicity materials to ensure that they present positive images of groups within the community which have traditionally faced discrimination.

20. The staff at Heathercroft Services demonstrate a clear understanding of equality issues. However, the company does not arrange for staff to receive a structured training programme to increase their understanding of changes in legislation or good practice developments. The awareness of equal opportunities among trainees varies across occupational areas: it is greater in the care sector than within customer service. The company seeks, through the induction process, to develop a consistent level of awareness among trainees of equal opportunities, but this has not been effective.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 2**

21. Employers approach Heathercroft Services to provide training for their staff. All except one of the trainees are employed. Trainees receive effective induction, at which the structure of the NVQ course is explained and issues, such as health and safety and equal opportunities, are covered. They are given a written record of this process. Subjects, such as first aid and manual handling, are also discussed and are subsequently well remembered by trainees. The environment at the company is a caring and supporting one. The company has well-developed working relationships

with a wide range of employers. Trainees are positive about the level of support which they receive from Heathercroft Services' staff. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, and additional strengths and weaknesses were found. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ frequent reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ support from training advisers available outside of office hours
- ◆ good advice given on progression and career development
- ◆ good monitoring of trainees' progress and welfare
- ◆ effective induction

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ unsystematic assessment of key skills
- ◆ no systematic testing to identify any additional learning needs

22. Managerial responsibility for trainee support is clearly understood. First-line responsibility is taken by training advisers, backed by senior managers.

23. Staff have a detailed knowledge of each trainee's circumstances. The progress and welfare of trainees are monitored, and additional support is offered, where appropriate. Heathercroft Services adjusts the frequency, timing and duration of staff visits to meet trainees and employers' needs. Training advisers are available to support and help trainees outside of normal office hours. Trainees who experience difficulties, receive good individual support, and additional peripatetic trainers are provided for assessment and training. Frequent reviews of trainees' work encourage good progress towards portfolio-building. The company's staff offer comprehensive careers advice about progression opportunities beyond NVQs, encouraging trainees to use their NVQ training as part of their overall career development.

24. Heathercroft Services' staff have relevant occupational experience and build good working relationships with employers. The company encourages employers to allow its staff to become work-based assessors and to provide relevant on-the-job training. One employer has changed the shifts of a part-time member of staff to enable him/her to assess different aspects of the NVQ. The company helps the work-based staff, during training, by offering good support, including supplying reading bibliographies and the names and addresses of relevant organisations which might prove helpful. This support for staff means that they have a good understanding of the NVQ process and can pass this on to trainees. Staff from Heathercroft Services also help employers, with explanations and advice on how to research information for projects.

25. Trainees are not tested systematically on entry to a programme to establish whether additional support is required, although objective tests are available.

Trainees are encouraged to identify their own needs for additional learning support, including key skills, by completing an initial assessment form.

## Management of training

## Grade 3

26. The company has grown considerably in the past three years and has consistently exceeded its TEC targets during this period, in terms of NVQ achievements. Recent changes have transferred the daily control of the organisation from the proprietors to a management team. This has produced changes to the staffing structure, resulting in smoother lines of communication and clearer responsibilities. There is a staff appraisal and development system which is currently under review. The management information system has traditionally been driven by TEC requirements, as opposed to business needs. The company has a business plan which is in the process of being developed. The self-assessment report did not identify all of the strengths and weaknesses of Heathercroft Services. Inspectors awarded a lower grade for this area than was proposed by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ open communication throughout the organisation
- ◆ good staff induction and appraisal
- ◆ continuous staff development

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ limited management information system
- ◆ no structured development of staff's teaching and training skills
- ◆ underdeveloped business plan

27. There are opportunities for all members of staff to contribute towards improving the effectiveness of training. Monthly meetings, at different personnel levels and in all areas of responsibility, are recorded and minutes circulated. Topics of particular interest are raised at subsequent meetings and ultimately discussed by a wider audience at monthly general staff meetings, if appropriate. All new members of staff follow a planned induction, involving a general induction and, in most cases, a more specific job-rôle induction. Probationary reports are produced after the first six months' employment. They are thorough and honest. There are six-monthly work reviews and an annual staff appraisal with line managers. Areas of personal and corporate development are discussed and recorded. A training plan for the current year has been devised, including a wide range of training opportunities: information technology, customer service, first aid, training and development lead body awards and progression to management. Staff are keen to improve their skills and encouraged to take new qualifications. The company produces a regular newsletter which is sent to all employees, employers and, wherever possible, trainees. It not

only contains items of general interest and updates about qualifications, but also celebrates student achievement.

28. The management-information system is basic and driven by the traditional requirements of the TEC. Consequently, there is little information available to support an analysis of those starting and leaving or achievement by occupational sector. The staff training plan does not currently offer sufficient learning opportunities to gain teaching and training qualifications. It concentrates primarily on training and development lead body awards and on occupational NVQs. The company has a strategic plan to meet the objectives of its Investors in People accreditation.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 3

29. Heathercroft Services has a documented quality assurance system which meets the requirements of the three TECs with which the company contracts. The company is an Investor in People. Internal verification systems are in place. Heathercroft Services has identified that change needs to be made to its quality assurance procedures and has begun working towards improving the system. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered to be no more than normal practice by inspectors, but additional strengths and weaknesses were identified, and the grade awarded was the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ customer charter states standard of service
- ◆ well-documented policies and procedures
- ◆ frequent quality assurance meetings

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ quality assurance procedures not embedded
- ◆ lack of formal record-keeping
- ◆ informal methods of sharing good practice

30. All staff have been involved in the process of self-assessment, and areas of development have been identified in an action-plan. The company has a quality assurance file, which holds its policies, and also a working file which contains working practices. However, the systems are not yet fully embedded, and not enough evidence is available to prove that the systems work effectively. Meetings of the quality assurance group are held monthly, and quality assurance is a regular item on the general staff meeting agenda, also held monthly. There is no formal mechanism to ensure that good practice is shared, although it can be discussed at staff meetings.

31. The company has a customer charter which is widely distributed and states clearly the standards of service which customers can expect. This has not been in place long enough to ascertain the level of performance against the standards set.

32. Feedback from staff and trainees' questionnaires is collated and monitored. Currently, this is done once a year, but the company has identified that reviews should be conducted more frequently. Any issues needing immediate attention are passed to the relevant personnel and dealt with, but no formal records are kept.