



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1998

Nova Training Ltd

SUMMARY

Nova Training Ltd offers good training in engineering and satisfactory training in administration and retail. There are no work placements for information technology trainees. It provides excellent support, particularly pastoral support, to its trainees, of whom 34 per cent have learning disabilities or are disadvantaged. No trainees are rejected at recruitment. There are good working relationships among staff, trainees, employers and local agencies. Training in the centre is well planned. There is an open management style and evidence of continuous improvement. Management information is not well used, and evaluation of training is underdeveloped.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	1
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective engineering training
- ◆ excellent pastoral support
- ◆ excellent working relationships with trainees and employers
- ◆ open management style
- ◆ open recruitment for all trainees
- ◆ positive links with local community groups
- ◆ quality assurance has led to continuous improvements
- ◆ well-planned tuition

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ evaluation of training is underdeveloped
- ◆ management information not used effectively
- ◆ no work placements for information technology trainees
- ◆ poor subcontracted quality assurance procedures
- ◆ weak equal opportunities monitoring and evaluation

INTRODUCTION

1. Nova Training Ltd was formed in September 1992, following a management buy-out of Corbett Training Services by two of its senior employees. When one of the partners retired, the remaining partner became the managing director. The company has three sites and 36 staff, with the head office in Willenhall, West Midlands. The company has just purchased a new building nearby, which will become the head office in 1999. There are 250 trainees in engineering, motor vehicle, business administration, information technology and retail. There is a small contract for seven trainees in printing which is subcontracted to a local college. Engineering training is subcontracted to two local employers which previously managed their own contracts. Thirty-four per cent of trainees have learning disabilities or are disadvantaged in some way. Nova Training has contracts with Walsall and Dudley Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), for modern apprenticeships, national traineeships, youth and adult training and some New Deal training. Most trainees are employed or on work placement with one of 165 employers. Information technology training is offered in the Willenhall centre and does not include work placements. Sixty to 70 per cent of trainees on youth programmes and 40 to 50 per cent of adults achieve qualifications and jobs.

2. The area covered by the training provider is deprived and depressed, with a high unemployment rate, at 7 per cent. Eleven per cent those in the local population are from minority ethnic groups. The main industry used to be engineering, but this has declined, with several large employers closing. There has, however, been a growth of small engineering firms. Service sector jobs have increased from 49 per cent to 68 per cent, of which 18 per cent is retail. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Walsall and Dudley respectively is 33.8 and 42.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Nova Training's self-assessment report was produced in May 1998, following two workshops held by the local TEC. The report was written by the quality consultant in conjunction with the managing director, senior management team and quality team. The new engineering provision was not included in the assessment process.

4. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 22 days at Nova Training. Inspectors interviewed 54 trainees, all members of staff, 15 employers and visited 11 placements. One induction session and 12 assessments were observed. Inspectors also reviewed policies and procedures, trainees' records, management information and contracts.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

5. Nova Training offers engineering and motor-vehicle training. Engineering is subcontracted. Nova Training has been responsible for the contractual performance and quality assurance of engineering since April this year. Motor-vehicle training takes place at the company's workshop in Netherton. One provider has 11 modern apprentices, working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 and national or higher national certificates. Trainees can progress to either a part- or full-time degree course. The other provider has 15 employed trainees, including five modern apprentices. Trainees work towards NVQ levels 2 and 3. The NVQ level 2 is delivered and assessed at a local college.

6. The company has 102 motor-vehicle trainees, 32 of whom are modern apprentices. Most trainees are employed or on work placement, with off-the-job training taking place at the company's workshop. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses which were agreed on by inspectors. The grade proposed by the company referred only to motor-vehicle training. The grade awarded by inspectors includes engineering and is the same as that proposed by Nova Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ all engineering trainees are employed
- ◆ comprehensive induction
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ good communications among trainees, trainers and employers
- ◆ effectively planned and communicated on-the-job training in engineering
- ◆ progression to higher qualifications available in engineering

- ◆ foreign-language classes available to engineering trainees
- ◆ motor-vehicle assessors work well as a team
- ◆ frequent progress reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some incomplete documentation
- ◆ some missed opportunities for assessment
- ◆ key skills underdeveloped

GOOD PRACTICE

Apprentices at one subcontractor's premises meet the group's training manager every month. The meetings are effective, well structured and consistent, each following a set agenda. Issues highlighted at the meeting are promptly acted on, and results are fed back at the next meeting. These meetings allow trainees to raise issues about their training experience. The group's training manager feeds back to departmental managers.

7. Both subcontractors offer a comprehensive induction to training, identifying trainees' previous learning and experience first of all. Health and safety are a priority. Engineering trainees are employed, irrespective of the programme which they are following. Trainees are motivated and have a clear understanding of the qualifications towards which they are working. There are strong working relationships among trainees, trainers and employers. Training is effectively tailored to meet individual trainees' needs. Training in the workplace is well structured, with trainees providing good work-based evidence. Trainees are encouraged to take higher-level qualifications which are relevant to their vocational area. German classes are available at one subcontractor's premises to help apprentices to talk to visiting German customers.

8. Motor-vehicle assessors are well qualified and have a wealth of industrial experience. They work closely as a team. Trainees' reviews are held every four weeks and involve the workplace supervisor.

9. Some engineering apprenticeship plans are incomplete, with only trainees and employers' signatures. Some trainees have failed recent college examinations and require extra tutorial support. At many of the motor-vehicle reviews, assessors observe and record trainees carrying out tasks, but do not always use this as evidence towards the qualifications. There is little key skills training and assessment. The NVQ achievement rate has dropped over the last three years from 74 to 55 out of 100 leavers.

Business administration

Grade 3

10. There are 82 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in business administration and 41 in information technology, at NVQ levels 1 and 2. Business administration trainees are employed or on placement with an employer. Thirty-three per cent of trainees are modern apprentices and the others are on youth training programmes. Trainees are referred to the company by the careers service or directly by employers. There are six assessors and one internal verifier. Off-the-job training workshops take place in the Willenhall centre and include telephone techniques, assertiveness and health & safety. Unemployed trainees receive initial assessment and induction in the centres and are placed with local employers. Assessors visit

trainees on placement to review progress and carry out assessments. Modern apprentices and national trainees are also assessed for key skills. Fifty-two per cent of trainees gain a job, and 43 per cent achieve a qualification.

11. Twenty-five per cent of trainees complete an information technology qualification before beginning business administration training. A key rôle of the information technology department is to provide learning opportunities for those trainees who have learning difficulties or who lack some of the basic skills required to become employable or acceptable for placement. The courses are based in the classroom, with no off-site, work-based training. Trainees are exposed to some real business demands, through Nova Training's administrative section, which places formal customer orders with the trainees. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses which were confirmed by inspectors. Some of the strengths are standard practice. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-qualified and experienced assessors
- ◆ excellent working relationships between trainees and employers
- ◆ good variety of work placements available
- ◆ clear progression routes
- ◆ good job-skills workshops
- ◆ well-structured training
- ◆ high quantity and quality of trainees' work
- ◆ many computers available for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient number of assessors
- ◆ key skills underdeveloped
- ◆ gaps in internal verification
- ◆ poor-quality paperwork
- ◆ lack of detailed reviews
- ◆ some trainees and employers unaware of programme content
- ◆ lack of work placements in information technology
- ◆ some obsolete computer software used for NVQ level 1 work

12. In business administration, assessors have relevant work experience and hold various qualifications: assessor, internal verifier, accreditation of prior learning adviser and trainer. Assessors have a good rapport with trainees and employers and are credible and professional. There is a wide variety of placements, established over several years, ranging from a large computer retail company to a small engineering firm. The placements enable trainees to produce a good range of evidence. Many trainees have been with Nova Training for over two years and have progressed from qualifications in information technology, through the business administration levels, to employment.

13. Initially, in information technology, several trainees do not have the confidence or level of basic skills to start placements. They use information technology training in the centre to develop to a stage where they can succeed in a placement. Off-the-job workshops are effective and popular, with some workshops booked well in advance. Those trainees unable to attend the sessions receive individual tuition and written assignments. Information technology trainees have access to a computer each, with over 50 available at any one time. Training is co-ordinated and well planned to include both teaching sessions and time when trainees work unsupervised. Trainees work hard, helping and supporting one another. They proceed at their own pace, but are monitored closely by the trainer, who provides help and support to individuals. The achievement of qualifications is high: 90 NVQs per 100 leavers.

14. In business administration, one part-time assessor has responsibility for 46 per cent of trainees. Staff are aware of key skills and have just started to plan assessments in the workplace where modern apprentices have already completed much of their qualification. A pilot on initial assessment of key skills has taken place at the Castleton site. Internal verification occurs at the end of training and not throughout. Portfolios have not been sampled, as planned, and assessors have not been observed in the workplace. Handouts and forms given to trainees are badly photocopied, not centred and are typed, rather than word-processed. Many review records are completed via ticks or single-word comments. Some trainees and workplace supervisors do not know what the training programme includes or what they are entitled to expect.

15. Information technology trainees are not offered work placements as part of their training. This is acceptable for NVQ level 1, for those with learning difficulties and for those lacking basic workplace skills. The high level of support helps these trainees to develop and build confidence to enter employment. However, NVQ level 2 trainees are not exposed to the occupational experience which other programmes offer. Trainees' progress and NVQ achievement is satisfactory: in 1997-98, the average time taken to achieve NVQ level 1 was 17 weeks, progression to NVQ level 2 taking a further 22 weeks. Twenty-two per cent of adults gained employment within three months of completing their training. Some of the computer software used is out of date and is now not used in the workplace.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

16. Nova Training has 40 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3 in retail, warehousing and customer service. Five trainees are modern apprentices, seven national trainees and five are adult trainees. Trainees have a one-day induction, followed by work placement. Most training takes place in the workplace and is supported by workplace supervisors and Nova Training's staff. The company identified several strengths and weaknesses in this area which were confirmed by inspectors. Inspectors also found additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is the same as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly experienced, qualified and committed staff
- ◆ effective partnerships among employers, trainees and staff
- ◆ trainees clearly understand their programmes
- ◆ assessors' work is monitored beyond awarding bodies' requirements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ assessments not effectively documented
- ◆ key skills underdeveloped
- ◆ ineffective training materials
- ◆ trainees unable to achieve unit accreditation easily

17. Staff genuinely care for trainees' progress and welfare, visiting trainees approximately every two weeks. There are very effective working relationships among staff, employers and trainees, who work as a team to plan and co-ordinate training and assessments. Trainees have a good understanding of their programme and of their progress and future plans. Trainees experience a wide variety of work activities which, in some workplaces, are well supported by open-learning workbooks. Nova Training provides retail trainees with a handout pack, but this lacks structure and is not used effectively to support learning. Assessments are adequately planned, and trainees' underpinning knowledge is checked thoroughly. Assessment practices are fair. Internal verifiers observe assessments, check records and question trainees more frequently than required by the awarding body. They also regularly check assessors' work.

18. Records of assessment are weak. Product evidence seen by assessors is not always included in the portfolio or referred to in observation notes. There is no common system used by assessors for recording assessments or future action points. Assessment records are sometimes completed several days after assessment from informal notes made in the assessor's diary. Trainees take little responsibility for maintaining portfolios, and this has resulted in trainees being spoon-fed by assessors. Trainees cannot readily achieve unit accreditation, owing to a lack of up-

to-date unit summaries. Those trainees leaving the programme before completion have to wait for the assessor to assess all units before achieving individual units' accreditation. Key skills have not yet been fully integrated in the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes. There is a clear policy to introduce key skills to trainees, three months after the start of the programme, but this is not fully implemented. Trainees are working on key skills and NVQ units independently. There is some initial assessment of key skills, which is used to inform trainees' individual training plans.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

19. Nova Training has an equal opportunities policy and procedures which form part of the quality manual. Procedures are well documented and are promoted to trainees, staff and employers. The quality consultant is reviewing equal opportunities to further develop audit procedures. The company has recently produced data on trainees' gender, ethnicity and disability which have yet to be analysed. The self-assessment report accurately identified weaknesses in this area, but the strengths are standard practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good gender mix and representation of minority ethnic groups
- ◆ complaints and grievances are resolved promptly and effectively
- ◆ positive links with local community groups and agencies
- ◆ open recruitment for all trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some premises inaccessible to those with limited mobility
- ◆ monitoring and evaluation procedures underdeveloped

20. Nova Training has successfully recruited and placed young female trainees in traditionally male-dominated vocational areas. Men are well represented in the business administration area. Records and feedback from trainees show that complaints have been properly dealt with. Appropriate improvements have been made to training. Nova Training encourages links with local minority ethnic groups and allows its premises to be used for these groups' community meetings. Staff are active within various local network support agencies and have close contact with community groups which promote the well-being of all young people in the community. Nova Training operates an open-door policy which ensures that trainees, at all levels of ability, are given equal access to training opportunities. Nova Training has met and exceeded its recruitment targets for trainees from minority ethnic groups.

21. The premises at Netherton and Willenhall are inaccessible to those with limited mobility. The recent purchase of the freehold to new premises will address this issue (refurbishment of the new premises will be completed during 1999). There is a lack of monitoring and evaluation of data on trainees.

Trainee support

Grade 1

22. Trainees vary in ability, from the very able and self-driven to others who have learning difficulties or lack some basic skills. The staff, systems and resources meet trainees' widely varying needs across all occupational sectors. Trainee support consists of initial assessment, finding placements, tutorials and assessments, on- and off-the-job training, regular reviews, pastoral support and preparation for, and help with, finding jobs. Two NVQ co-ordinators have recently been appointed to improve integration of training and assessment, initial interviews and support for non-achievers. Thirty-four per cent of trainees receive additional learning support. The self-assessment report identified strengths and weaknesses which were confirmed by inspectors. The grade awarded is higher than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment
- ◆ accessible and widely used literacy, numeracy and job skills training
- ◆ well-planned and flexible tutorial and pastoral support
- ◆ small training groups
- ◆ trainees' reviews are frequent
- ◆ highly responsive staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unstimulating induction training

23. At interview, each trainee receives support to analyse needs and aspirations and to test skills levels. There is a well-used workshop programme, covering vocational and generic skills, including preparation for employment. Topics covered include telephone techniques, presentation, assertiveness, interviews and body language. These sessions are open to both in-house trainees and those on work placements or in employment. Trainees on placement are visited frequently, usually weekly. Pastoral support is seen as a priority within the company, with experienced and sensitive staff supporting issues such as pregnancy, alcohol, drug abuse and homeless trainees. Staff have good contacts with local support networks. Trainers respond quickly to any changing circumstances of trainees which may affect their progress towards qualification and jobs. For example, additional support was given to a trainee to gain an NVQ earlier than planned – the employer wanted to offer a full-time post, as long as the trainee was qualified.

24. Literacy and numeracy sessions are readily available to all trainees. Intensive

individual support is achieved by using small groups of between four and six trainees. Minibuses are provided to help and encourage trainees' attendance at those locations which are difficult to get to. Also, when trainees complete their placement, they continue to be paid their allowance until an alternative placement is found. Some training is uninteresting for trainees.

Management of training

Grade 2

25. Nova Training is managed from the central office at Willenhall, which provides operational support to staff based at the Castleton Street and Primrose Hill sites. Three executives manage the commercial, motor-vehicle and administration areas, reporting to the managing director who has overall responsibility. There is a quality team and a health and safety team. The company identified several strengths and one weakness in this area in its self-assessment report. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is the same as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open management style
- ◆ frequent staff reviews
- ◆ effective staff induction
- ◆ effective deployment of staff
- ◆ good internal communication

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ management information not used effectively
- ◆ gaps in key skills training for some staff

26. Staff and managers work well together. Regular meetings are held to address general issues within the company, and quality circle meetings are held quarterly to tackle specific business priorities. The managing director and senior managers are open and accessible. Staff enjoy working for the company. The efforts and achievements of staff are recognised informally. Staff are consulted before the development of the annual business plan. Operational plans are also developed which link clearly to the business plan. There are frequent and regular staff supervision sessions, at which progress and problems are discussed and future actions agreed on. Tutors and assessors have specific targets for trainees' achievements. Senior management have strategic and operational objectives. All staff have clear and up-to-date job descriptions. New staff have an effective and well-structured induction on joining the company. Staff induction is well supported by a range of information packs. Staff are effectively deployed in the company, according to their specialist skills, experience and interests. Staff undertake a range of development activities, and the company supports both internal and external

development. There are good facilities for producing management information in a range of formats. There is a dedicated member of staff responsible for producing data.

27. Managers do not agree on NVQ completion targets for staff members. Staff reviews do not focus on broad objectives. Gaps exist in key skills training for some staff. Clear links are not always made between the training activity and the person's job rôle.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

28. Nova Training has a quality assurance system, which meets the ISO 9002 quality standard. It also meets the requirements of the awarding bodies, and of Walsall and Dudley TECs. Quality assurance is managed by the quality department and supported by an external consultant. Since April this year, Nova Training has been responsible for quality-assuring three subcontracted training providers. The company's strong links with local employers have produced good work placements. The company did not recognise all of the weaknesses in this area. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ rigorous internal audit system
- ◆ quality assurance procedures are understood by staff
- ◆ quality assurance has led to continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ subcontractors' quality assurance procedures are not established
- ◆ evaluation of training is underdeveloped
- ◆ some internal verification activity is conducted at programme end

29. Quality assurance procedures are well documented. Internal audits are rigorous, with non-compliance recorded and actioned. Audits also identify areas for improvement. Staff, throughout the organisation, are fully aware of the quality assurance system, with copies of the quality assurance and procedures manuals readily available. Changes to procedures are communicated effectively via memoranda and notification, signed by staff in acknowledgement.

30. Procedures for assuring the quality of subcontractors have recently been revised, but have yet to be implemented. Evaluations of trainees and employers' opinions of training are immature, and are yet to have any impact on developing training programmes' quality. Information about leavers and their destinations is not analysed to improve the quality of training. Within the company, there are established procedures for internal verification. However, in some programmes,



internal verification sampling takes place after trainees' portfolios have been completed.