



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JULY 1998

East Lindsey ITeC

SUMMARY

The training provided by East Lindsey ITeC in business administration and in retailing and customer service is of satisfactory quality. Most trainees are in employment. The company's equal opportunities policies and practices are effective. Trainees receive good support. The company has a comprehensive and well-documented quality assurance system which is used to monitor performance and promote continuous improvement. The organisation is effectively managed. However, links between on- and off-the-job training are weak.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of NVQ achievement
- ◆ high quality of work placements
- ◆ good induction to the NVQ programme
- ◆ effective use of management information to inform planning
- ◆ effective quality assurance procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not integrated with vocational training
- ◆ lack of trainee involvement in portfolio-building process
- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ little on-the-job training provided
- ◆ little awareness in the workplace of equal opportunities or quality assurance procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. East Lindsey Information Technology Centre (ITeC) was established at Louth and Skegness in Lincolnshire in 1984. The company is registered as a non-profit-making charity. The ITeC currently employs 21 people. The board of directors comprises the managing director and representatives drawn from local businesses and local authorities.

2. Much of the ITeC's work is funded through Lincolnshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The ITeC also offers some programmes contracted to three colleges of further education, which are funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). It is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), via the TEC, for its modern apprenticeship programme. East Lindsey ITeC also operates a commercial training department, which offers a range of short courses, primarily in information technology applications, to local businesses and individuals.

3. At the time of inspection, there were 156 trainees on TEC-funded programmes. Of these, 89 were modern apprentices, 58 were on other youth programmes and nine were on adult training programmes. Only 14 trainees were unemployed. There were 384 people registered on full- and part-time FEFC-funded courses.

4. East Lindsey is a rural and coastal district in Lincolnshire, characterised by small and dispersed market towns and seaside resorts with very low populations and a significant lack of public transport. The rural nature of the area presents problems to individuals in terms of accessing employment and training opportunities. The coastal area faces additional problems caused by the seasonal and temporary nature of many of the employment opportunities, and this can have an impact on people's eligibility for some government-funded training programmes. Increasing numbers of young people are moving out of the district in search of career and higher education opportunities not available locally.

5. Unemployment within the East Lindsey district, and Lincolnshire as a whole, is 4.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent. Most companies in the district employ 25 or fewer people. The agricultural industry and the associated food industry employ 18 per cent of the workforce. A further 18 per cent work in tourism.

6. Within the district, most secondary schools have sixth forms, and over 60 per cent of school leavers continue in education after the age of 16. This figure has increased over recent years, at the expense of alternatives, although the numbers entering further education have fallen slightly. The number of young people entering youth training and modern apprenticeships has fallen to just over 10 per cent. The number of school leavers in Lincolnshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 46.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. All members of staff took part in self-assessment. The management team produced the report following consultation with staff, employers and trainees. The self-assessment report claims several strengths which represent normal practice or contractual requirements. Inspectors identified several additional strengths, but also found some weaknesses which had not been identified by the company.

8. A team of five inspectors spent 20 days at the ITeC during July 1998. They visited 44 employers, interviewed 65 trainees and 15 workplace supervisors. Fifteen ITeC staff were interviewed. Inspectors visited both the Louth and Skegness training centres. They examined a broad range of supporting documents, including trainees' portfolios, assessment records, reviews, trainees' files and external verifiers' reports. Opportunities to observe formal teaching sessions were limited, since almost all of the training is work based, but four sessions of learning were observed, as detailed below:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		3				3
Retailing & customer service		1				1
Total	0	4	0	0	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

9. There are 54 trainees following NVQ programmes in business administration at NVQ levels 1 to 4, information technology at NVQ levels 1 and 2 and accounts at NVQ levels 1 and 2. Twenty-three are modern apprentices, and 25 are youth trainees. Six trainees on the NVQ programmes are enrolled on the FEFC programme. A further 162 are following an FEFC-franchised computer literacy course on a part-time basis. Off-the-job training takes place at both the Louth and Skegness training centres. The self-assessment report identified some strengths which represent normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good employer links
- ◆ high level of NVQ achievement

- ◆ good off-the-job training in information technology
- ◆ effective personal and vocational development of trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient involvement of employers in NVQ process
- ◆ key skills not integrated with NVQ training
- ◆ lack of trainee involvement in portfolio-building

10. Off-the-job training for information technology trainees is flexible and well structured. Resources and training materials are of a high standard at both training centres. Procedures for securing work placements are effective, and the quality of placements and employment opportunities is high. Links between the company and employers are good. Many trainees are able to complete several NVQs at levels 2 and 3, and overall achievement is high. Where appropriate, trainees working towards NVQ level 3 are provided with the opportunity to supervise others through internal placement with the ITeC. The ITeC has sufficient staff with the appropriate skills and knowledge to assess training in this sector.

11. The delivery of key skills is not integrated with the vocational training programme for modern apprentices. Key skills are usually delivered only at the completion of the NVQ. Employers are not directly involved in the training and assessment of NVQs in the workplace, although many provide witness statements and testimonials which are used in the assessment process. Most workplace training is coincidental, through work, and opportunistic. Trainees do not follow a planned or structured programme of on-the-job training linked to the NVQ. For trainees in placement or employment, off-the-job training is marginalised. The ITeC's staff carry out assessment in the workplace during their monitoring visits, and, in most cases, assessors compile portfolios from evidence submitted by trainees. The quality of portfolios is good, and achievement rates are high. However, this process excludes trainees and deprives them of the opportunity to understand the portfolio-building process and to become fully involved in their work.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

12. There are 53 trainees studying for NVQs in retailing and customer service. Twenty-one are modern apprentices and 25 are youth trainees. Six are following FEFC-franchised courses and one is following a New Deal programme. Fifty-one trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in customer service. Two are on the retail programme. Trainees do not attend on day release. All training and assessment are carried out in the workplace. The self-assessment report claimed several strengths and weaknesses. Some of the strengths represented normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear recording of trainees' progress
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of the benefits of the NVQ
- ◆ high-quality work-placement providers
- ◆ high rate of NVQ achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of trainee involvement in portfolio-building
- ◆ key skills delivery and assessment not integrated with vocational training
- ◆ poor assessment planning

13. Comprehensive records are maintained of trainees' progress. All trainees are aware of their progress towards achievement of the NVQ and recognise the relevance of the NVQ to their current jobs and future employment opportunities. NVQ achievement is high, with many trainees gaining more than one qualification and progressing from NVQ level 2 to level 3. The company uses local employers who take a keen interest in the progress and welfare of their trainees. Trainees' work is of an appropriate standard and demonstrates occupational competence. Trainees attend regularly. They are able to work without supervision, when required. The ITeC has sufficient staff with the appropriate skills and knowledge to assess training in this sector.

14. Staff at the ITeC carry out much of the portfolio work with limited input from trainees who, therefore, have little understanding of the portfolio-building process. Key skills are not integrated with the vocational training, as required, but are delivered separately. Assessment is not planned. Work-based training is ineffective and learning is incidental, rather than planned. Trainees are unclear about the assessment process, although the actual assessments are rigorous and fair.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

15. Equal opportunities issues are discussed regularly at staff meetings at the ItEC. There is an equal opportunities working group to monitor, evaluate and improve current practices. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented equal opportunities policy
- ◆ good awareness among staff of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ effective monitoring and evaluation of policy

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited awareness of equal opportunities policies and procedures in the workplace

16. The ITeC's equal opportunities policy and action-plan are printed in the staff and trainee handbooks. All staff and trainees are introduced to the policy and action-plan at induction, although, in some cases, it is not explained sufficiently. The policy is continually reviewed and regularly updated. Equal opportunities data are collected, and a system is in place to monitor trainees at interview, during the programme and when they leave. Staff, therefore, take an active approach, but it is too early to analyse the results of this work. The company is making efforts to increase staff awareness of equal opportunities, through a programme of training. An equal opportunities working group has been set up which meets regularly to discuss and evaluate the ITeC's performance in equal opportunities. There is wheelchair access to both centres.

17. Trainees are insufficiently aware of equal opportunities in the workplace and are not familiar with the policies and procedures of their employers or of the work-placement providers. They are unsure what to do if they encounter discriminatory practices in the workplace.

Trainee support

Grade 2

18. The ITeC provides a supportive environment for trainees. Staff are committed to helping trainees to fulfil their qualification aims. Some trainees are already in employment before they start the programme, but others go through rigorous selection procedures with both the ITeC and prospective employers. All trainees take a screening test in literacy and numeracy as part of their initial assessment. Most of the strengths claimed in the self-assessment report represent normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good induction onto NVQ programme
- ◆ high level of pastoral and vocational support
- ◆ effective workplace supervisors
- ◆ trainees' willingness to help one another

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ variable use of review process and documentation

- ◆ irregular visits to trainees by ITeC staff

19. The induction process provides trainees with an excellent introduction to training, which is valued by all trainees. Induction to the NVQ is particularly effective. Work placements are of a high standard and are flexible enough to accommodate trainees' individual learning needs. Most employers are very supportive of their trainees. Where employers have more than one trainee, peer group support is effective in pooling knowledge and experience.

20. Some reviews of trainees' progress are not sufficiently comprehensive, and decisions made at them are not properly recorded. They are not used effectively. Some trainees are unsure about the purpose of the assessor's visits and about the review process. Visits to trainees are not set at regular intervals, and some trainees require more frequent contact. For those trainees who are not employed, there is little job-search support, and some are unsure about their future, receiving a limited amount of guidance to help them to secure employment.

Management of training

Grade 3

21. East Lindsey ITeC has undergone some restructuring, and there have been staff changes in the last year. Each of the Louth and Skegness training centres has its own manager. Both managers report to the managing director and have overall responsibility for the achievement of targets for their centre. A sales team is responsible for the identification of work placements, and another team supports the administrative activities. The self-assessment report claims strengths which represent normal practice or contractual requirements. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses, awarding a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management team
- ◆ clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ high standard of recruitment, induction and training of staff
- ◆ effective management of trainees' data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ little on-the-job training available
- ◆ no structured planning of work-based training
- ◆ some assessors not qualified

22. Management responsibilities are clear and understood by all staff. Staff participate in the development of strategies and policies. Targets are discussed, set and reviewed regularly. The organisation has comprehensive procedures for the recruitment and induction of staff. Most staff are well qualified to carry out their roles, but a few are not. There is a strong link among training, staff development and appraisal, all of which reflect the business plan and aim to improve the company's performance. The ITeC has an effective computer-based data system which provides accurate up-to-date information and is used to inform management decisions.

23. Contact among company staff, employers and work-placement providers is limited. The ITeC does not manage or control on-the-job training, and little formal training takes place in the workplace. The training which does take place, is coincidental and unplanned. There is no co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training. Not all staff involved in the assessment of trainees' portfolios are qualified to the appropriate standard.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

24. The ITeC meets several external quality assurance standards. It is recognised as an Investor in People and holds the ISO 9001 quality award. It also satisfies the quality requirements of Lincolnshire TEC and of the awarding bodies. The self-assessment report claimed strengths and recognised weaknesses in quality assurance. Inspectors found others and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ all permanent staff required to train as internal auditors
- ◆ frequent internal quality audits carried out
- ◆ trainees and employers' feedback is sought and analysed
- ◆ effective promotion of continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited awareness in workplace of company's quality procedures

25. The company's quality assurance procedures are comprehensive and are maintained rigorously. The ITeC systematically seeks feedback on the quality of training from employers and trainees, and their views are well documented. This information is then acted on, in order to improve the quality of the provision.



Internal quality audits are carried out frequently, to a high standard, by well-trained staff. The ITeC has established a quality working group which regularly reviews quality issues. It is headed by a member of the senior management team and aims to implement remedial action and promote continuous improvement throughout the organisation. Some employers and workplace supervisors have little awareness or knowledge of the company's policies and procedures for quality assurance.