



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

Bolton Training Group Ltd

SUMMARY

Bolton Training Group Ltd offers good-quality engineering, motor-vehicle and business administration training. It has satisfactory quality assurance and management systems to ensure that training is effective. Equal opportunities are actively promoted in the organisation, and trainees are made aware of their rights and obligations to others. Support for trainees is good from both BTG's staff and employers.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	2
Engineering	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of off-the-job training
- ◆ opportunities to achieve additional qualifications
- ◆ staff and trainees have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities
- ◆ highly effective induction programmes
- ◆ good initial assessment used to prepare realistic training plans
- ◆ regular news sheets produced for staff and employers
- ◆ effective use of action-plans for continuous improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient observation of NVQ assessment by qualified assessors
- ◆ workplace assessment not planned or structured
- ◆ statistical data insufficiently detailed to inform equal opportunities development
- ◆ work-based reviews not always used for further action-planning
- ◆ no systematic recording or analysis of management information

INTRODUCTION

1. Bolton Training Group Ltd (trading as BTG) is a company limited by guarantee. It is an employer-led and -owned organisation, serving the training needs of some 100 member and 400 associate companies in the north Manchester area, predominantly in the engineering and manufacturing sectors. A board of directors, appointed by BTG's member companies, is responsible for the policy and direction of BTG. The directors are all either owner-managers or senior managers of their respective companies.

2. Established in 1966 as an Engineering Training Group Association by the Engineering Industry Training Board and local employers, the group trained traditional engineering apprentices. In 1986, BTG became a managing agent for the Youth Training Scheme, covering engineering and business administration. BTG currently employs 40 permanent staff and offers training mainly in engineering, motor vehicle and business administration. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are offered from level 1 to 4.

3. BTG contracts with Bolton and Bury Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) and Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for the provision of modern apprenticeship training, national traineeships and training credits. At the time of inspection, BTG had 202 modern apprentices, 15 national trainees and 117 youth trainees on the CCTE's contract. On the Manchester TEC contract, there were 21 modern apprentices and 15 training credits trainees.

4. The Bolton and Bury area is largely urban and strategically placed to the north of the regional centre of Manchester. It has a population of more than 447,000 inhabitants, with the main trend being the ageing profile of the resident population. In the Bolton and Bury area, the unemployment rates are lower than the regional or national averages. Bolton stands at 4.1 per cent, compared with Bury at 2.7 per cent, northwest England at 5.5 per cent and Great Britain at 5 per cent in October 1997.

5. The proportion of minority ethnic groups in Bolton and Bury stands at 6 per cent of the population. Most young people continue in full-time education in the area. The number of Bolton school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 40.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. The company's self-assessment was co-ordinated by the training manager, supported by local CCTE/TECs. All staff were involved through a process of questionnaires and consultation. The resulting report is clear and concise. Many of the strengths cited in the report are no more than normal practice, but inspectors found many additional strengths not identified through self-assessment. Inspectors did not regard some of the weaknesses in the report as having a significant impact on the training.

7. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at BTG in October 1998. Inspectors interviewed 78 trainees, 39 of BTG's staff and 26 employers. They observed seven training sessions, 18 reviews and five NVQ assessments. Documentary evidence, including trainees' portfolios, assessment records, awarding body records and contracts, was examined.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 2

8. BTG has been delivering business administration training since the early 1990s, in response to local demand. There are 40 trainees in business administration, 31 of whom are employed and 17 are modern apprentices. There are two youth trainees in information technology, one of whom is employed, and two youth trainees in customer service.

9. NVQ training is delivered through a combination of on- and off-the-job training, at the company's training centre in Horwich. Additional training in single-subject qualifications is available at the company's Bolton centre, where information technology trainees can access the Internet. Most trainees attend the Horwich centre one day each week, but, where this is not possible, trainees are supported with their training in the workplace and receive off-the-job training, if and when appropriate.

10. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths. Actions were taken to correct the weaknesses identified in the report before inspection. Other weaknesses have been identified. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good working relationships among BTG's staff, work-based supervisors and trainees
- ◆ flexible delivery of training and assessment
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to achieve additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor understanding of key skills
- ◆ workplace assessment neither planned nor structured

11. The tutor, assessor and internal verifier have worked together for over two years and have developed a good rapport. They are well regarded by their placement employers and by the trainees. The needs of trainees and their employers are taken into consideration when planning the delivery of training and the arrangements for assessment and review. All new placements are visited before vacancies are accepted and trainees submitted. This establishes the range of training opportunities available within the job and ensures that health and safety and equal opportunities requirements are met. Training is well supported by employers.

12. Trainees are encouraged to work towards additional qualifications: around 25 per cent of trainees in 1997-98 combined business administration with information technology and/or customer service. Some of the modern apprentices are also continuing in further education through the BTEC in business and finance, with BTG's full support.

13. Staff have made considerable progress in establishing and integrating key skills. Their understanding and mapping of where evidence can be found in the NVQ, and, where appropriate, within the BTEC qualification, is still developing. Some modern apprentices in their third year are unfamiliar with the concept of integrating key skills.

14. The assessment of trainees who attend day-release sessions at the training centre for NVQ level 2 is almost all done in the centre by the tutor. It relies heavily on evidence brought from the workplace, witness testimony and questioning. The visiting monitoring officer observes, and reports on, workplace activity, but this is random and unplanned.

Engineering

Grade 2

15. BTG has 226 engineering and 43 motor-vehicle trainees. All trainees work towards NVQs. In engineering, there are 126 modern apprentices, 12 national trainees, with the rest training credits trainees. In motor vehicle, there are 19 modern apprentices and 24 training credits trainees. Engineering trainees complete NVQ level 2, usually through full-time attendance at BTG's training centre although this can be achieved through day-release training away from the workplace. Trainees also receive theory training one day each week. Motor-vehicle trainees receive regular off-the-job training at BTG's centre or, in the case of vehicle-body repair trainees, at a local college which is subcontracted by BTG. The rest of their time is spent working at employers' premises. Inspectors agreed with BTG's self-assessment grade for this area.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of off-the-job training
- ◆ good NVQ portfolios
- ◆ good working relationships among trainees, employers and staff
- ◆ flexible entry opportunities to NVQ programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient observation of assessment by qualified assessors
- ◆ some poor planning of motor-vehicle work-based training
- ◆ late introduction of key skills for third-year engineering modern apprentices

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are able to practise steel erection skills on a four-storey steelwork structure provided by a local contractor. Large steel structures are manipulated into position using a mobile crane. This close working relationship between employers and BTG provides trainees with good additional training opportunities.

16. The training at BTG is of a high standard for both engineering and motor vehicle courses. NVQ portfolios are comprehensive and well organised. There are good working relationships with trainees, employers and the staff at BTG. Trainees speak highly about their training, and value the way in which BTG's staff show genuine interest in helping them to progress and achieve their goals. Engineering training programmes are designed to allow flexible entry arrangements, which allows trainees to start the training programme at any time of the year. This is not usually the case with engineering training, and this approach ensures that trainees and employers are provided with good recruitment opportunities.

17. Trainers are occupationally very experienced. Work placements are of a high standard, and BTG's training centre is well equipped. Its spacious training workshops meet the needs of the awarding body for the programmes being delivered.

18. Engineering trainees produce regular written accounts, about completed work, which are signed by workplace supervisors to confirm that it is the trainee's own work and is used as evidence towards the NVQ. This system, although effective, is totally reliant on the witness, who may not be aware of the NVQ requirements. Assessment carried out by qualified assessors at the workplace is unusual, even

though this method is recognised as being a much more reliable source of NVQ evidence. Workplace assessment by qualified assessors does take place more frequently with motor-vehicle trainees, although this tends to be opportunistic and not planned. Training in motor-vehicle workplaces is variable, with some employers taking a more active rôle than others.

19. Some engineering trainees in their third year of training have only recently been introduced to key skills. Some trainees are not aware that additional evidence is required to achieve the key skills certificates to complete the modern apprenticeship framework. This problem has been resolved for recent trainees, as BTG has now integrated key skills with NVQ level 2.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

20. The company's chief executive is named as having responsibility for equal opportunities. The company has a detailed, written equal opportunities policy. Over recent times, innovative approaches to, for example, the recruitment of minority ethnic groups to training programmes have declined. There are plans to return to the issue of the recruitment of minority ethnic trainees and women to engineering. Some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report are considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weakness identified in the report and identified further strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed by BTG.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ all staff are trained in equal opportunities
- ◆ targeting of under-represented groups
- ◆ staff and trainees have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no structured review of equal opportunities procedures or developments
- ◆ statistical data insufficiently detailed to inform equal opportunities development

21. There are well-defined procedures to support the equal opportunities policy and to satisfy contractual and legislative requirements. The company has taken steps to improve its access for those with disabilities and has a track record of providing appropriate special aids, liaising with minority ethnic community groups and participating in local projects. Subcontractors and placement employers' contracts specify equal opportunities requirements.

22. BTG maintains links with particular local schools, where minority ethnic students represent a significant part of the school population. The company works with schools and the careers service to inform potential applicants about opportunities in engineering, particularly for women. This activity is supported by

advertising material. There are few minority ethnic trainees or women in engineering, but particular feedback is sought from them in order to develop company strategies.

23. Equal opportunities rights and responsibilities are included in induction training for trainees and new staff. Trainees recognise and understand the equal opportunities contents of the training charter, and all staff have been trained in equal opportunities practices.

24. The chief executive reviews the policy and procedures on an annual basis, when the contract and other policies are reviewed. Other reviews occur through the monthly management meetings, but the issue is not a standing item for operational meeting agendas. Statistical data are produced manually to inform the management review, but are not sufficiently detailed to enable trends of ethnicity and gender in occupational areas to be identified.

Trainee support

Grade 2

25. Trainees are recruited through interviews, and basic skills testing is undertaken. All trainees complete these tests, but acceptance is based on employer interview and test results. Local careers officers work closely with BTG, and guidance is given on programme selection. A computer matching system is used to provide details of trainees for employers and vice versa.

26. Trainees receive induction training at the training centre. This covers their rights and responsibilities, health & safety and job-search skills. In addition, they receive a further induction from the department they join. The job-search training is available to all trainees and is aimed at teaching techniques to improve job achievement. The company works with local careers offices and schools, receiving private recommendation from previous trainees to attract trainees and work placements. The self-assessment report underestimated the strength of provision in the area, and inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective induction programmes
- ◆ good job-search and matching system
- ◆ effective counselling and personal advice available
- ◆ initial assessment used to prepare realistic training plans
- ◆ assessors available at unsocial hours, if necessary

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ motor-vehicle trainees not given up-to-date advice on opportunities for employment and further education
- ◆ support not always documented or reviewed
- ◆ work-based reviews not always used for further action-planning

27. BTG's system of interviewing, testing and advising helps and guides trainees towards a training programme which suits them. The company works closely with the careers advisory service which gives appropriate guidance. After acceptance, trainees attend the job-search workshop. Interview techniques, CV preparation and letter-writing are covered, before introduction to a prospective employer. A computer-based matching system follows, and information is passed to suitable employers, while employers' details are given to trainees. A shortlist is produced, culminating, in most cases, in a job for a trainee. A general induction follows which is well designed and documented. After induction, trainees are not allowed to go to their placements until stringent checks are made at the prospective employers' workplace, to determine suitability as employers. Trainees benefit from strong pastoral support from caring staff, both in the training centre and in the workplace.

28. Trainees are not aware of the range of support available to them and are given very little advice or training guidance on other educational courses. Support, although plentiful, is not always documented or reviewed, resulting in missed opportunities to reinforce existing care and support systems.

29. Reviews are regular and frequent, but are not recorded in sufficient depth or detail to enable them to be used as a planning tool. Placement review forms do not focus on trainees' progress to satisfy job needs. BTG subcontracts some training, where, because of other commitments, the subcontractor carries out workplace assessments only on a quarterly basis.

Management of training

Grade 3

30. BTG is a well-managed organisation with clear structures which are understood by staff. The company is managed by a chief executive who reports to a board of directors from local industry. The company's lines of communication are clear, but not always consistently applied. There is a sound staff appraisal system. The company financially supports and provides resources for a development programme for staff to gain new skills and further qualifications in line with business objectives. Inspectors identified different strengths and weaknesses from those identified in the self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective staff appraisal linked to business objectives
- ◆ staff encouraged to gain new skills and qualifications
- ◆ weekly liaison with careers service
- ◆ regular news sheets produced for staff and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ management information not systematically recorded or analysed

- ◆ underdeveloped NVQ progression data
- ◆ managers do not take responsibility for all on-the-job training

31. BTG has a comprehensive business plan which is split into individual targets for achievement. The company's organisational structure is clear, and staff understand their rôles and responsibilities. There are clear job descriptions which accurately describe working rôles. There are well-established staff appraisal systems which are linked to performance targets; these are used to identify training needs. Staff are fully supported and encouraged to gain new skills and qualifications. All company staff train to NVQ level 1 in information technology and all business administration staff involved in placement visits have completed a health and safety course. There is a fully documented and well-working staff recruitment policy and induction procedure. BTG has a recruitment matching team, with an active marketing approach, which liaises frequently with the careers service. Vacancies are updated weekly, and there is fully documented analysis of those who leave programmes early. Regular newsheets are produced for both staff and employers.

32. There is a lack of systematically recorded and analysed management information. There is some evidence of trends available, but this information is not broken down into relevant statistical trends for each occupational area. There are underdeveloped NVQ progression systems which result in managers not being fully aware of each trainee's progress. Present systems vary in different occupational areas and do not readily inform trainees' progress. In some areas, where BTG subcontracts training, managers do not take control of the subcontracting arrangements. Control of assessments and the organisation of work based-training are left to the subcontractor and not effectively managed.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

33. BTG has a quality assurance system which meets the requirements of the ISO 9002 quality system and those of the funding bodies. The company is an Investor in People. The system's documented procedures are internally audited on a scheduled basis. Sixty per cent of trainees' employers are members of BTG and maintain close and regular contact with the company. Thirty per cent of trainees receive part of their training at subcontracted further education colleges. Inspectors identified strengths and weaknesses which differ from those in the self-assessment report. They concluded that the strengths and weaknesses are in equal proportions and agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ review of quality assurance system to improve relevance to training
- ◆ good use of feedback from employers
- ◆ effective use of action-plans for continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of an effective trainee feedback system
- ◆ insufficient quality assurance of subcontractors
- ◆ internal verification not planned or structured

34. The quality assurance system is well established, and internal audit is fully operational. BTG has recognised that the system is more effective in supporting the administrative processes than in assuring the quality of training. The procedures have been thoroughly reviewed to increase their relevance to trainees' experience. Internal audit concentrates on the identification of errors in documents, rather than on the delivery of training itself.

35. There is insufficient evidence of continuous improvement resulting from a systematic evaluation of trainees' experience. Trainees' feedback has been sought, but only limited information has been gathered. Information is obtained in several ways from employer-members of the company. The most effective mechanism is a schedule of regular visits to member companies by the management team to collect feedback on the training provided by BTG and to discuss future improvements. Action-plans are widely used throughout BTG to identify and control improvements in training, although there is no standard format or coherent approach, limiting the involvement of staff.

36. Internal verification takes place and includes the continuous sampling of assessments throughout the process. The selection of candidates and units for sampling is not carried out in a planned or structured manner. The number of trainees attending subcontracted further education colleges for part of their training has been deliberately reduced in recent years, partly as a result of concerns about the quality of the provision. BTG has been unable to establish effective quality assurance arrangements for the colleges, resulting in an inconsistent standard of training.