



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2000

Didac Limited

SUMMARY

Didac Limited provides good training in wood machining, furniture production and hand-crafted furniture. All training is carried out in the workplace. Training materials are good. Trainees are employed in companies throughout the Southwest. There are no systematic procedures for ensuring equality of opportunity for trainees. Trainees are given a comprehensive induction and emphasis is placed on the importance of health and safety. There is insufficient support for trainees with diverse needs. All trainers are specialists within their specific areas and all training is effectively co-ordinated and well-managed. Some trainees make slow progress towards achieving an NVQ. Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive but there are no systematic arrangements for evaluating their effectiveness. Performance targets are not set.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Manufacturing	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	3
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ careful planning of training to meet trainees' needs in the workplace
- ◆ good training materials
- ◆ comprehensive induction programme
- ◆ inclusion of self-employed trainers in meetings and the staff appraisal process
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsatisfactory recording of assessments
- ◆ no formal training for staff in equal opportunities
- ◆ lack of rigour in initial assessment
- ◆ some trainees' slow progress towards achieving their NVQ
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of policies and procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. Didac Limited was established in 1997 as a private training company specialising in training and development of operatives in wood machining, furniture production and hand-crafted furniture. The company has three shareholding directors, two of whom work part time and four self-employed assessors/trainers who also work part time. In August 1998, Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) contracted the company to provide training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2, and modern apprenticeships in furniture-related occupations. In October 1998, another specialist provider in the Southwest ceased trading and Didac took over responsibility for the training of 18 trainees. Since that time, 23 more trainees have started training. At the time of the inspection, there were 29 trainees, of whom 14 were modern apprentices and 15 were on work-based training for youth programmes. The company provides specialist training and a consultancy service to other training companies and employers.

2. Didac's head office is in Bristol and its trainees are employed in 10 companies based throughout the Southwest. Over half the trainees work for three companies in Somerset and the other trainees work for various companies in Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Bristol. Throughout the area, unemployment is on average 3.6 per cent, compared with a national average of 4.8 per cent. Unemployment is high in some areas of rural deprivation in the region. The main occupational areas providing employment are agriculture and manufacturing. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was over 52 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In the Southwest, less than 2 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Didac Limited produced its first self-assessment report in April 1999. The report was reviewed twice and the managing director produced a third edition for the inspection. This included a contribution from the training director, following discussions with staff, employers and trainees. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses though they considered several strengths to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grades in the self-assessment report for the occupational area, management of training and quality assurance. Inspectors awarded lower grades for equal opportunities and trainee support than those given by the company.

4. A team of two inspectors spent a total of eight days at Didac Limited during January 2000. The inspectors visited nine out of the ten employers and interviewed 11 workplace supervisors and managers and 27 trainees. The inspectors reviewed the trainees' portfolios and work at their workplaces. A wide range of other documents were also scrutinised including the TEC contract, quality manual and procedures manual, minutes of meetings, training materials, trainees' files and data. The inspectors observed two assessments, two quarterly reviews and four training sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Manufacturing		2	2			4
Total	0	2	2	0	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Manufacturing (wood machining and furniture production)

Grade 2

5. Didac Training has a total of 29 trainees in this occupational area. Trainees work towards NVQ qualifications at level 2 and level 3 and these are summarised in the table below. All trainees are employed and all training and assessment takes place in the workplace. Didac staff visit trainees on one day every four weeks, and in some cases, once every two weeks. These training days at the employer's premises are used for off-the-job training sessions, assessments and reviews. Four staff are self-employed trainers/assessors. They specialise in training leading to specific qualifications. In addition, the managing director and training manager carry out all the training and assessment in wood machining qualifications, as well as acting as internal verifiers. Didac staff use specialised training materials where appropriate, as well as the employers' own resources. Since 1998, 12 trainees have left the programme. Six achieved their NVQ and nine remained with the same

employers. The average NVQ achievement rate for manufacturing trainees in the Somerset TEC area is only 30 per cent. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths that inspectors considered no more than normal practice and some weaknesses that were not significant. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

Qualification	Level	Modern Apprentices	Work-based training for youth
Wood machining	2	8	4
	3	3	
Furniture Production (veneering)	2		1
Furniture Production (assembly)	2		2
	3	1	3
Furniture Production (polishing)	2	1	2
Upholstered Furniture production	2		2
Producing hand-crafted furniture	2	1	1

STRENGTHS

- ◆ adaptation of training to meet trainees’ needs in the workplace
- ◆ good training materials
- ◆ participation of trainees in international industry exhibition

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal plans for theory training sessions
- ◆ inadequate planning and recording of assessments

6. There are good working relationships between supervisors, trainees and Didac staff. All training is provided in the workplace and employers are involved in all aspects of the training. Trainees carry out projects in order to develop the skills necessary to achieve the NVQ. These projects are adapted to suit the working methods and equipment used by the employers. All training takes place on the employers’ equipment. If an employer does not have the appropriate equipment to enable the trainee to cover the requisite range of NVQ competencies, the company will arrange for the trainee to receive training in another company that has. Additional practical learning support is readily available from experienced work-based supervisors. In some cases, employers have requested that trainees take additional NVQ units relevant to their production requirements. The training provided by Didac staff is based on practical activities linked to company production whenever possible. There are sufficient training resources to ensure good training is carried out. Training materials, in the form of handouts, contain excellent graphics, and are of outstanding quality. These materials are stored on computer and are accessible to all staff. Didac staff have designed the materials to meet the needs of trainees, the employers and comply with the industry regulations. The materials are

being updated to incorporate key skills wherever possible. Trainees work in a responsible manner and are enthusiastic about the training. The interim period between training days is designed for trainees to work on their own and take responsibility for organising their own learning, during which they complete written or practical work set by the trainer. This is marked at the start of the next training day.

7. Trainees are encouraged to use computers to generate evidence for their portfolio. Information technology training is planned at the larger companies as part of their training programme. A laptop computer is available for trainees. Trainees are encouraged to provide photographic evidence of work for their portfolios and a digital camera is available for this purpose. Trainees are also encouraged to enter national competitions. Two trainees have won prestigious awards. Trainees are also involved with an international industry exhibition where they demonstrate machinery to visiting delegates and produce pieces which are then sold to raise money for charity. This enables trainees to gain experience on new machines and with new technology and obtains additional evidence for their NVQ.

8. Theory training is not planned systematically and trainers are uncertain when they should carry it out. Theory sessions were satisfactory. In many instances, trainers gave individual tuition, and questioned the trainees closely to make sure they understood what they were learning. The planning of assessments is neither systematic nor recorded. Assessments are usually arranged informally. The assessment methods are sound and appropriate but the assessments are not recorded in detail. Trainees are not usually given written feedback on their assessments. Trainees are unsure of when they are being formally assessed or which NVQ units they have achieved. Some trainees are not aware of the difference between training and assessment. In some cases, trainees do not know which of the projects have been used as a means of assessing their NVQ competencies.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

9. Didac Limited has an equal opportunities policy and a copy of this is given to all trainees during their induction. Employers have their own policies or are given a copy of the company's policy. There is a harassment policy and a written grievance and complaints procedure set out in the procedures manual. All trainees are employed. There are currently no female trainees, no trainees from minority ethnic groups and no trainees with disabilities. There is one trainee who has restricted growth. The inspectors did not agree with the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They found both strengths and weaknesses which the company had not recognised. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular monitoring of the effectiveness of the harassment policy
- ◆ employers' support for equality of opportunity

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no specific action to promote recruitment from under-represented groups
- ◆ no training for staff on equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient checks on employers' upholding of equal opportunities during trainee recruitment
- ◆ no systematic analysis of data to measure effectiveness of policies

10. Didac Limited has a harassment policy and code of conduct for both staff and trainees. Staff are given a copy of the policy as part of the quality assurance manual. Trainees are told about the policy during induction. Didac has started to review this policy by asking trainees about its effectiveness during their quarterly progress reviews. They ask trainees if they have been treated fairly and if there have been any instances of harassment or bullying in the workplace. The effectiveness of the policy is also being monitored through the revised questionnaire for trainees, which is issued to them every six months.

11. Employers provide a safe environment for all trainees. All trainees feel they are treated fairly and equally. Didac has started to monitor the promotion of equality of opportunity by employers with whom it works. Half of the employers have responded to a recent survey on how they support equality of opportunity and their returns have been analysed. Half the companies Didac works with employ operatives from minority ethnic groups and 2.7 per cent of their production operatives are female. In non-production areas, 42 per cent of employees are female. The company has no action plan for encouraging employers to recruit female trainees or persons from minority ethnic groups. The marketing materials do not specifically promote equality of opportunity.

12. Staff are aware of the need to treat everyone fairly though none have had any formal training on issues relating to equal opportunities. Staff are not familiar with equal opportunities legislation or issues such as those relating to social exclusion or the need to safeguard and respect cultural and religious beliefs. The equal opportunity policy complies with TEC contractual requirements. The agreements with the employers do not specify that the employer should be an equal opportunities employer. The health and safety checks carried out on companies before trainees start are comprehensive but do not include any checks on facilities for female or disabled trainees. The guidance notes given to employers about their role and the training programme do not include any requirement for recruitment and selection of trainees to be free from bias. There is no additional information or training available to staff, trainees or employers. The company does not provide

staff with training related to equal opportunities and it does not give staff, trainees and employers additional information or reference material on equal opportunities.

13. The company collects equal opportunities data relating to trainees' gender, ethnicity and disabilities. It also seeks feedback from the trainees relating to the promotion of equal opportunities, at the quarterly reviews of trainees' progress and through six-monthly questionnaires. Data and feedback, however, are not analysed systematically in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the company's equal opportunities policy.

Trainee support

Grade 3

14. The company is not responsible for the selection and recruitment of trainees. Employers recruit and select trainees who are employed with them. The company carries out initial assessment using its own numeracy and literacy test. Induction takes place in the workplace and is carried out by company staff. It covers procedures, health and safety, equal opportunities and key skills. Further induction, especially in relation to health and safety, is also given in the workplace. Trainees receive support from supervisors in the workplace, and additional support from Didac staff on an informal basis. Inspectors considered many of the strengths stated in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They found one strength and one weakness the company had not identified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction for trainees
- ◆ availability of advice and guidance for trainees outside working hours
- ◆ effective process for providing trainees with work schedules after each training day

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently rigorous initial assessment
- ◆ no systematic support for trainees with diverse needs
- ◆ failure to record trainees' progress reviews in sufficient detail

15. Didac staff undertake a multi-stage induction process with their trainees in the workplace. The first induction is conducted by Didac staff, and covers procedures and equal opportunities, with particular attention given to health and safety and control of substances hazardous to health. The second stage is induction by the employer, during which company procedures are covered and the trainees' awareness of the importance of health and safety and equal opportunities is reinforced. The trainees also receive a separate induction to the NVQ and key skills. A list of abbreviations for technical terms relating to the sector and NVQs is

provided for trainees to help them understand their training programmes. Trainees said they could recall their induction and especially the information on health and safety which is given the highest priority. Trainees are given a booklet, which contains all relevant information and the telephone numbers of Didac staff. Trainees receive daily support from their workplace supervisors. Where there is a particular difficulty with a trainee, parents are invited to attend a meeting with the employer to resolve the problem. Trainees are also encouraged to telephone Didac staff for a private chat outside normal working hours, if they so wish. Some trainees have done so to resolve personal problems and work-related problems.

16. In some instances, qualifications and experience the trainees already have are recognised and recorded. Some trainees who have already completed units towards key skills have had these credited towards their qualifications. There are arrangements for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning and three trainees are currently being credited with units towards their NVQ. The process for identifying and recognising trainees' prior qualifications is not, however, sufficiently thorough. For example, company staff were unaware that one trainee held an NVQ in carpentry and joinery. They had, in consequence, taken no action to find out whether this trainee had already covered some of the units for his NVQ in cabinet making. The initial assessment process is not rigorous enough. A literacy and numeracy test designed by the company is given to all trainees, but results from these have not been analysed or evaluated. There is no specific test to assess trainees' key skill training needs. Trainees who need additional support are usually referred back to the TEC or careers service and no record of their name is kept. No member of staff has received training in teaching or assessing trainees with learning difficulties or other specific needs. There are no systematic arrangements for providing additional support for trainees.

17. Trainees receive a copy of their course report after every training day. This report details training and assessments completed and projects or work to be carried out before the next training day. The workplace supervisor is also given a copy. The trainees have a more formal quarterly review of the progress with Didac staff and their supervisor. Some of the records of these reviews do not give much detail on trainees' progress. During the reviews, trainees are not set targets for achievement of their NVQ. Some trainees and their supervisors are uncertain of the extent of their progress or by what dates they must complete some, or all, of their NVQ units.

Management of training

Grade 2

18. Didac Limited employs one full-time and two part-time members of staff. The managing director is directly involved in all aspects of the company's work including training and assessment of wood machining, internal verification, development of training materials and commercial courses. The training director works part time and co-ordinates the work of four self-employed specialist trainers/assessors. All staff have relevant occupational qualifications and experience. Both directors have

obtained occupational safety and health certificates. All other staff undertake basic health and safety training as part of their induction. The company started working towards the Investors in People award in October 1999. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and also identified additional ones. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ employers' support for all training activities
- ◆ inclusion of self-employed trainers/assessors in staff appraisals and regular meetings
- ◆ sharing of staff expertise with other providers and industry

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to set down some procedures in writing
- ◆ some trainees' slow progress towards achievement of the qualification

19. Didac staff, employers and trainees work effectively as a team. The training programme is discussed carefully to ensure that it not only enables the trainees to cover all the requisite NVQ competencies, but also meets the needs of employers. The training given by Didac staff is co-ordinated with the training given by the workplace supervisors and experienced operatives. Employers ensure trainees are released for one-day of training every four weeks and give them time to carry out the activities they are set by the Didac staff at each visit. Many employers are fully involved in the training activities and these are well co-ordinated. Some employers have arranged for Didac to provide training for their staff related to specific NVQ units.

20. All staff, including self-employed, part-time staff, are given an annual appraisal which is linked to staff development. All staff have achieved or are working towards, assessor qualifications. One trainer who is a specialist in cabinet making is being trained to teach wood machining. The training director recently achieved his key skill practitioners' qualification. The training director and another trainer are taking the lead on helping the company achieve the Investors in People award. Two days a year are booked as training days for all staff. The last training day was used to discuss and develop training materials for different areas. Records are kept of staff qualifications and courses staff have attended. There is, however, no formal procedure for staff development and no records are kept of staff development activities. There are also no detailed written procedures for the selection and recruitment of staff, employers or trainees. Most of the staff are self-employed and communication with them is not always systematic. All staff are invited to attend a monthly meeting. They are kept updated on current developments and salient issues through memos and telephone discussions. Didac staff not only share their knowledge and expertise amongst themselves, but run courses and seminars for

other training providers and employers. Didac ran a course for training providers on manual handling training. They also run courses on the provision and use of work equipment regulations, which were established in December 1998. The managing director assists the health and safety executive on matters relating to wood machining.

21. Didac recently established a record card system for recording the units achieved by each trainee and to manage their progress. Trainees' achievement rates are not systematically analysed to identify trends that may be taken into consideration in management decisions. Trainees' progress is not always monitored with sufficient thoroughness. For example, management only recently became aware of a trainee who had been on the programme for 17 months and had not completed any NVQ units. Action has now been taken to rectify this situation. Trainees make slow progress towards achievement of wood machining qualifications. Even allowing for the fact that trainees have, for health and safety reasons, to be closely supervised, it is still taking as long as 15 months before the trainees are assessed for any part of the NVQ. Some trainees who have progressed from level 2 to level 3 over eight months ago have still not completed any of their level 3 units, even though they are working on specific projects.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

22. Didac limited has a quality assurance manual and a quality assurance procedures manual. The company's quality assurance arrangements meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and the local TEC. Business targets and standards are set in line with contractual requirements. The managing director takes full responsibility for the quality assurance arrangements. The training director was involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report but considered that some of the weaknesses were not significant. They found strengths and weaknesses the company had not identified and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ effective action on trainees' feedback and self-assessment findings
- ◆ frequent review and updating of training materials

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic use of data on trainees' achievements and destinations
- ◆ insufficient performance targets
- ◆ poor arrangements for internal verification sampling

23. All staff have a copy of the quality assurance manual and operating procedures which they use on a regular basis. The quality assurance arrangements include a wide range of activities. Feedback is sought from trainees using questionnaires every six months. Questionnaires will also shortly be used to obtain more formal feedback from employers. Training materials are frequently reviewed and updated to reflect changes in technology and legislation. The company has a schedule to ensure one of the directors observes all members of staff carrying out training and assessments every quarter. The company has welcomed the opportunity to use the self-assessment process to enhance its quality assurance arrangements. The company is implementing an action plan it devised after the production of its self-assessment report. There have been two significant improvements following self-assessment and action on trainees' feedback. Training days used to be every six weeks and they have been changed to every four weeks to give the trainees more opportunity to develop specific skills. Some trainees felt they were not changing jobs frequently enough to enable them to cover all the requisite NVQ competencies. Didac has worked with the employer to develop a schedule so that the trainees change jobs every month. The trainees and their supervisors use the schedule to plan activities and to ensure that the trainees master all the machines and processes in each area.

24. Didac collects data on trainees' achievements and destinations of trainees. It does not analyse the data systematically to establish key issues or trends. The training director has established a process for recording achievement rates but these are reviewed only at the end of the contract year. There is no regular or systematic review of the destination of trainees. Staff have not taken specific action to improve trainees' retention rates. The company monitors its performance against the TEC contract targets. The only performance target the company has set itself is an NVQ achievement rate of 80 per cent. In 1998-99, the achievement rate was 100 per cent. Currently, however, the trainees' achievement rate is only 50 per cent. The company does not set interim targets against which it can monitor its own performance, and that of the trainees.

25. The internal verification process is well established and well used. Checks are not made, however, to ensure that the sampling of assessment is comprehensive or appropriate. Internal verification of assessment by new or trainee assessors is insufficiently frequent. There is no systematic planning of assessment sampling.