



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 2000

Dales Agricultural and Rural Training

SUMMARY

Dales Agricultural and Rural Training (DART) provides good training and assessment in agriculture, animal care, and veterinary nursing. Most of the weaknesses of the provision are in horticulture training and assessment. Programmes are designed to be convenient to trainees work patterns and suited to their learning needs. DART makes good use of peripatetic assessors and trainers. DART's commitment to, and opportunities for, young people who have problems at school is good, as is its support for trainees with learning difficulties. The links between DART and employers are good, and lead to well co-ordinated on- and off-the-job training. Quality assurance leads to the identification and rectification of weaknesses. Horticulture trainees do not benefit from the same high quality, frequency and regularity of training and assessment as the other trainees. Reviews lack rigour. Measures to monitor employers' performance in equal opportunities are not in place. Relationships with the main subcontractor are well managed but too informal. This subcontractor's performance is generally good but there are no formal methods for assuring the quality of the services it offers.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible modes of training and assessment
- ◆ good opportunities for disaffected trainees
- ◆ positive commitment to equality of opportunity
- ◆ good initial assessment
- ◆ good support for trainees with learning difficulties
- ◆ well-managed links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ comprehensive range of policies and procedures for quality assurance
- ◆ improvements resulting from action-planning

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment in horticulture
- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ lack of rigour in reviews for horticulture trainees
- ◆ no formal monitoring of main subcontractor
- ◆ failure to share self-assessment findings and report

INTRODUCTION

1. Dales Agricultural and Rural Training (DART) was established early in 1999 and provides work-based training throughout the northern half of Derbyshire, covering the areas managed by North Derbyshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Stockport and High Peak TEC. The co-ordinating TEC for inspection was North Derbyshire. The programmes offered are called 'Young Options' for North Derbyshire, 'Careership' for Stockport and High Peak, and also national traineeships and modern apprenticeships. DART operates as a sole trader owned by the director. Other staff include an administrator and six part-time specialist tutors and assessors. In April 1999, DART took over the management of the existing North Derbyshire and Stockport and High Peak TEC contracts previously held by a college which is the main provider of land-based training in Derbyshire. Young people in training with the college in April 1999 continued with their existing training programmes and arrangements for off-the-job training. DART continues to subcontract some of its off-the-job training to the college and three other subcontractors. DART has centre approval for assessing and internally verifying awards in agriculture, horticulture, key skills, numberpower and wordpower, and training and development qualifications.

2. The unemployment rate across the county of Derbyshire as a whole in December 1999 was 4 per cent, down 0.3 per cent since December 1998. In those areas in Derbyshire where trainees are recruited or work, the unemployment rates vary between 2 and 6 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.8 per cent. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above for North Derbyshire was 46 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent and 5 per cent gained no GCSEs. The equivalent figures for the Stockport & High Peak TEC area are 51 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. Agriculture accounted for 12 per cent (2,170) of VAT-registered businesses in Derbyshire in 1997, and 2 per cent of the working population are employed in this sector. Other important sectors are manufacturing and construction. The population of Derbyshire at the 1991 census was 717,700. In 1998 this rose to 734,300. The proportion of minority ethnic groups in these areas was low in the 1991 census at less than 1 per cent of the population.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. DART produced its first self-assessment report in July 1999. A revised version was produced in January 2000 in time for inspection. The owner consulted with staff when compiling the report and trainees' views were also taken into account. The report has not been shared with the company's main subcontractor.

4. Three inspectors spent a total of nine days at DART's premises during February 2000. They interviewed 32 trainees. Eleven staff and managers of off-the-job training were interviewed. Inspectors visited 24 workplaces, projects and training venues and 16 interviews were carried out with workplace training staff and managers. Inspectors observed three training sessions. Two grades at 3 and one at 2 were awarded. Four assessments and one review were also observed. Twenty-two trainees' files, 29 training plans and 31 trainees' portfolios were examined. Other documents reviewed included contracts with the TECs, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance and operating manuals. Minutes of meetings, staff-development plans, schemes of work, marketing materials and monitoring data were also inspected.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 2

5. DART currently has 59 trainees. Of these, 18 are taking NVQs in agriculture livestock management production at levels 3 and 4. Ten are following amenity horticulture programmes. Four are taking animal care, three of whom are following an NVQ in customer service at level 2 prior to starting on an NVQ at level 2 in dog grooming. One trainee is taking floristry, and six are taking veterinary nursing. Twenty trainees are taking NVQs in agriculture at level 1 or 2. There are 18 modern apprentices, nine national trainees and 32 trainees on other work-based programmes. DART subcontracts with a number of other organisations to provide trainees with off-the-job training. These arrangements usually cover training, assessment and internal verification. Subcontracting arrangements either already exist or are being established. Seven of the agriculture trainees attend day-release classes every week in Buxton, and a further 12 are supported in the workplace. Trainees are working in mixed livestock farms, veterinary practices, garden centres, nurseries and landscaping companies, dog grooming parlours and boarding kennels. One works in a centre which rehabilitates pets and wild animals.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible training and assessment
- ◆ excellent resources both on- and off-the-job
- ◆ good training in agriculture and veterinary nursing

- ◆ good promotion and understanding of health and safety
- ◆ good progression for trainees in agriculture

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress of trainees in horticulture
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment in horticulture
- ◆ no policy or procedure for unit accreditation

6. DART offers learning programmes which are closely tailored to trainees' individual needs. Through a range of subcontractors, peripatetic trainers and assessors, and well-planned training and assessment, each trainee benefits from a customised programme. Trainees who dislike or distrust institution-based education are especially well catered for by well-organised and regular training and assessment on the job.

7. Animal care and veterinary nursing employers offer good learning opportunities. For example, veterinary practices regularly rotate trainees' duties so that they experience all the tasks required to complete their NVQs. Agriculture trainees are in excellent work placements with employers who understand their training requirements. Employers often provide additional learning experiences by organising work for trainees on neighbouring farms. These trainees are undertaking a greater range of tasks than are required by the NVQ, and this broadens their skills and knowledge. For example, most agricultural trainees are undertaking some conservation work in addition to their livestock NVQ work. Horticulture trainees are also generally with employers who offer a good range of experiences and resources, and who provide structured on-the-job training.

8. Classrooms at the colleges used for off-the-job training are of a high quality. Practical facilities are up to date and appropriate for the levels of training. The college training staff are experienced, well qualified and well respected by the trainees. Several farms support agriculture trainees by providing livestock, buildings and materials for off-the-job training. The trainees benefit from visiting these farms and from the authentic work environment for training and assessment. These trainees also benefit from regular visits to ploughing competitions, fatstock shows and abattoirs. A veterinary practice is used for off-the-job training for veterinary nurses and offers valuable experience of real cases and very good modern facilities. Resources for information technology at the main college are particularly good, and access to them is well organised.

9. DART has an excellent health and safety record. Trainees receive good training in the whole range of pertinent legislation and regulations applying to themselves and employers. Monitoring of health and safety issues is well organised.

10. Progression to either sustainable employment or higher qualifications is generally good, and especially successful for agriculture trainees. Eight out of 10 of

those completing NVQs at level 2 have progressed to level 3. There are five trainees undertaking NVQs at level 4 in farm management, having achieved NVQ level 3 within the modern apprentices framework. Over 60 per cent of those who started in agriculture training in 1997 are completing a third year and NVQs at level 3.

11. Horticulture trainees make slow progress with their qualifications. Between April and September 1999 only two had achieved level 2, and two achieved level 1. The main reason for this slowness is the infrequency of assessors' visits to workplaces, and the failure of assessors to sign-off evidence, some of which has accumulated over a period of 12 months or more. Otherwise, assessment for agriculture, animal care and veterinary nursing trainees is good. A variety of assessment methods are used including direct observation, worksheets and theory questionnaires.

12. Portfolios are satisfactory and contain sufficient evidence of trainees' competence. In veterinary nursing, however, many portfolios are excellent and include an impressive depth and breadth of evidence. DART has no formal policy or procedure for unit accreditation so trainees leaving the programme early are not able to take any accredited units for completion elsewhere.

13. DART has been providing training for only a year. There is insufficient data to allow meaningful statistical analysis. In horticulture, 80 per cent of trainees leave the programme early, and only 20 per cent of leavers gain a qualification. Over 90 per cent of those who complete in agriculture gain NVQs.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. DART has equal opportunity and disability policies which are made available to all staff, trainees and subcontractors. The director is responsible for the management of equality of opportunity. Job descriptions set out staff responsibilities. Promotional materials contain information and statements designed to attract more applications from women who wish to enter agriculture and horticulture, where they are currently under-represented. Induction includes reference to equal opportunity policies and disability statements. During the 12 weeks prior to inspection staff undertook training and development to enhance their understanding of equality of opportunity issues. Grievance and complaints procedures are in place. Inspectors awarded the same grade as shown in the self-assessments report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ effective transport arrangements
- ◆ good opportunities for disaffected trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ low awareness of equality of opportunity among trainees and employers

15. There is a positive commitment to equality of opportunity at DART. It has appropriate documents to promote equal opportunities including a policy and statements within job descriptions. The trainees' handbook contains equal opportunities and disability policies. Subcontractors' agreements include statements that they should either have their own policies or use DART's. DART is successful at establishing work placements specifically for women trainees, but at present has no applicants to fill these vacancies. DART actively promotes its programmes to disaffected young people. A number of trainees with poor school attendance and punctuality records are showing marked improvements in these areas. They are enthusiastic about their training and their attendance is good. One trainee had not attended school for over a year and has recently produced an excellent level 2 agriculture portfolio. Staff attend appropriate training to increase their understanding of equal opportunities. Some peripatetic staff have also attended training.

16. Transport arrangements enable young people from the more remote areas of rural Derbyshire to access training. Some trainees use a bus service provided by a local university which runs at hours suitable to trainees' needs. Others benefit from a well-organised pick-up and drop-off service provided by some of DART's staff.

17. Monitoring of equal opportunities at work is weak. DART does not check to ensure that employers have equal opportunity policies or even use DART's own policy. A few employers do have their own equal opportunity policies and have identified key staff to manage and monitor equal opportunities. DART does not adequately explain to employers issues relating to equal opportunities.

18. Although equal opportunities is a standing agenda item at course review meetings, minutes reflect a lack of understanding by trainees of the importance of the issues. DART uses trainees' review forms which include a section for comments on equality of opportunity. One agriculture tutor habitually responds to this by writing "not applicable". Many trainees have a poor understanding of equality of opportunity.

Trainee support

Grade 2

19. Trainees are recruited through the careers service, by school referral or by direct contact with employers. In DART's first year of operation the majority of trainees were already placed with employers. Most agriculture trainees find their own work placements. All trainees receive a handbook. Trainees are often interviewed by both the director of DART and subcontractors' staff. The director is responsible for managing trainee support, and DART has trainee support policies. Inspectors awarded the same grade as shown in the self assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good initial assessment
- ◆ good support for trainees with learning difficulties
- ◆ high frequency of placement visits
- ◆ highly accessible information and guidance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of rigour in reviews for horticulture trainees
- ◆ no formal trainee support arrangements with main subcontractor

20. All trainees benefit from good support by DART. There is a systematic and thorough approach to determining support needs which starts at application, continues at interview where trainees are asked to fill out a detailed checklist, and is kept under regular and frequent review. Trainees with additional learning support needs endorsed by the TEC are asked to undertake literacy and numeracy assessments. The findings of these formal and informal assessments are used to devise a training plan that is appropriate to trainees' needs, and these plans are regularly updated to reflect any change in their circumstances and the progress they make.

21. The frequency of reviews meets, and, in the case of trainees with special or additional needs, exceeds contractual requirements. Action plans arising from these reviews are usually thorough, although for a few horticulture trainees they are not particularly detailed or demanding. A trainee at a kennel is able to achieve more quickly than the targets set by her peripatetic assessor.

22. Learning and pastoral support facilities at the main college are especially good and include excellent computing resources including voice and text recognition software and digital cameras for use by trainees with dyslexia or other learning difficulties. Although DART's trainees use these facilities, the formal arrangements for ensuring trainees get support are inadequate. The subcontractor is not issued with copies of DART's initial assessment findings.

23. DART makes good use of peripatetic assessors and learning support tutors. In addition, it employs two part-time additional needs tutors who provide wordpower and numberpower training and assessment at work. This is especially commendable in view of the widespread and remote rural locations of most workplaces. In general, support, advice and guidance for trainees are easily accessible, either off the job or on the job. Trainees are encouraged to speak to the director over the telephone out of working hours if they have any pressing pastoral or learning support needs.

24. DART makes effective use of accreditation of prior learning and experience. One trainee has had units from a customer care qualification accredited to an animal care NVQ. Some agriculture and mixed farming trainees who have passed the national proficiency test for sheep dipping have this qualification accredited as part of the unit for monitoring health and safety. Some trainees working towards dog grooming and animal care have identified previous qualifications in kennel craft to provide evidence for some units. There are two members of staff who are qualified to advise trainees on use of evidence for accreditation.

Management of training

Grade 2

25. DART is managed by the owner and director, aided by one part-time administrator. There are six regular and three occasional part-time staff involved with the training and assessment process, all of whom report directly to the director. Inspectors awarded the same grade as shown in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ particularly effective use of peripatetic assessors in most areas
- ◆ excellent internal and external communications
- ◆ dedicated and focused management and staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ over-reliance on informal relationships
- ◆ poor management of off-the-job horticulture subcontractor
- ◆ lack of training targets in business plan

26. DART's staff act promptly to deal with any issues which affect trainees and their progress towards achieving their training goals. Problems are dealt with openly and all parties are kept informed of developments through regular and frequent communications with the director. The transition from the previous provider to DART was seamless, and resulted in an improved service for some trainees and employers.

27. Generally, the management of subcontractors is good with highly effective informal communications. The director meets the subcontractors' staff on a weekly basis. Training issues are often quickly resolved by informal discussions. Monthly written feedback reports provide highly effective links between on- and off-the-job training in veterinary nursing.

28. DART uses six part-time staff on a regular basis to carry out training, key skills work, assessment and internal verification. Flexible development of staff allows the company to access a wide range of skills by employing several specialist staff rather than a few full-time employees. There are good working relationships between the director and the workforce. All of the team is managed by the director who works from home and is available to staff in the evenings.

29. The director has worked with several of the staff for over 10 years prior to the formation of the company. He has 16 years' experience of youth training programmes in the land-based sector. All staff hold higher education qualifications and/or degrees in relevant work areas. They fulfil their duties efficiently and have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. There are clear job descriptions for all staff and regular meetings identify staff development needs. Staff development is well planned to meet individual and organisational needs. Training opportunities are organised to fit the flexible working patterns of part-time staff. Lines of communication are effective but often informal. The director welcomes opinions from staff and acts on their advice.

30. DART has excellent working relationships with a wide range of employers most of whom have dealt with the director for several years. Employers value the quality of the off-the-job training, when practical instruction is given in addition to sessions on theoretical knowledge. DART seeks information from employers by questionnaire and personal enquiry regarding the organisation of training and this informs the planning process. A questionnaire to employers in December 1999 shows that 95 per cent of them felt that practical instruction given off the job was good or very good.

31. Management information on progression, retention and achievement is readily accessible and used to influence the planning of training. Regular review meetings are arranged every six months to monitor trainees' progress. They concentrate on financial planning and detailed training targets are not set.

32. There is lack of formal procedures and protocols for the subcontractors, which puts the trainees' experience at risk should there be personnel changes within the organisations. Poor management of the horticultural subcontractor has resulted in a failure to provide training to the expected standards and timescales, and in low achievement rates. DART is highly dependant on the expertise and experience of the director. Other staff are capable of taking over the management responsibilities to cover short periods of absence by the director, but there are no written procedures to deal with prolonged absence.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

33. Quality assurance at DART is the responsibility of the director. Two staff attended self-assessment training sponsored by the TEC, other staff attend regular updates on quality assurance given by the TEC. Inspectors awarded the same grade as shown in the self assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive range of policies and procedures
- ◆ good use of trainees and employers' surveys
- ◆ improvements resulting from action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal monitoring of quality assurance at main subcontractor
- ◆ failure to share self assessment findings and report

34. DART has a complete range of policies and procedures to assure the quality of training and to promote continuous improvement. Procedures are clearly written with a logical, step-by-step approach taken to each plainly described stage. DART also has mechanisms for annual review and improvement of these policies and procedures.

35. DART has conducted two self-assessments during its short existence, and action plans arising from them have resulted in tangible improvements. For example, subcontractors' transport arrangements for farm visits previously meant that trainees often arrived late and left early, so DART has laid on its own minibus. Again, it was recognised that attendance at off-the-job training sessions by agriculture trainees was a problem, so DART's day-release sessions were rescheduled to more convenient times. Similarly, DART recognised that access to learning support was difficult for some trainees, and that others were reluctant to attend college. DART has arranged for excellent support at work.

36. The commitment to self-assessment has resulted in a report from DART which is largely accurate in its findings and describes reasonable measures to overcome any weaknesses found. The self-assessment report is not shared with the main subcontractor, so this opportunity to communicate DART's purpose, ideals and the standards it expects is lost. At present, and given the scale and newness of the provision, the quality assurance arrangements with the subcontractor are informal but satisfactory.

37. DART conducts surveys among both trainees and employers. These surveys are well designed and are subject to detailed analysis which leads to positive action being taken. For example, replies from questionnaires have led to the identification



of weaknesses in assessment and training in horticulture, and helped DART to gauge the effectiveness of induction processes.

38. Internal verification is well organised among the four qualified internal verifiers. Internal verification plans ensure that sampling is carried out regularly and across a wide variety of assessment strategies. Feedback is given to assessors and records of assessment are up to date. Internal verifiers meet every four months to encourage the sharing of good practice.