



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1998

Project Management (Staffordshire) Ltd

SUMMARY

Project Management (Staffordshire) Ltd has a caring and empathetic staff which deals well with a wide-ranging group of trainees. Training programmes offer excellent opportunities for trainees to learn a trade and to prepare for the world of work. Most trainees who complete their programmes gain employment. The company has good links with employers. However, links with the local further education college are poor in the subcontracted construction training. Trainees are not always clear about their qualifications' aims or assessment criteria. Equal opportunities are effectively promoted. Quality assurance systems are underdeveloped, and systems for trainees' feedback lack formality.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	2
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good management and dedicated staff
- ◆ high level of trainee support at the centre and in the workplace
- ◆ extensive taster programmes available
- ◆ good personal development opportunities for trainees
- ◆ good progression rates to employment
- ◆ high achievement rates in wordpower and numberpower qualifications

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete workplace induction
- ◆ induction at the centre lacks reinforcement
- ◆ trainees lack understanding of qualifications' aims
- ◆ poor control of subcontracted construction training
- ◆ underdeveloped quality assurance system
- ◆ process of trainees' feedback and evaluation not fully implemented

INTRODUCTION

1. Project Management (Staffordshire) Ltd is based in Stoke-on-Trent and was founded in 1982 to provide opportunities for the occupational and personal development of young people. A range of outdoor activities is arranged for trainees, including rock-climbing, abseiling, pot-holing and paint-balling. The company delivers training mainly to disaffected young people with particular training needs. In 1993, Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) expressed a wish that all training providers should form consortia to reduce the number of individual contracts issued. The Multitrain group was formed and now embraces five member companies, of which Project Management is the senior member. The TEC issues a single contract to Multitrain which then subdivides it internally. At the time of inspection, 332 trainees were receiving government-funded training through Project Management (Staffordshire) Ltd.

2. The company offers training in construction, manufacturing, engineering and foundation for work. Its centre at Shelton has accredited facilities to deliver training in engineering and painting & decorating to NVQ level 2. A small building services workshop is used to enable new trainees to sample activities before selecting a trade. The city of Stoke-on-Trent is the major conurbation in north Staffordshire, accounting for 253,300 of the 471,000 population. Those from minority ethnic groups account for 3.5 per cent of the local population, of which 78 per cent is Asian. Seventy-five per cent of the industry in the area is based in the city, as new commercial and logistic business has developed to replace the traditional potteries industry. The company has a database of over 120 workplace sponsors which regularly provide opportunities for trainees, often leading to permanent employment.

3. Primary employment in the city is still connected to the potteries, but the number of employed people has decreased considerably, and mining and steel jobs have disappeared. Rubber-tyre production continues, but employment in this industry has reduced by three-quarters over the last two decades. Unemployment levels in Staffordshire currently approximate to the national average, but those within the city's travel-to-work area are higher. Last year, over half of local school leavers continued to full-time education, 15 per cent entered youth training programmes and 13 per cent entered employment. The number of Staffordshire school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 46.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997, but within Stoke-on-Trent, the success rate was much lower, at 30.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. An associate consultant, using the pilot Quantum Edge framework, compiled the self-assessment report on the company's behalf. The report did not follow the framework of *Raising the Standard*, and staff were not very involved in its preparation. It did not accurately reflect provision and was inaccurate in parts. Each occupational area was graded separately for generic aspects, and inspectors found it necessary to compare their judgements against repeated statements in each area, and to aggregate the associated grades.

5. A team of seven inspectors, plus a specialist adviser in ceramics, spent a total of 34 days at Project Management during September 1998. Inspectors observed and met 27 trainees at the Shelton training centre. They visited 31 workplaces and the local further education college. They interviewed 44 work-based trainees and held meetings with company staff, employers, trainers, assessors and representatives from the TEC. Inspectors examined management documents, individual trainees' files, portfolios and progression data, as well as audit and external verifiers' reports.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

6. The company has 32 trainees in construction programmes, working in electrical installations, carpentry & joinery, brickwork, plumbing and painting & decorating. The company is accredited to offer NVQ levels 1 and 2 in painting and decorating at its own training centre. The remaining off-the-job training is carried out at the local further education college, mainly on a day-release basis. Trainees are placed with appropriate employers for the work-experience element of their programmes. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' selection enhanced by taster programmes
- ◆ good learning materials and other resources support trainees' learning at college
- ◆ trainees work without supervision, when appropriate
- ◆ good links with supportive employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor control over subcontracted training
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of trainees' assessment
- ◆ progress reviews do not set effective targets for trainees
- ◆ no opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ training programmes not agreed on with employers
- ◆ poor retention rates

7. Trainees take a three-week taster programme, during which they are assessed for suitability to various trades. Realistic targets are set during the taster programme; these are recorded in trainees' individual training plans. Trainees' progress is regularly monitored, although training reviews do not always set clear targets. Basic skills are assessed, and trainees' needs are identified, with additional learning support provided, where appropriate. Trainees in painting and decorating are regularly assessed at the centre, and the results are recorded to enable accurate tracking of their progress. Trainees produce work to industry standards, satisfying awarding bodies' criteria and meeting employers' demands. Trainees are aware of NVQ assessment criteria, and good use is made of learning support materials. Many trainees are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their work, which is often completed well and without constant supervision. Three-quarters of trainees continue in employment, on completion of their programme. Seventy per cent of trainees achieve an NVQ level 1 and 2, which is above the national average. Some trainees progress to NVQ level 3 qualifications with their employer's support.

8. Of the 40 trainees who began on the programme last year, one-third dropped out. Opportunities for trainees to access work-based assessment are not offered. Links with the subcontracted college provision are weak. Monitoring of trainees' attendance and progress during off-the-job training is poor. Employers do not use training plans for those trainees who are working on site. Prospective employers enter into a formal work-placement agreement with Project Management. This is supported by a helpful pack containing information on health and safety requirements.

Engineering

Grade 3

9. Thirty-three trainees are currently on engineering programmes, of whom 24 are taking NVQ level 2 foundation training; one undertaking NVQ at level 3. Trainees spend the first three weeks training at the company's own centre, sampling each occupational department, engaging in character-building exercises. Those who elect to continue in engineering attend the company's workshops until an appropriate work placement is allocated, after which they attend the centre for one day each week. While identifying additional strengths and weaknesses, inspectors agreed with the grade proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training delivered to meet individual trainees and placement companies' needs
- ◆ good management and recording of assessment records
- ◆ good working relationships among trainees, trainers and placement companies
- ◆ high proportion of trainees obtains relevant employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees do not understand the assessment process
- ◆ poor awareness, among trainees, of progress on NVQ
- ◆ poor awareness of some health and safety issues

10. All training and assessment is undertaken at the accredited Shelton centre. Staff are appropriately qualified to deliver the awards. Training is tailored to trainees and placement companies' needs and is often delivered on an individual basis. Staff allow trainees to work at their own pace, which builds confidence. Work is of an acceptable industry standard. Assessment is carried out regularly, and results are recorded on a clear spreadsheet, giving instant, accurate information about trainees' progress. The trainer visits trainees in the workplace each quarter for a formal review. Good working relationships are fostered among trainees, trainers and work-placement supervisors. Trainees are carefully selected to suit the work-placement companies' expectations. Last year, 58 per cent of trainees who completed their programme secured permanent employment with their placement company.

11. Many trainees have a poor understanding of the qualification system and the assessment process. There is a wide difference in the rate of progression among trainees, and some are unaware of their progress. Understanding of health and safety issues is poor, with some work-based trainees unclear about relevant legislation. Resources in workshops are adequate for the programme, but there is some overcrowding.

Manufacturing

Grade 2

12. Trainees engage in a wide variety of manufacturing occupations. There are 21 employed trainees taking NVQ level 2 in performing manufacturing operations (PMO). One hundred and sixty-nine trainees, of whom 141 are employed, are taking the vocational qualification at NVQ level 2 in machining, assembly and processing skills (MAPS). All training is carried out in work placements, with off-the-job basic skills training provided, where needed. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good working relationships among employers, trainers and trainees
- ◆ well-planned, documented and well-delivered training
- ◆ trainees' high rates of success in gaining qualifications and jobs
- ◆ occupational expertise of staff enables training and assessment in a range of industrial settings

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no targets set for progression
- ◆ trainees' insufficient understanding of training and assessment procedures

GOOD PRACTICE

A trainee had two years' experience in the commercial window-making industry. Project Management's staff accredited the trainee's prior experience by taking testimonials from previous foremen and supervisors. He is now pursuing a MAPS level 2 qualification and, on the advice of staff, has taken up an evening course in art and design to extend his skills base.

13. Qualifications and training programmes are customised to meet diverse manufacturing settings' requirements, such as double glazing, producing ceramic items, printing and carton manufacture. Staff update their knowledge of the various manufacturing operations and ensure that trainees are rigorously assessed. Assessment requirements are regularly shared with placement supervisors to ensure that they meet the operational procedures of the employment. Trainers have devised imaginative methods for employment-based training and use these flexibly to meet trainees' needs. Many trainees are successful in finding appropriate jobs. Placement employers receive good support from the company to enable them and the trainees to benefit from the MAPS qualification. In 1997, 81 per cent of trainees secured full-time jobs and nearly two-thirds achieved their qualification.

14. Trainees are not familiar with the requirements of the qualification, and many did not realise that their work placement formed part of their training. Though final-target achievement dates are set and trainees' progress is regularly reviewed, there are no interim achievement targets set.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

15. Training includes a 12-week prevocational programme and offers training to those with additional training needs. An open-access policy is offered, and either trainees are referred from the careers and employment services or they refer themselves. All trainees recruited follow the prevocational route and participate in a range of taster options, including painting and decorating, plumbing and engineering. Trainees select a vocational option at the end of an initial three-week assessment period. Most trainees are allocated a work placement for the remainder of the programme. Trainees are assessed for literacy and numeracy ability and, where appropriate, take wordpower and numberpower qualifications. There are 40 trainees on prevocational training and 33 identified as having additional training needs. The self-assessment report did not accurately reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the foundation training, and the grade awarded by the inspectors was higher than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open-access recruitment policy
- ◆ wide range of taster options for trainees
- ◆ well-qualified and empathetic staff
- ◆ many trainees progress to further training or jobs
- ◆ well-planned and -documented reviews of additional support
- ◆ good resources for prevocational programme
- ◆ wide range of personal development activities for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees on work placement do not receive induction from the company
- ◆ assessment process poorly understood by trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee with learning difficulties on work placement was given a wide range of tasks appropriate to his abilities. He has benefited from a high level of personal support, from the employer, despite the company being in financial difficulties. During induction, use is made of a Youth Hostel Association renovation project to provide trainees with the opportunity to develop a range of personal skills, through closely supervised activities, such as painting and decorating; path clearing; basic metalwork. The trainees enjoy the opportunity to work in teams, most of them quickly developing a sense of maturity and learning to co-operate with one another.

16. The 12-week prevocational programme is well designed and offers trainees vocational tasters during the first three weeks. Assessments are carried out at regular intervals, assisting trainees to make an informed choice about their occupational direction. Trainees benefit from a range of personal development activities, including team sports and paint-balling, during the initial stages. Literacy and numeracy support is well developed, with trainees attending the centre weekly, while they are on work placement. Good training by empathetic staff is offered at Project Management's premises, and resources are appropriate. The standard of assignments, relevant to trainees' work experience, is good. One trainee with additional training needs is following an NVQ level 1 in horticulture, with work experience provided through the company's own community gardening programme. During the last two years, progression rates from prevocational to mainstream training have remained constant, at 67 per cent. The number of trainees gaining numberpower and wordpower qualifications has increased from nine, in 1996-97, to 62 in 1997-98. The proportion of trainees leaving mainstream training and gaining employment has declined by 15 per cent over the last two years, while the drop-out rate has improved slightly.

17. Local employers provide good work-placement opportunities and offer a high level of support to trainees. Trainees are given an induction to the work placement. However, there are occasions when trainees go immediately into work placement and are not provided with an adequate induction. There are excellent working relationships between the company's staff and work placements. External development officers and assessors regularly visit trainees in the workplace to assess their progress on MAPS qualifications. Trainees who leave their work placement are provided with full-time training at the company's premises, until an alternative placement is found. Trainees are enthusiastic about their programme and appreciate the support and encouragement received from staff and work placements. Trainees following the MAPS level 2 qualification show little awareness of the assessment process and their own progress.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

18. An equal opportunities policy, complying with current legislation and TEC requirements, is included in the trainees' logbook and forms part of their induction programme. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is similar to that found in the local community. Fifteen per cent of trainees are women. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade than that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open-access policy
- ◆ good staff training in equal opportunities issues
- ◆ equal opportunities promoted through marketing materials
- ◆ careers fairs organised to increase awareness of training in local community

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little promotion, to trainees and employers, of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ no access to training centre for those with mobility difficulties
- ◆ lack of evaluation of equal opportunities data

19. The company operates an open-access policy. All new trainees are guaranteed a place, regardless of their background. The comprehensive equal opportunities policy is included in the trainees' logbook, and a member of staff monitors the effectiveness of the policy within the company. Staff undertake equal opportunities training, and some statistical evidence is produced for the six-monthly group management meetings. Full-time employment has been obtained for several trainees with disabilities. Equal opportunities are promoted in the company's marketing material, with posters representing all sectors of the community and efforts made to produce promotional literature in other languages. The company organises well-attended careers fairs to publicise training opportunities to the local community.

20. The policy is not effectively promoted to trainees, who generally have a poor understanding of equal opportunities issues. There is little evaluation of statistical data, which are not used to endorse or modify recruitment procedures. Many work-placement providers have no equal opportunities policy; monitoring is weak. There is no access to the training centre for trainees with mobility difficulties. The complaints procedure is underdeveloped, and review meetings for this purpose are infrequent.

Trainee support

Grade 2

21. Project Management provides a high level of support, both within the centre and at the workplace, for all trainees. Trainees with additional learning needs receive support from specialist support staff in many areas, including literacy, numeracy and personal effectiveness training. Inspectors found more strengths than weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong teamwork and support mechanisms within the centre
- ◆ careful selection and use of supportive employers
- ◆ high level of work-based support by staff
- ◆ additional support effectively delivered, documented and reviewed
- ◆ clear evidence of progression through all programmes to employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ not all trainees take part in initial assessment
- ◆ trainee review documentation not always shared
- ◆ trainees unclear about rôles and responsibilities of training staff and workplace providers

GOOD PRACTICE

A trainee was not attending college, despite the company making transport arrangements for him. The placement provider expressed dissatisfaction with his performance and threatened to sack the trainee. Project Management staff systematically analysed the problem and they adapted the programme, negotiated an extension to the placement and provided the trainee with effective personal support. He has now achieved the qualification and secured permanent employment.

22. Trainees benefit from good support given by committed and empathetic training staff. There is good teamwork and co-operation with the trainees throughout the process. An open-access policy is operated, with many trainees enjoying the benefit of a three-week taster period to assist in decisions concerning chosen vocational routes. Trainees complete an initial assessment. Many trainees joining the foundation for work programme successfully complete wordpower and numberpower qualifications or receive additional support at work. The progress of trainees on programmes leading to employment, including employment with Project Management, is fully documented.

23. Trainees who are placed directly with an employer are often excluded from initial assessment and do not receive induction or a general introduction to their training programme. Induction, held at the centre, does not sufficiently reinforce those messages delivered to trainees. Some trainees were unclear of Project Management's rôle and responsibilities in the training-and-assessment process. Copies of trainees' reviews are not routinely shared with trainees or workplace providers. Assessment of trainees' prior learning in manufacturing is sometimes carried out by trainers.

Management of training

Grade 2

24. The company is clear about its purpose and direction. People and resources are deployed effectively, and staff have appropriate job descriptions in line with agreed priorities. The appraisal system identifies staff development needs and includes opportunities for personal development. Staff meet regularly to exchange information, and realistic training targets are set and monitored regularly. Inspectors found more strengths than weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear business development plan
- ◆ realistic targets are set and monitored
- ◆ good staff appraisal
- ◆ opportunities for personal development of staff
- ◆ good links with local TEC
- ◆ effective use of management-information system
- ◆ enthusiastic and dedicated staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some construction subcontractors unaware of organisational targets
- ◆ poor control over subcontracted training in construction
- ◆ process of feedback and evaluation of trainees not embedded

GOOD PRACTICE

Staff development is sometimes used to allow company staff to meet their own personal development needs. Recently, two members of staff extended their range of skills by completing training in a foreign language.

25. The company is well managed, with dedicated and hard-working staff. The annual business-development-planning process involves all staff and managers. The company has established good working relationships with employers which provide good work placements. Links with Staffordshire TEC are good. Staff work well as a team, and praise from trainees and employers is high. The effectiveness of staff development, which aims to meet the organisation's needs, is reviewed and evaluated. The company has a clear placement agreement for employers, setting out procedures for off-the job training. The management-information system informs decision-making and is effective in providing progress review schedules.

26. There is a lack of effective control over the subcontracted construction training provision. The process of feedback and evaluation of trainees is new and not fully embedded. Reviews are not linked to trainees' achievement in off-the-job training. Some construction employers are not aware of Project Management's expectations, and there is no formal feedback mechanism for them.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

27. Project Management is an Investor in People and meets the requirements of the TEC and awarding bodies. The company is regarded as a low-risk provider by Staffordshire TEC, following a recent audit survey. A quality assurance policy document is in place and relates to a wide range of training activities. Performance targets are set for the organisation and are reviewed informally through staff meetings. The company has recently implemented a survey of trainees' views on the quality of training. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good systems for tracking trainees' progress
- ◆ excellent NVQ assessment tracking systems for programmes in painting & decorating and engineering
- ◆ thorough internal verification systems for programmes in construction and engineering
- ◆ trainees' destination data clearly documented and evaluated

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ quality assurance framework not embedded in training provision
- ◆ procedures and guidelines not rigorously reviewed
- ◆ some incomplete documentation

28. Through the management information system, trainees' reviews are updated weekly, and their progress is checked on a regular basis. The health and safety officer is responsible for work-placement files which record information, including safety checks, contracts and insurance details. An efficient system for ensuring that workplace insurance is valid is in operation. Effective assessment-tracking systems are in place in the painting & decorating and engineering sections of the training centre. The engineering section uses a comprehensive electronic system, while the painting and decorating system is manual. Good internal verification systems are in place at both the centre and at the subcontracted construction provision at the local further education college. Trainees' destination data for all vocational sectors are regularly collected and evaluated by senior management.

29. The quality assurance framework lacks a formal structure and is not embedded in the provision. Detailed policies and procedures are in place covering a range of activities, including counselling, assessment, interviewing, briefing on work placements and other key activities, but some of these are not used, and there is little checking of whether these policies and procedures are put into practice. Some training plans and review sheets are not accurately completed. There is no formal system for gathering feedback from employers.