



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 1998

Lunn Poly

SUMMARY

Lunn Poly Limited provides comprehensive and effective on- and off-the-job training for trainees working towards NVQs in travel services. Training resources are excellent, and trainees are given study time to support their training. Trainers are highly skilled, and training sessions are challenging and interesting. Trainees are competent and treated as valuable members of the team. Assessment is over-reliant on a narrow range of evidence. All assessment and verification are subcontracted to another provider. These are not well operated and mar the achievements and slow the progress of trainees. Controls over the subcontractors are inadequate to ensure that the quality of assessment matches that of the training. Customer service training is satisfactory. Trainees are given the opportunity to carry out a wide range of work opportunities, but there is no structured off-the-job training. Trainees work in a highly supportive environment and benefit from the considerable encouragement which the company offers throughout training programmes. The company has a culture of continuous improvement and strives to meet trainees' needs.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	3
Leisure, sport & travel	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent programme of on- and off-the-job training in travel services
- ◆ trainees benefit from regular on-the-job study time
- ◆ successful progression within the company
- ◆ protective work environment
- ◆ high level of support for trainees
- ◆ excellent co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor awareness of key skills among trainees
- ◆ narrow range of evidence used for assessment
- ◆ low awareness of equal opportunities among staff
- ◆ ineffective control of subcontracting provision
- ◆ inadequate internal verification programme

INTRODUCTION

1. Lunn Poly Limited is a national travel agency and one of the largest retailers of package holidays and leisure travel in the United Kingdom. Established over 100 years ago as the Polytechnic Touring Association (PTA), Lunn Poly has grown steadily and, in 1972, was acquired by the Thomson Travel Group. The company has a youth training department, located at its head office in Leamington Spa, responsible for all trainees on government-funded training programmes. Lunn Poly has 793 shops throughout the country divided in five divisions, each one headed by a sales director. In each division, there are approximately nine regions, which are responsible for 15 to 22 shops. Each region has a regional sales manager. Lunn Poly employs 5,622 staff, of whom 145 shop managers and 237 assistant shop managers have progressed from government-funded training programmes.

2. Lunn Poly has been offering government-funded training since 1988. Prospective trainees apply through the company's head office. Trainees attend local interviews and 'search for a star' open days. During these events, trainees are assessed on personality, ability and suitability for a career in travel. Trainees are expected to demonstrate a commitment to working in the travel and tourism industry. Individual shops are allocated training places each year, depending on staffing levels and turnover. In many shops, first- and second-year modern apprentices work side by side. Recruitment commences in March, and trainees are employed throughout the summer months. Once on the training programme, trainees undertake a 12-week induction. Off-the-job training starts each September. All off-the-job training takes place in regional training centres throughout the country.

3. Training is offered to young people through contracts with 62 training and enterprise councils (TECs) administered through the National Training Partnership (NTP). Lunn Poly also has direct contracts with Coventry and Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Devon and Cornwall, London East and West London TECs. All trainees employed in retail work towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in travel services, through modern apprenticeship programmes. The company also offers customer service and business administration qualifications to those trainees based at the company's head office and at the leisure air centre. At the time of inspection, there were 660 young people training.

4. Although Lunn Poly collates applications through the youth training department, trainees are recruited locally and are employed in shops near to where they live. Being a national organisation, Lunn Poly operates in areas of high and low unemployment. The company recruits trainees to meet the business needs of the organisation. The proportion of women currently on programme is 89 per cent. About 1 per cent of trainees is from a minority ethnic group.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Lunn Poly produced its first self-assessment report in August 1998. The consultation process involved all staff in the youth training department, personnel staff and training officers responsible for writing training materials. Feedback was also sought from trainees. The company produced a comprehensive self-assessment report which clearly identified the company's strengths and weaknesses. Supporting text is well thought through and accurate. As a result, the company was able to identify areas in need of improvement before inspection. The company was accurate in its proposed grades for travel services, management of training and quality assurance. Inspectors awarded higher grades in customer service, equal opportunities and trainee support.

6. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 29 days at Lunn Poly during October, November and December 1998. Inspectors attended first- and second-year induction programmes, spent a day with the subcontracted internal verification team and met the awarding body's external verifier. Inspectors visited 42 shops in 14 regions of the country. They interviewed 122 trainees, 36 managers, 22 industrial tutors and six assessors. Inspectors also observed 16 training sessions. They examined assessment records, training and action plans, trainees' files and portfolios, internal and external verification documents and documents about the training and its management. The following table shows the grades awarded to the training sessions observed by inspectors.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Leisure, sport & travel	4	12				16
Total	4	12	0	0	0	16

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

7. Lunn Poly has offered customer service NVQ training since 1995. Seventeen modern apprentices have joined the programme in the past three years. Of the eight remaining, one has achieved the modern apprenticeship and seven have recently finished level 2 and one continues to work towards completing their modern apprenticeship. Only two of the leavers achieved level 2. All customer service trainees are based at the company's leisure air centre at Coventry. Trainees follow workbooks and gather evidence for their portfolios. Assessment and internal verification are subcontracted to another training provider. The company's self-assessment report did not identify all of the strengths in this area. Some of the weaknesses were overstated, and others had already been addressed. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive range of work-based activities
- ◆ on-the-job study time enables trainees to meet progress targets
- ◆ good opportunities to progress to full employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no structured formal training programmes
- ◆ poor awareness of key skills
- ◆ limited feedback opportunities for trainees

POOR PRACTICE

The customer service workbooks include preset witness testimony for individual tutors to sign. Each unit has a standardised text which does not do justice to trainees' individual achievement at work and holds no value as a valid item of evidence of their competence.

8. Customer service trainees gain a variety of work experience by spending time in different departments at the leisure air centre. This provides trainees with a valuable and effective way of developing their skills, and opportunities to demonstrate their competence in a wide range of work situations. Lunn Poly developed this scheme to ensure that trainees meet all the requirements of the modern apprenticeship programme. Managers and supervisors fully support this initiative and actively encourage trainees to develop and practise their newly acquired skills.

9. All modern apprentices are given designated study time to complete their workbooks and develop their NVQ portfolios. Industrial tutors ensure that trainees take advantage of this facility, while, at the same time, balancing the needs of the organisation, particularly at busy seasonal periods. On average, one hour's study time each day is encouraged, although work pressures sometimes mean that half or even a whole day is taken by trainees to ensure that they stay on target. All trainees join the programme as employees. They initially receive a training allowance, but are actively encouraged to apply for vacancies as they arise. All trainees currently on the scheme are employed.

10. Trainees do receive some training, but this is arranged to meet the business needs of the organisation and does not meet the needs of the modern apprenticeship programme. Trainees rely on unplanned learning opportunities which arise in the normal course of their work and some occasional individual coaching from their assessor. However, assessors are not formally responsible for training and are contracted to carry out assessment only. Trainees do not receive any specific customer service training. None of the trainees currently working towards customer service qualifications has any knowledge of the requirements for key skills development and assessment. There are plans to introduce these in the near future as trainees approach the completion of their qualification. They are presently unaware of the modern apprenticeship framework, having been given only brief details in their individual training plans.

11. Trainees give informal feedback on their views of the quality of the programme to their industrial tutors during progress reviews and to managers during appraisal. They do not have opportunities to complete anonymous or structured evaluation questionnaires which feed analytical information to training managers. Other modern apprentices in the company have regular opportunities to express their views by

completing questionnaires, following training sessions. Customer service trainees are disadvantaged by not having a similar facility made available to them.

Leisure, sport & travel

Grade 2

12. There are 211 trainees working towards NVQ level 2 and 441 trainees working towards NVQ level 3 in travel services, through modern apprenticeship programmes. Trainees are recruited nationally each year and referred through careers services, schools and colleges. Local eye-catching advertising encourages trainees to apply. Prospective trainees are interviewed in a group and individually; they complete an initial assessment. Successful candidates are placed in shops throughout the country. Each trainee is allocated an industrial tutor, normally the assistant shop manager. Trainees undertake a structured programme of on- and off-the-job training. All off-the-job training takes place at regional training centres. At the end of the 12 weeks, trainees are appraised by their shop managers.

13. Trainees attend a two-day training block each month throughout their two-and-a-half-year training programme with Lunn Poly. Off-the-job training includes product knowledge and geography. It extends trainees' knowledge and understanding of the travel industry and the rôle of a sales consultant. All trainees undertake a primary and advanced geography test as part of their qualification. In 1998, all of the trainees passed these tests. In addition to the off-the-job training, trainees follow a structured workplace training programme. Shop managers set targets regularly for trainees and monitor progress through individual training and development plans. Minimum performance standards are set, and individual progress is monitored frequently. Assessment, internal verification and awarding body registration are subcontracted to a training provider. Assessors visit trainees every 12 weeks to carry out assessments. All staff involved in the assessment process have assessor qualifications and a background in the travel and tourism industry. Achievement rates have improved over the last three years and are satisfactory.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ exceptionally enthusiastic and motivated trainees
- ◆ high levels of occupational competence demonstrated among trainees
- ◆ trainees are valued; many take on significant responsibilities
- ◆ all aspects of training resourced to high standards
- ◆ challenging, creative and enjoyable off-the-job training
- ◆ regular on-the-job study time provided
- ◆ successful progression for trainees within the company

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ variable assessment practice
- ◆ narrow range of evidence used for assessment
- ◆ limited key skills awareness by trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

In one shop, a level 3 trainee is carrying out managerial functions, including dealing with external security issues, deploying relief staff and allocating responsibilities. In other instances, trainees are able to carry out complex holiday bookings confidently and without supervision.

14. Lunn Poly's training is comprehensive, well planned and effective. The programme quality is marred by far less well organised and delivered assessment practices. Trainees are enthusiastic about their training and employment with Lunn Poly. They are set appropriate progress targets and many work ahead of these and are ready to be assessed before their next assessment visit. All trainees receive feedback on their performance and progress at monthly review meetings. Progress reviews are well documented and involve trainees, industrial tutors and managers. Trainees have a calendar of events, used to map off-the-job training. They eagerly complete the full range of on- and off-the-job activities which form part of the training programme. The training is relevant and helps them progress in their chosen career. Trainees are occupationally competent. Training, both on and off the job, enables trainees to develop, to a high level, the practical and interpersonal skills needed in their working environment. In addition, they have substantial product knowledge, which is continually updated and extended. Their competence is reflected in the fact that many trainees are encouraged to take on significant responsibilities. Trainees are important members of the team. In addition to off-the-job training for their NVQ qualification, they all have a personal development plan. Trainees have excellent working relationships with their industrial tutors and managers.

15. Training centres are well resourced, and trainees have access to a wide range of manuals, guides, atlases and self-study training materials. All written resources are of a high quality and professionally produced. On-the-job training is supported by Lunn Poly-developed activities which guide trainees to collect the necessary performance evidence to achieve their qualification. These activities are well prepared and in a language which trainees understand. Self-study packs are purchased by Lunn Poly and are of an extremely high quality. At work, trainees use up-to-date computer reservation systems and are constantly kept up to date with the changes which affect the travel industry.

16. Off-the-job training is structured and well planned, meeting both business and trainees' needs. There are approximately ten core trainers in each region, usually working together in pairs to deliver training blocks. Trainers attend a 'train the trainer' course each year run by the regional sales managers. The course ensures that trainers update their training skills and share good practice. This results in consistently high-quality, effectively delivered training. Trainees benefit from the core trainer approach and the variety of training methods and visual aids used to sustain their interest. Sessions are normally delivered by two trainers with a maximum of 16 trainees in a group. Training sessions are well planned and involve group and individual work. Trainers use their extensive knowledge, experience and skills effectively. Trainees are set challenging work and are encouraged by the team approach. Sessions are highly participative, and activities stretch trainees' skills and initiative. The pace of the training is appropriate, with time allocated for trainees to discuss their understanding and progress. Summaries and questioning reinforce the learning process. Trainees are highly supported by the training teams.

17. Lunn Poly supports on- and off-the-job training with study time. All trainees are given study time to complete their geography packs and assemble their portfolios of

evidence. In many shops, trainees have a designated study area. All trainees receive support from their industrial tutor, and managers encourage them to use the time usefully. There are clear opportunities for career progression within the organisation. Of those trainees starting in 1996, 57 per cent are still employed by Lunn Poly. Approximately 25 per cent of current Lunn Poly staff are either modern apprentices or are on government-funded training programmes. Achievement rates have increased from 45 to 65 per cent.

18. Assessment practice varies among assessors. There is an over-reliance on a narrow range of evidence. Assessment at both level 2 and 3 is led by assessors, inhibiting trainees from presenting their own valid evidence in their own time. Evidence used is restricted to a narrow range of sources. For example, use is made of standardised witness testimonies, signed by shop managers and trainees' industrial tutors. However, testimonies are often completed in a general way and do not provide a clear indication of how trainees have demonstrated they have met the standards. Assessors invariably accept these testimonies without questioning how they support the competence of trainees. Assessors undertake very few observations of real work skills with only four assessment visits each year. Many of the observations record only basic details and do not provide a clear indication of the candidate's competence. Observations are frequently difficult to relate to the standards. Assessors rely on the use of the company's study material, rather than referring directly to the national standards when undertaking assessments. Some assessors do not record question-and-answer sessions, and some assessment reports are not signed or dated.

19. Trainees have little, if any, key skills awareness. The key skills have been fully integrated in the assessment programme as part of the old modern apprentice framework. Trainees on this programme are unaware of what key skills are or how they are being assessed. On the new modern apprenticeship framework, key skills are being developed, with some units being assessed separately. This programme is just being introduced to current first-year trainees. Trainees have little understanding of key skills or how they form part of their training programme. Lunn Poly has developed a key skills pack and has allocated a training block, but this had not been introduced at the time of inspection.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

20. Lunn Poly has equal opportunities, grievance and antiharassment policies. It monitors all modern apprenticeship applicants for gender and ethnicity. Reasons for their rejection or acceptance to programmes are analysed. It complies with all the TEC contract requirements. Out of all the modern apprentices on the programme, 89 per cent are women. These figures are in line with the sector average. No statistics are available for the number of trainees with disabilities, although this is recorded on individual training files. The company's self-assessment report was accurate in its identification of strengths and weaknesses in this area, but inspectors awarded a higher grade than the company in its report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed company selection procedures to guarantee fairness
- ◆ staff training for harassment issues
- ◆ protective working environment for trainees
- ◆ removal of stereotyped images from company promotional literature

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ out-of-date equal opportunities policy
- ◆ lack of promotion of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ difficult access to training centres
- ◆ low staff awareness of all equality issues

21. The company is fully aware of its legal obligation to ensure that equal opportunity issues are addressed, but its approach has been largely passive. The company is moving towards a more active rôle in addressing the issues of equal opportunities. The company has detailed policies and procedures for the selection of trainees for the modern apprenticeship programme. Lunn Poly ensures that these are applied and has laid down specific guidelines to ensure that its policies are fair to all potential applicants. It monitors and records the reasons why applicants are accepted or rejected. The company carefully monitors the gender and ethnic origin of all of its trainees; this is presented in an annual report. However, it does not take any action about specific trends or issues arising from the data collected.

22. Managers, staff and trainees have a limited understanding of the implications of equal opportunities. They appreciate the basic issues, but take a very narrow view, with most focusing on gender and race. The company has identified this as an issue; it is one of the company's strategic objectives to ensure that it adopts an active rôle in this area. The company is currently amending all of its relevant policies to bring them in line with best practice. Training has been provided for all staff over harassment issues, with clear guidelines on how it should be dealt with and the serious consequences which could arise from such instances. A new policy statement entitled *To Eliminate Harassment At Work* has been produced for all staff, which includes a confidential system to inform the personnel department of problems. Further detailed training on applying equal opportunities in recruitment is being provided by managers. The company is adopting a positive approach in addressing the issues related to age and recruitment. As part of this policy, the personnel department has analysed company literature and is removing stereotyped images.

23. Lunn Poly's training centres are located above its shops, and access to them is difficult for anyone with mobility problems. The company has not carried out any form of audit to ensure that its facilities are appropriate for those with disabilities. The company does provide a supportive environment, and facilities for individuals

with specific needs. The company ensures that any grievances or issues are dealt with effectively. Trainees are treated the same as other employees and are expected to adhere to the company's policies on equal opportunities. They are provided with an employee handbook, containing an outline of their rights and responsibilities.

Trainee support

Grade 1

24. Lunn Poly operates an open and competitive selection process, including entry testing and interviews. Successful candidates undergo a 12-week on-the-job induction programme. Each trainee is allocated an industrial tutor, who takes responsibility for training and reviews monthly progress. Sales directors, regional sales managers and other managers also support and monitor their trainees. Trainees are treated and accepted as company employees and given access to a range of company benefits, including incentives for good performance. All the trainees follow the same programme, with prior qualifications and experiences not taken into consideration. Inspectors confirmed the strengths claimed in the company's self-assessment report. However, some strengths were judged to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive and effective 12-week induction programme
- ◆ comprehensive and well-documented reviews
- ◆ trainees individually mentored by industrial tutors
- ◆ high level of commitment and managerial support for trainees' progress
- ◆ effective pastoral support
- ◆ excellent incentives for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no system for accrediting prior learning
- ◆ haphazard guidance for trainees who leave programmes early

25. Lunn Poly operates a rigorous selection process, and some regions operate 'search for a star' days, during which candidates compete for each available place. Potential trainees are asked to make a presentation to the group, join in activities and are interviewed. They also complete an entry test, which covers communication, numeracy, accuracy, geography and general knowledge and has a pass mark of 80 per cent. Those who are selected have a substantial sense of achievement and begin their training with Lunn Poly with an extremely positive attitude. Most trainees come straight from school or college. A small minority, however, move to Lunn Poly with previous experience of the travel industry or having partially completed NVQs,

GOOD PRACTICE

A trainee who had to leave the programme, owing to personal problems, was continually supported through that absence by her industrial tutor and trainers. The team continued to send course material and made regular telephone calls over a three-month period, until the trainee was able to return to the programme.

other travel-related qualifications or key skills. There is no system by which the prior learning of these trainees can be evaluated or accredited. This means that some trainees are expected to repeat work or demonstrate competence already covered elsewhere.

26. New trainees are issued with a comprehensive induction pack, covering a wide range of work-related issues. Trainees spend the first 12 weeks of their employment completing this and developing occupational skills. This comprehensive induction builds trainees' confidence and ensures that they are clear about what is required of them at work and the skills needed to gain their qualification. The pack also acts as a record of basic information to which trainees refer during the rest of the programme.

27. Industrial tutors take direct responsibility for guiding trainees and monitoring their progress. In addition, industrial tutors carry out monthly progress reviews with trainees, during which progress against an action plan is discussed and short-term progress targets are set. Pastoral and developmental issues are also addressed and shop managers comment on trainees' progress. A copy of the progress review is sent to regional sales managers and the youth training department. Details of each trainee's progress are entered on a database in the youth training department. If trainees fall behind with their studies and NVQ unit achievement, regional sales managers discuss the situation with individual shop managers and industrial tutors to identify additional support needs. Trainees are also active in monitoring their own progress and keep an up-to-date record of their action plan, clearly identifying achievement.

28. Pastoral support for trainees is strong and effective. Working relationships among trainees, industrial tutors and managers are good. Trainees are confident that help with practical and personal difficulties is available if they need it. Trainees are given a wide range of support, including additional study time lost through illness, homelessness and personal problems. Some trainees, who leave without completing their qualification, are given appropriate guidance in finding alternative employment. This includes help with job applications and time off to visit a job centre or attend interviews. However, this is unstructured and sporadic and there is no formal system to ensure that every leaver receives the support needed.

29. Trainees are treated as full employees from the moment they join the company and are given access to benefits, including discounted insurance, free personal alarms and free eye tests. They also attend a five-day modern apprenticeship conference, designed to develop team spirit, teamwork skills and product knowledge. At the conference, trainees are given the opportunity to meet the sector's market leaders and become fully involved in the travel industry. The company also offers a range of incentives to motivate trainees to succeed. These include a reward system, for which successful performance during on- or off-the-job training earns points which can be converted to discount vouchers for use in local shops. Trainees who have shown particular ability or aptitude are nominated for local and national 'trainee of the year' awards. Trainees are also nominated as regional 'employee of the month'. Trainees respond positively to these incentives and take pride in working for Lunn Poly.

Management of training

Grade 2

30. Lunn Poly is committed to improving the professionalism of the travel and tourism industry. It is an Investor in People. The company is part of a working party involved with the Travel, Tourism and Event National Training Organisation (TTENTO) in the development of new training standards and the modern apprenticeship framework. The youth training department supports industrial tutors, shop managers and provides data for regional sales managers and sales directors on trainees' development and performance. There are 11 staff in the department. The company has clear management and staffing structures. Policies are widely known and adhered to by staff and trainees. The company's mission statement features in each member of staff's personal development plan. There are regular and comprehensive lines of communication in the organisation, with frequent team meetings at shop, regional and divisional levels, involving all staff. The company has a comprehensive recruitment policy which focuses on recruiting people with the right attitudes and skills. Each member of staff has his or her own rôle document, outlining expectations for each job. Trainees' recruitment is centralised and ensures that all potential trainees are treated fairly. Subcontractors responsible for assessment and internal verification all have occupational experience and hold assessor and internal verifier awards. The company's self-assessment report identified many of the strengths in this area. Inspectors identified different weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ active commitment to the company's values and targets by staff at all levels
- ◆ good communication and clear lines of responsibility
- ◆ comprehensive recruitment, induction and appraisal process
- ◆ a supportive training and development programme for all staff
- ◆ excellent co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ senior management action ensures that trainees' targets are met

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective control of subcontractor's provision
- ◆ lack of systematic support for industrial tutors

31. There is a culture in the company of teamwork and productivity. Staff are kept fully informed through their managers and regional sales managers about current developments. Communication is effective throughout the organisation. Trainees participate fully in the training and development programmes, which involve all staff. All staff participate in a comprehensive induction programme which ensures that they are fully aware of the company's policies and procedures and deliver a

comprehensive and professional service to customers. In shops, staff participate in weekly team development meetings. There are clearly defined minimum standards set for staff. Targets are set and reviews conducted with each member of staff at frequent intervals. Staff are annually appraised by their manager. The appraisal process is thorough. Both managers and staff complete pre-appraisal documents and a comprehensive action plan is agreed on between them. Staff are given support by their managers to update and acquire new skills. Staff development also includes educational visits to a variety of destinations. This development plan recognises achievement and reinforces the company's commitment to continuous improvement.

32. Lunn Poly has developed the off-the-job training programme to support on-the-job training. The whole of the training programme is thoroughly thought through, and trainees benefit from the excellent co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training.

33. Managers and industrial tutors are informed of trainees' progress through discussions with trainees after monthly training sessions. A computerised system has been developed to track the progress of each trainee centrally. The system is interrogated regularly and reports sent to sales directors. Senior managers take action and pursue progress of individual trainees who are not meeting the targets set. Commitment from top management ensures that trainees' training needs are given high priority.

34. The company does not monitor or evaluate assessments carried out by the subcontractor and has no means to judge their effectiveness. The lack of understanding of the assessment process has led to overdependence on the subcontractor. Neither Lunn Poly nor trainees are aware of awarding body appeals procedures or the full range of assessment methods. Quarterly reviews concentrate on mundane issues, such as dates for assessment and internal verification or the number of trainees on programmes. Lunn Poly does receive copies of internal verification meetings.

35. Most industrial tutors effectively support trainees. However, there is limited support for industrial tutors to ensure that they give consistent advice to trainees. Although there is an industrial tutor training day, those appointed after this has taken place, with limited understanding of the training programme, do not have the opportunity to develop their skills in supporting trainees in a more structured way.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

36. Learning materials and training sessions are designed and evaluated by the training department. The views of trainees and trainers are actively sought and analysed. A subcontractor carries out all assessment and internal verification. The company's self-assessment report identified some of the strengths of quality assurance. It did not accurately identify the weaknesses. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ consistently high standard of training at all centres
- ◆ effective evaluation of training programme
- ◆ company culture of continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate internal verification system
- ◆ no standards set to measure the performance of the subcontractor
- ◆ missed opportunities to share good practice

37. The 'train the trainer' programme covers a range of essential skills, such as lesson plans, developing training techniques, preparing effective training sessions, using a variety of training methods and providing feedback. Trainers receive a complete pack of resources approximately one month before training is due to be delivered. These resources include learning materials for trainees, lesson plans, trainers' guidance and visual aids. These are all designed and developed to a high standard by specialist staff at head office. All trainees benefit from the same high standard of training delivery and learning materials, including activities, quizzes, teamwork, reading and workbooks. Regional sales managers and the authors of the training materials occasionally attend training sessions, and provide informal feedback to the training department about the quality of delivery and effectiveness of the learning experience.

38. Training is effectively evaluated, with trainees and trainers completing questionnaires at the end of each training session. Trainers are asked for their views on preparing the course, length and pace of delivery and the value of the training materials. Trainees are given the opportunity to express their opinions on the effectiveness of the training and trainer, course content and style and are invited to add comments about anything which they particularly dislike about the programme. Questions are restricted to seeking data on the training course only and do not explore views on the assessment practice. The results from all regions are collated and rigorously analysed to demonstrate regional and national trends. The results are returned to senior managers and trainers who pass the outcomes to trainees. Trainees are also kept informed of issues through a modern apprenticeship newsletter. This includes articles about successes, internal verification days and the company's modern apprenticeship annual conference.

39. The company has a history of acting on programme evaluation and introducing improvements to training provision. Some of the most significant responses include a change in subcontractor for the assessment of customer service, the change to the internal delivery of travel service training, setting up the core trainer scheme and improving learning materials. The company has embraced the concept of self-assessment and has promoted a concise and relevant report on its strengths and weaknesses. This is supported by easily accessible evidence, a clear action plan and largely accurate self-grading of the provision. The company also uses external

agencies to research their training provision. In 1994 and 1998, the company conducted a MORI poll to obtain feedback from all staff. The company's efforts to improve provision have resulted in a positive trend in trainees' performance. Achievement rates have increased from 45 to 65 per cent, and trainee retention has improved from 64 to 71 per cent over a two-year period.

40. Internal verification takes place only when trainees' portfolios are completed. In October 1998, six internal verifiers spent four days verifying 700 portfolios. There is no continuous sampling of trainees' work or internal verification plan. Internal verifiers do not talk directly to trainees. Internal verifiers do occasionally visit Lunn Poly's shops to observe assessments and give assessors feedback on their performance. Assessors do not receive individual feedback following the internal verification of trainees' portfolios. Instead, a general report is drafted and circulated to assessors. This has not proved successful in driving improvements in assessment practice.

41. The company relies greatly on the subcontractor to handle and process all trainees' registrations with awarding bodies, to carry out assessment and internal verification. There is no service level agreement written in the contract or any clarity of the standard of performance expected by both parties. Contract review meetings are held each quarter, but these lack depth. The company has insufficient knowledge and data to accurately measure the success of this agreement.

42. There is no national or regional forum for all industrial tutors and shop managers to consider the success of the modern apprenticeship programme. There are opportunities for staff to meet and discuss operational issues, but training and assessment are not on the agenda.