



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1998

Wakefield Skillcentre

SUMMARY

Wakefield Skillcentre offers good training in engineering trades and fork-truck operations. Training is carefully planned to meet the needs of adult trainees who have experienced a period of unemployment. Trainees have access to a wide range of resources, spacious accommodation and the support of highly experienced staff. The management style is positive and open. The staff performance review system is well established and is closely linked to staff development programmes. Systems for monitoring equal opportunities and quality assurance are not yet fully developed.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2
Retailing & customer service	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ carefully structured training programmes to meet all trainees' needs
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ trainees' success in obtaining jobs
- ◆ staff skilled in dealing with trainees who have particular support needs
- ◆ individual needs carefully identified and used to plan training
- ◆ clear lines of accountability and communication
- ◆ clear targets and standards set, with performance carefully measured

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsystematic approach to monitoring equal opportunities
- ◆ insufficient trainer time with individual trainees at initial interview stage
- ◆ underdeveloped management information systems
- ◆ inadequate strategies to support continuous improvement

INTRODUCTION

1. Wakefield Skillcentre (WSC) is an industrial skills training specialist with over 30 years' experience providing training programmes for privately sponsored and government-funded trainees. The Skillcentre was originally part of the national network of government training centres. In 1990, it was privatised as part of ASTRA plc and, in 1993, became a division of the Clothing and Allied Products Industry Training Board group (CAPITB).

2. CAPITB was established in 1969 as part of the government's arrangements for training. In 1990, its statutory powers were revoked. Since then, CAPITB has evolved and created an organisational structure, comprising subsidiary companies and operating divisions which encompass commercial training and assessment and consultancy services for a wide range of occupational and industry groups, together with awarding body activities and sectoral responsibility for training arrangements on behalf of the apparel industry and the animal care and equine industry.

3. WSC currently delivers government-funded adult training programmes for Wakefield Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Bradford TEC. It currently offers training programmes in the following occupational skill areas: construction plant operatives; plumbing and heating; mechanical engineering and maintenance; electrical engineering and maintenance; welding and fabrication; motor-vehicle maintenance; fork-truck operations and warehousing. Training is predominantly based at WSC's premises, which are situated on the outskirts of Wakefield on an industrial estate. The building is single-storey, with clearly designated practical training areas. There are well-equipped training rooms, meeting rooms and offices. Facilities are good.

4. The Wakefield district is a diverse area, covering approximately 130 square miles. The population and employment opportunities are distributed evenly throughout the area. In the past, the area has suffered greatly from the decline of the mining industry and those industries which supported it. Unemployment rose to levels significantly above the national average. In recent years, this trend has been reversed. Development funding, the close proximity of major transport routes and the pool of unemployed labour have attracted new businesses to the area. The unemployment rate remains higher than the national average, and, in 1996, the proportion of unemployed persons was 6.5 per cent in Bradford and 8.2 per cent in Wakefield.

5. The number of school leavers in Wakefield and Bradford achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 35.2 and 47 per cent, respectively, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997. The percentage of those from minority ethnic groups varies in the areas in which the company works, from below 1.6 per cent in Wakefield to 13.2 per cent in Bradford.

6. In recent years, the manufacturing industry has declined, and employment opportunities have predominantly been in the service sector. However, in the last few years, the decline in manufacturing seems to have halted, and the sector still employs around 25 per cent of the working population of Bradford and 35 per cent of Wakefield's. Employment opportunities in the sector are holding steady.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. Wakefield Skillcentre's self-assessment report was produced by its management team, three months before inspection. Staff participated in discussions about the standards and the strengths and weaknesses of WSC's training. The process was new to the staff, who found it difficult to make grading decisions. The final self-assessment grading was carried out by the management team. The self-assessment report relates clearly to *Raising the Standard* and accurately reflects some of the strengths and weaknesses of its provision.

8. A team of three inspectors, accompanied by a specialist adviser, spent a total of 15 days at Wakefield Skillcentre in October 1998. They interviewed 11 trainees, one ex-trainee and observed a group interview session. Two workplace supervisors and 15 staff were interviewed. Inspectors looked at the engineering and fork-truck-driving provision, observing a total of ten training sessions. They observed off-the-job and practical training sessions, as well as assessment in the training centre. Inspectors examined a wide range of supporting documents, including trainees' files, assessment records, reviews, trainees' portfolios and scheme records.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

9. WSC offers training in mechanical and electrical engineering, welding and motor vehicle, via the adult training programme. The programme's aim is to increase employability and vocational skills of unemployed adults. There are currently 13 trainees in the centre or on placement. In all areas, training focuses on skills enhancement and/or accreditation to current standards, and so it is usual for trainees to have some prior skills. Additional training is provided as part of the initial training package to certification levels. Inspectors found that many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice and identified additional strengths, awarding the same grade as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ unemployed trainees benefit from working with employed trainees
- ◆ instructors are multiskilled, many operating in two areas
- ◆ well-structured training programmes meet all trainees' needs
- ◆ training is carried out in a stringent health and safety conscious environment
- ◆ good accommodation and resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of feedback from trainees' questionnaires
- ◆ some learning sessions lack variety

10. At WSC, 15 per cent of the trainees are on work-based training for adults programmes, the remainder being privately sponsored by employers. Working side by side, this mix has a positive influence in that unemployed trainees are motivated to achieve. Staff are highly experienced and suitably qualified, with some individuals assessing and instructing in more than one occupational area. Training programmes are well structured and organised, with trainees' progress monitored regularly. Training takes place in a stringent health and safety conscious environment. Trainees complete additional short courses to complement their occupational skills. The courses include manual handling, emergency first aid at work, site safety and abrasive wheels. Communications and job-search training is positively encouraged. All trainees successfully completing courses are awarded a WSC certificate.

11. There are excellent staff-trainee working relationships which help to drive forwards trainees' learning experience. Programmes have a higher than average success rate when it comes to job outcomes, with 80 per cent of trainees gaining employment in 1997. Trainees are regularly consulted about the effectiveness of their training, but there is no summary or analysis of this information and, therefore, no feedback. Learning opportunities are not always used effectively. Some teaching methods employed make little use of visual aids to add variety, and there is insufficient interaction between instructor and trainees during practical welding training sessions. Trainees are not given enough individual support and guidance. Motor-vehicle training is currently carried out in the workplace. Assessors and trainers visit trainees regularly in the workplace to plan assessment opportunities. However, there are plans for the centre to buy additional equipment, so that future training can be carried out in the training centre. Twenty-eight out of 44 trainees obtained employment in 1997-98.

Retailing & customer service (fork-truck operations)

Grade 2

12. The fork-truck programme is aimed at unemployed adults and seeks to increase their employability. Prevocational training is also provided for those trainees for whom it is relevant. There are currently 33 trainees, of whom four are on placement. Together with a further four employed ex-trainees, there are eight registered for the NVQ level 2 in fork-truck operations. Twenty trainees have recently been transferred from another provider. The programme includes fork-truck training leading to a Road Transport Industry Training Board (RTITB)/AITT competence certificate and placement opportunities leading to employment and, in some cases, to an NVQ level 2 in fork-truck operations. Fork-truck training is provided on consecutive days: either five days or two and a half days, depending on trainees' previous experience. The programme follows the RTITB/AITT-recommended content and is assessed in accordance with the appropriate procedures and standards

for reach truck or counterbalance fork-lift trucks. The self-assessment report accurately identified some strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors also identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ carefully planned and effective delivery of training
- ◆ trainees' employability enhanced by additional complementary skills units
- ◆ responsiveness of staff to trainees' needs
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ high achievement rate of jobs
- ◆ high rate of achievement of certificates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees not given a copy of the programme timetable for the course
- ◆ failure to make some off-the-job training an integral part of the NVQ programme

13. Training sessions are effectively delivered, and trainees are attentive, involved and responsive. Question and answer sessions are effectively facilitated, and the participation of all trainees is encouraged. Trainers give trainees help and support, and the technical content of sessions is appropriate. Competence-testing is organised sensitively and rigorously. Assessment is conducted in accordance with the awarding bodies' guidelines, and documented verification systems are in operation. Trainers use their experience to add interest and to stimulate discussion in training sessions. Feedback from trainees is unanimously positive about the training which they receive, and there are effective working relationships between trainers and trainees.

14. The training programme includes prevocational and foundation opportunities which are appropriate to the level of programme and valued by trainees. There is a high rate of achievement of jobs. Thirty-five out of 36 trainees achieved the fork-lift truck driving operation certificate. Trainees' employability is enhanced by the additional training opportunities available, including manual handling, health and safety, abrasive wheel, first aid and job-search certificated courses. The training centre is well resourced and appropriately equipped for classroom training and practical sessions.

15. Trainees are not given a detailed programme explaining the timetable and sessions when they start training. The introduction given, at the selection and initial assessment session, lacks variety and information about the content of the programme. Evidence generated from the off-the-job training, leading to the

assessment of competence in fork-truck driving operations, is not fully integrated in the NVQ programme. Placing trainees in employment is a high priority, and continuous efforts are made to identify suitable placements where trainees may receive training to NVQ standard.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

16. WSC has an equal opportunities policy, of which all staff are made aware. All work-placement providers are made aware of WSC's equal opportunities policy before a trainee is placed. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups and those with disabilities are recorded. Inspectors found an equal number of strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the company's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wheelchair access to training accommodation
- ◆ special materials available for trainees with literacy problems
- ◆ staff are skilled in dealing with trainees who have particular support needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no recent formal staff training in equal opportunities
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no designated staff member responsible for co-ordinating equal opportunities policy

GOOD PRACTICE

A two-week work experience scheme has been set up between local schools and the welding instructor. It involves both male and female students, who prepare material samples for welding and complete a full day in the welding booth. Both parents and teachers are invited to visit the Skillcentre before work experience commences.

17 WSC's training centre is carefully laid out and has appropriate facilities, which are accessible to all trainees, including those with disabilities. Staff are responsive and sensitive to those who require additional training and support. Training materials are specially designed for trainees who are dyslexic or have specific literacy support needs. A nominated member of staff is used to record answers for the trainee. Trainees are issued with a copy of the appeals procedure at the start of their training; this clearly identifies their right to fair assessment.

18 Work-placement providers are monitored through trainee-monitoring visits and trainees' reviews. There are annual contract reviews with each provider. As part of this review, the work-placement provider's equal opportunities policy is specifically discussed and reviewed. Adherence to the company's equal opportunities policy and procedures is identified as a primary requirement to all applicants at staff interviews. However, no training has been carried out in the recent past to update or further develop staff's awareness of equal opportunities issues and practices.

19. Some equal opportunities information is collected, but comprehensive data are not systematically collected or analysed. The organisation does not monitor the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy. There is no member of staff designated as responsible for the promotion and effective implementation of equal opportunities. The company is aware of under-represented groups, but no action is taken with regard to recruitment.

Trainee support

Grade 2

20. All prospective trainees referred to WSC take part in a half-day interview and initial assessment session. Trainees train in close proximity to qualified assessors and have regular opportunity for assessment. A training needs test is carried out at this time. Time is spent in small groups followed by individual interviews. Induction sessions are held. Training opportunities are carefully explained, and individual training plans are agreed on. Individual needs are identified, with all trainees receiving support and guidance. Inspectors identified additional strengths to those identified in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed and regularly updated individual training plans
- ◆ trainers effectively develop trainees' confidence
- ◆ exceptionally good working relationships between trainers and trainees
- ◆ supportive monitoring of trainees on placement
- ◆ individual needs are carefully identified and used to plan training
- ◆ thorough trainee inductions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainers have insufficient time with trainees at initial interview stage
- ◆ failure to inform trainees of their progress towards NVQ attainment
- ◆ undocumented feedback from those leaving programme

21. Trainees take part in an initial assessment session which includes a practical test intended to assess training needs. This is followed by an individual interview. Information gathered is used to select trainees and prepare their individual training plan. Relevant information is used to inform the plan, and foundation training opportunities are offered in response to individuals' needs. All trainees take part in a well-planned induction, during which they agree on their individual training plan with the trainer. Trainers inform each trainee of the individual support which has been identified as necessary to meet their learning needs. Trainees participate in job-search training sessions to prepare them for employment.

22. Trainers work positively with trainees and display good skills in developing individuals' confidence. Trainees and trainers have constructive working relationships. Trainees placed with employers are visited regularly. Trainers carry out regular monitoring visits to the trainees at their work placements to discuss their progress and welfare. Individual trainees' needs are regularly reviewed, and training plans are comprehensive.

23. During fork-truck training sessions, trainees work in groups of three or fewer, with participative classroom sessions. Staff are experienced in working with adults and aware of the requirements for responding to individual trainees' needs.

24. Initial assessments are effective in producing judgements for trainees' selection, but this is of limited use in planning training. Initial interviews with prospective trainees are fitted around skills testing and a group presentation. There is insufficient time for trainees to discuss their particular needs with trainers. Trainees are monitored in placement, but, at this point, information about NVQ progress is not available, as this is held in trainees' portfolios in the centre. All trainees are interviewed before leaving the programme. However, information given is informal and not documented.

Management of training

Grade 2

25. WSC is clear about its purpose and direction. Staff have detailed job descriptions and are effectively deployed. The company achieved the Investors in People Standard in November 1997. Training targets are communicated to all staff, who understand their individual rôles in achieving the company's objectives. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ company's business plan and targets understood by all staff
- ◆ staff trained to be effective with trainees who have diverse needs and experience
- ◆ open management style
- ◆ regular management and staff meetings
- ◆ clear lines of accountability and communication
- ◆ thorough staff performance review and development procedures
- ◆ clear action plan

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ data not used to inform management's decision-making
- ◆ underdeveloped management information systems

26. Management is careful to include staff in the preparation of the company's business plan. All staff discuss and agree on the mission statement and the business plan at their performance reviews. Copies of mission statements and objectives are displayed around the training centre.

27. Managers are keen to involve all staff in the daily running of the training centre, and they value open and frank communication. Staff are encouraged, through the open management style, to address immediately any concerns which they have. There are also regular discussions at staff and management meetings.

28. A thorough staff development process is used, linking the company's aims and needs to the performance and development needs of individual staff. Bi-annual performance reviews and development meetings are held with each member of staff. Together, they review mission statements, policies and targets of the company. Performance and development needs of the individual are addressed. Staff development is provided to broaden the combined skills of the workforce. Staff gain transferable skills, which enable them to work in different areas of the training centre.

29. Data from applications, equal opportunities and NVQ achievement, are not gathered to assist the management's decision-making.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

30. WSC meets the requirements of the two TECs with which it contracts, and those of the awarding bodies. It achieved the ISO 9002 quality standard in November 1996 and is now included in the scope of the CAPITB group's quality assurance system. Inspectors identified a mixture of strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the company's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough internal verification systems
- ◆ clear targets and standards are set, and performance is carefully measured
- ◆ quality audits are used as an opportunity to discuss development needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor use of feedback from trainees
- ◆ no performance measurement strategies
- ◆ inadequate strategies for continuous improvement

31. Internal verification systems are comprehensive, with regular observation of assessment and assessors' practice. There are regular verifier and assessor meetings on site, in line with the policies and procedures prescribed by the awarding body. Minutes of meetings and records of observations are maintained, with assessors' action plans being issued when required.

32. Targets and standards are established with staff at regular staff meetings and at staff performance reviews. All staff are invited to discuss the shared targets and ways of improving programmes' effectiveness. Regular management meetings are held to discuss and review the business plan, current progress and any feedback from staff meetings.

33. An internal audit schedule is drawn up for WSC and is used to ensure that all procedures are regularly audited and reviewed. At each audit feedback meeting, a discussion takes place between centre managers and the group quality assurance manager to identify any changes to procedures which may be required. Additional meetings are scheduled every two months with the quality assurance manager to discuss the quality assurance systems.

34. Questionnaires are used to gather feedback from trainees about induction and training programmes. Leavers are invited to write a critique of their training. This information is read, but is not analysed to enable evaluation or effective programme review to take place by programme staff or managers.