



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1999

# British Printing Industries' Federation

## SUMMARY

The British Printing Industries' Federation is a national training provider specialising in printing skills. At the time of the first inspection, training in print was satisfactory, although some trainees' progress was slow. Trainees and employers received guidance on equality of opportunity. Company policies were regularly updated but there was no monitoring of their impact. Training co-ordinators provided good pastoral care but there was no systematic induction process for trainees. Management of training and quality assurance were less than satisfactory. There was insufficient management control. Training and quality assurance arrangements were not used to analyse or improve the quality of training. There was an over-reliance on skilled observers, and regular internal verification during the training programme was not standard practice. The British Printing Industries' Federation was reinspected 12 months after the original inspection report was published. Management of training and quality assurance have improved and are now satisfactory. It now has systems to track trainees' progress. Data on trainees' progress and surveys of trainees and employers are analysed, with findings distributed to aid improvement. The role of skilled observers is still unclear, but the number of visits to trainees by BPIF's training co-ordinators has increased. Assessment and verification procedures have improved, but still lack rigour.

**As a result of the reinspection of the British Printing Industries' Federation, the original published report text for management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Media & design	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3



### **KEY STRENGTHS**

- ◆ trainees gain good practical skills
- ◆ wide range of good placements
- ◆ good resources in the workplace and at college
- ◆ good pastoral care by co-ordinators
- ◆ good communication within the company and regions
- ◆ well-planned, comprehensive annual surveys of trainees and employers' views

### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ trainees' progress to qualification is often slow
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ lack of understanding by some skilled observers of their role
- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment and verification procedures
- ◆ value of college training not always understood by trainees
- ◆ no monitoring of the quality of training in colleges

## INTRODUCTION

1. The British Printing Industries' Federation (BPIF) is a business support organisation dedicated to improving the efficiency and profitability of companies in the printing, packaging and graphic communications industries. The BPIF operates from a head office in London, and six regional business centres in London, Bristol, Newmarket, Birmingham, Salford and Wakefield. Training is an integral part of the services on offer and includes both government-funded and commercial training programmes. The BPIF, as the only national training provider specialising in printing skills, aims to serve the printing industry and is a key player in the delivery of national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Specialising in the provision of training and assessment to improve the printing industry's skills, the BPIF's training scheme covers origination, machine printing, print finishing, carton manufacture, mechanised bookbinding and administration (known as print commercial) operations. All training and assessment are focused on the workplace where trainees work towards NVQs in their chosen area of work. The BPIF and the print and graphic communication national training organisation (NTO) have a close working relationship. The BPIF plays a major part in the development, revision and promotion of NVQs in print. The BPIF's staff are on several working parties for the NTO.

2. The print industry has a long history of apprenticeships, and has had to move with the times to cater for rapid changes in products and technology. The modern apprenticeship scheme for the industry is designed to provide young people starting work with a breadth of knowledge and skills which will be augmented, through the various phases of the programme, to the levels required of a qualified skilled worker or technician. The two routes provided, from which an apprentice selects, are print production (origination, machine printing, print finishing, mechanised bookbinding or carton manufacture desktop publishing, digital printing), or administration (covering customer service, estimating and production control).

3. The BPIF has run government-funded training programmes for over 10 years. Before the introduction of the modern apprenticeship programme, which was launched at the beginning of 1996, the BPIF delivered a programme known as the joint training council (JTC) certificate for skilled production workers. The JTC consisted of representatives from employers and unions, and the certificate was of a modular design, achieved through proving competence in the workplace. NVQs were developed, so that qualifications for print could become part of the national framework. The BPIF currently has less than 20 trainees completing JTC certificates and those who have recently embarked on their NVQ modern apprenticeship programme. The first modern apprentices are scheduled to complete their programmes during the coming year.

4. The BPIF works with employers to provide modern apprenticeships in the workplace. The programme is provided through a comprehensive package of on-the-job training and flexible learning materials. It is monitored and assessed by

visiting training co-ordinators. The BPIF also contributes to college fees, if trainees attend day-release courses. Alternatively, they are offered 12 additional visits per year from their training co-ordinator to cover this theory work. The number of additional visits has been increased since the first inspection.

5. The BPIF contracts with most TECs in England through the National Training Partnership. In addition, it has direct contracts with the following training and enterprise councils (TECs): Manchester, South East Wales, Merseyside, Prosper (Devon and Cornwall), London East, Thames Valley Enterprise and Shropshire. The latter acts as the co-ordinating TEC for the direct contracts.

6. The printing industry is the United Kingdom's sixth largest manufacturing industry (not including newspaper printing), employing 160,000 people in over 10,000 companies. The industry serves all sectors of the economy, including government, financial services, travel and tourism and distributive services. Printing is also an important medium for education, information and entertainment. Its customers range from major institutions to the smallest businesses. Its structure reflects the diversity of its products and fragmented nature of its market, with fewer than 20 printing companies employing more than 500 people and only around 550 employing between 50 and 499 people. These companies tend to specialise in a narrow range of products in national and international markets. There is a vast army of small firms, usually general printers, catering for a local market. There is also a growing number of high-street print shops, catering for the needs of the public and small businesses. Continual advances in information technology make the printing industry one of constant change. Qualifications are reviewed and updated to reflect this. Desktop publishing is the most obvious growth area in the industry. New print machinery is more sophisticated and is computer controlled, leading to a need for retraining as print works are updated. Technological advances mean that high-street print shops are able to produce a more diverse range of products.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. The commercial training manager conducted an initial assessment of the BPIF in January 1998. A steering group, with representatives from all areas of the organisation, was formed to review the self-assessment process and the resulting evidence and action points. The BPIF has plans to make self-assessment an integral part of its quality assurance system. It had problems in measuring the quality of its training against that of other providers and found difficulty in clearly identifying appropriate strengths and weaknesses. Some of the strengths included in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. Weaknesses were insufficiently identified in the appropriate sections of the report, particularly in the training and assessment section and trainee support, where none was listed. One of the five grades awarded by inspectors was the same as that given in the self-assessment report, while four were graded lower.

8. In preparation for reinspection, BPIF produced a report and action plan, which identified how it was addressing the strengths and weaknesses identified at the first inspection. The company's report provided grades for each of the areas due for reinspection. The grades awarded following reinspection concur with those given in the company's report. Inspectors noted that at the first inspection BPIF indicated it had plans to make self-assessment an integral part of its quality system, and that this has been achieved.

9. At the first inspection, a team of seven inspectors spent a total of 32 days at the BPIF during September 1998. A specialist print advisor was available to the inspection team for the last two days of inspection. Inspectors examined company and awarding body documents, including the BPIF's web site. They met staff from the company at the main office in London and observed 15 training co-ordinators in the field, while visiting work placements. Twenty-six employers were visited across the country. During these visits, 21 printing companies' managers, 17 skilled observers and 67 trainees were interviewed. Two colleges, offering theory training to the BPIF's trainees, were inspected. Inspectors examined assessment records and trainees' work portfolios, and observed 50 monitoring visits and instruction sessions. The following table (overleaf) shows the grades awarded to the on- and off-the-job training observed by inspectors.

10. Reinspection was carried out by a team of seven inspectors, for a total of 21 days, during October 1999. An inspector was placed in each of the BPIF regions and each met with training co-ordinators, visited trainees, employers and training providers to review the impact on trainees of action-planning by the BPIF to improve its management of training and quality assurance arrangements. One inspector was located at the BPIF's head office in London to review the revised procedures and practices designed to maintain effective management and aid continuous improvement of training. During the reinspection, visits were made to 15 printing companies and discussions were held with employers and their staff which

included 14 skilled observers. Thirty-nine trainees were interviewed, six training and assessment sessions were observed and 21 interviews were held with the BPIF's regional and head office staff.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Media & design		31	15	4		50
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Media & design (printing)

### Grade 3

11. There are 926 modern apprentices, 16 following a national traineeship programme and 18 other youth trainees currently on programmes nationally, all employed in the printing industry as machine printers, print finishers, originators, carton makers, mechanised bookbinders or administrators. There are also 273 adults improving their skills with the aid of European funding. Employer companies vary from large multimachine printers (employing many staff and covering all the origination, production and finishing aspects of the trade) to small, high-street print shops with fewer than five employees. Trainees work through NVQs in machine printing (which includes offset litho, letterpress, flexography, screen process and photogravure), in print finishing or, less often, in carton manufacture at NVQ level 2, before they embark on NVQ level 3 work.

12. Some 25 per cent of the BPIF's trainees attend college for their off-the-job theory training, studying for the City & Guilds 5260 qualification. This training is typically for one day each week over a two-year period. Eighteen colleges are approved by the BPIF to deliver training. Those trainees who do not attend college receive all their training at work. The BPIF supplies workbooks for each NVQ unit, which trainees work through with the assistance of employers' staff and their visiting training co-ordinators. These workbooks are intended to provide trainees with a basic understanding of the theoretical and process side of the work and include assessment materials and guidance. Those trainees who attend college are visited by the BPIF's training co-ordinators once every three months to support them and check progress. The co-ordinators are required to visit non-college trainees every month to offer pastoral support and to help them with the theoretical aspects of their work. Assessment is carried out at work by skilled observers. The co-ordinators monitor the assessment process and review trainees' portfolios at the end of their programme.

13. The skilled-observer licence system has been developed by the printing industry as an alternative to the expert witness arrangement used elsewhere. The observers

either complete a half-day training programme or study an open-learning package. This includes submission of two assessments through which they indicate their skills and competencies, which are evaluated by the BPIF's staff. They do not necessarily have recognised assessor awards. The aim of the scheme is to improve the specificity and quality of workplace assessment.

14. The self-assessment report identified few weaknesses for the occupational area, but the action-plan was more comprehensive. Many of the strengths in the report are either normal contractual practice or were not agreed on by inspection. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses, and the grade awarded was lower than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good skilled observers and co-ordinators committed to their trainees' progress
- ◆ trainees gain good practical skills
- ◆ good resources in the workplace and at college
- ◆ interactive computer simulation programme
- ◆ wide range of good placements
- ◆ some trainees moved within company or to other employers, in order to gain breadth of experience

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees' progress to qualification is often slow
- ◆ some trainees are not visited monthly
- ◆ limited availability and expertise of some skilled observers
- ◆ lack of detail in written feedback to trainees
- ◆ inappropriate language in workbooks, especially at NVQ level 2
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills

15. Apprentices generally have access to equipment and facilities which help them to learn effectively and which reflect current practice in the industry. The range of facilities and processes for each trainee depends on what his/her company can offer. Some trainees' opportunity to cover all aspects of the modern apprentice programme is limited by a lack of experience in a sufficient range of work. The more supportive employers ensure that trainees work with a range of equipment and processes within the company or arrange for them to gain this experience elsewhere. Trainees are generally happy with their progress in gaining practical skills and some are sent on courses to manufacturers as part of their practical training in the use of equipment.

16. The BPIF's workbooks are issued to all trainees and a set of them is provided free to colleges. The workbooks offer a structured approach to acquiring the



knowledge and skills required by the NVQ. The benefit to trainees depends on the individual's ability and the support which they are given by workplace staff and training co-ordinators. New workbooks are developed by the BPIF to match changing NVQ standards. The workbooks are now under review and amendment for a second edition, on the basis of feedback from staff and trainees. The language used in these books is sometimes complex and does not reflect the differences between NVQ levels 2 and 3. Some of the tasks in the workbooks are repetitive, and trainees are sometimes required to complete workbook tasks which repeat work for which they have already demonstrated competence in the workplace.

17. The BPIF gives annual awards to training providers and to a trainee, to whom a cash prize is awarded. These awards are highly prized within the industry and help to motivate trainees to succeed. The printing industry holds an exhibition every four years called the International Printing Exhibition (IPEX) which attracts exhibitors and visitors from all over the world and gives trainees information on the latest technological advances in the industry. This is attended by many of the trainees each year.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Computer programmes are used in some colleges to simulate print-production processes and allow for interactive use. These will soon be available to the BPIF's co-ordinators. Trainers can choose printing faults and trainees work either alone or in groups through alternative causes of the problems to put them right. The programme is sophisticated and realistic. Trainees can be set production targets based on costed time or paper wastage, making the tasks more difficult. When operated skillfully, this programme provides an interesting set of varied challenges for trainees.*

18. Assessment for the NVQ takes place at work and is carried out by skilled observers. Most trainees are well supported by these observers. The skills of each observer vary, some assessing outside of their particular area of expertise, for example, someone whose skills are related to the print-finishing area may assess machine-printing work. The BPIF assists employers to train staff as skilled observers. They recommend that the observers reflect the types of work being undertaken by the trainees. The assessment process is overseen by training co-ordinators. Of the 27 co-ordinators, 12 are machine printers, six are originators, three are print finishers and three are experienced in administration operations. Some assessments may, therefore, be undertaken and monitored by staff who are inexperienced, not occupationally competent or unqualified in that area being assessed.

19. Trainees' progress to qualification is often slow. For some trainees, progress is hindered by the lack of assessment in the first year's training and by shift work which makes it difficult for some observers to visit trainees in the workplace. Trainees attending college are visited every three months by their co-ordinator. Trainees are motivated to work just before and after the visit, but this level of motivation and activity is not sustained between one visit and the next. Trainees who do not attend college are entitled to a monthly visit from a co-ordinator; this sustains their work levels and keeps them on track. Where this is the case, a steady rate of progress is sustained. However, not all of these trainees are actually visited each month, and this delays progress, often leaving target dates unmet. Some trainees have not achieved their NVQ level 2 qualification after more than two years' training. The completion rates in 1995 and 1994 were 78 and 70 per cent respectively. The withdrawal rates have been increasing over the last few years and now stand at 20 per cent of trainees leaving without completing their programmes.

20. Most reviews are effective and provide trainees with helpful guidance. Trainees appreciate the support which they receive during reviews and the help from co-ordinators with portfolio-building. During reviews, trainees are given verbal feedback and advice, but no written records are kept of these conversations. This makes it difficult for trainees to act on the advice, and neither supervisors nor the co-ordinator are able to check that it has been acted on between one visit and the next. Some better-organised trainees make their own checklist of what needs to be achieved before the next visit from a co-ordinator. These trainees generally complete their NVQ level 2 within two years.

21. Many trainees are unaware of the key skills requirement of the modern apprentice programme. Although the BPIF has developed key skills workbooks, these are generally not issued until the end of NVQ level 2, resulting in opportunities for collection of evidence being missed. This is particularly problematic for the evidence-collection for the information technology element, especially where facilities in some companies are restricted or unavailable.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*One young trainee joined the company from school as an unskilled worker. He had a poor school report and no qualifications, communications and confidence problems and suffered from epilepsy and dyslexia. The manager wanted to give the trainee an opportunity to develop his potential and gave him the chance to work in different departments. The trainee developed an ability to learn about and handle machinery. He now works on print machinery and is actively involved in the training programme. He does not attend college, but is supported enthusiastically by his manager, who has become a skilled observer, and his training co-ordinator. The trainee now talks very knowledgeably about his NVQ.*

22. The BPIF has a comprehensive, clearly worded and regularly updated equal opportunities policy. There is a good range of up-to-date marketing and general publicity materials which portrays positive visual images of female trainees and trainees from different ethnic groups. One particular guide for employers is well written and carries several positive equal opportunity messages. It gives guidance on placing recruitment advertisements with different types of newspapers to attract female applicants, as well as those from minority ethnic groups. The guide gives several positive pictorial examples and case studies to promote participation from other groups, rather than the white males who presently dominate the printing industry. The BPIF encourages employers to review their own equal opportunities policy. It also encourages employers to both check their own codes of practice and monitor equal opportunities issues more effectively. Training co-ordinators ensure that employers have their own equal opportunities policy. If there is no suitable policy, the BPIF works with the employer to develop one. Trainees are issued with a guide, written in clear language, which highlights their rights and responsibilities relating to their training programme. There are several trainees with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. Inspectors agreed with the main findings of the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in that report.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ equal opportunities policy regularly updated

- ◆ guidance given to employers
- ◆ guidance given to trainees on equal opportunities

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no monitoring of data
- ◆ no monitoring of the impact of the equal opportunities policy
- ◆ awareness of equal opportunities is low
- ◆ no equal opportunities monitoring of staff

23. Although the BPIF maintains records of ethnicity, gender and trainees' achievements, there is no systematic analysis or evaluation of data collected or of the corresponding effect of the equal opportunities policy on trainees. This means that there is no effective action-plan for improvement. Training co-ordinators issue trainees with equal opportunities documents at the start of their training programme. However, trainees' awareness of equal opportunities issues in the workplace is generally low, and many have limited understanding of their rights and responsibilities. There is no formal training on equal opportunities issues or updates for staff. There is no monitoring of initial applications for vacancies within the BPIF. Application forms do not contain questions relating to gender, ethnicity or disability.

#### **Trainee support**

#### **Grade 3**

24. Trainees are selected and interviewed by employers which liaise with the BPIF regarding individual training requirements. No further initial assessment takes place for the range of NVQs offered, including assessment for key skills and prior learning. Training co-ordinators induct trainees to the training programme on the job, but this is done informally. Trainees work through a foundation skills workbook in their first three months, as part of induction, and receive feedback from training co-ordinators during reviews which usually take place every three months, although some trainees are visited more frequently. Visits are mainly monitoring visits to discuss trainees' progress. However, feedback is frequently verbal and not fully recorded. Guidance on progression from NVQ level 2 to 3 is also informal. The self-assessment report failed to recognise weaknesses found during inspection. The grade awarded for this area is lower than that proposed by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ external sources of support available in the workplace
- ◆ good pastoral care by co-ordinators
- ◆ celebration of trainees' success

## WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment
- ◆ no effective systematic induction process
- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning

### GOOD PRACTICE

*A modern apprentice, enrolled on the programme in 1996, had lost his mother at a young age and his father a few years ago. Shortly after the programme started, he had a car accident and became depressed and demotivated. His company supported him through difficult times and encouraged him to continue his qualification, with help from the training co-ordinator. His portfolio contained some outstanding work, including a project which he had designed and implemented and which led the company to reduce wastage costs by up to £350,000 per year. The company will nominate him for the local Young Achievers award.*

25. Training co-ordinators are supportive of trainees and are sensitive to their needs, both on and off the job, including those trainees with special needs or those with communication and self-confidence problems. Trainees are able to telephone training co-ordinators at any time to discuss their work or, sometimes, personal problems. All trainees are aware of what action to take, if they have problems outside of their monitoring or tutorial visits. This is due to the positive relationships established between trainees and the training co-ordinators. There is also a BPIF advice helpline for trainees, who can telephone any time in the normal working day, as required. This is still in the early stages of development, but is being used. There is good pastoral care, for trainees in the workplace, from the training co-ordinators, with several examples of help being given outside of normal working hours. One trainee had personal financial problems which affected his relationship with his supervisor at work and progress on the NVQ level 2. The training co-ordinator mediated at home and at work to help the trainee to continue with the NVQ level 2 qualification.

26. Most trainees are able to qualify for the BPIF's apprentice of the year award. Trainees are nominated by employers and training co-ordinators and are screened by the BPIF, and others in the industry, over a period of time. Three apprentices are nominated for the final awards ceremony, attended by a range of employers and sponsors. The winner receives a financial reward of £500, and the event is widely publicised in the printing industry.

27. Initial assessment is not effectively implemented. Some trainees do not have suitable entry qualifications for the training programme and struggle to complete NVQ units. As a result, some trainees are unsure why they are doing an NVQ level 3 qualification. Trainees do not receive an assessment to comprehensively analyse additional support or key skills requirements, meaning that learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, are not immediately recognised or acted on by the BPIF's staff. However, the company is beginning to use an initial assessment pack, from the Basic Skills Agency, throughout the country. There is no process for the accreditation of prior learning. Several trainees have good GCSEs, A levels, national diplomas and qualifications which are not recognised. One trainee studying for a higher national diploma, in print production, at college has completed a course in estimating, but has not been given credit for this on her modern apprenticeship. As a result, her progress is slow, as she has achieved only two NVQ units relating to general skills. Some trainees cover information in the workbooks at college and are still required to produce assignments, rather than use the relevant workplace evidence.

28. There is no formal induction to the modern apprenticeship programme. Training co-ordinators induct trainees individually, or in small groups at the workplace, but do not follow a standard induction programme. There is an over-reliance on trainees inducting themselves, using the foundation skills workbook. Trainees are also not formally inducted on progression from NVQ level 2 to 3 or to key skills.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

29. The company operates from a head office in London, supported by six regional offices throughout England. A team of 20 training co-ordinators, 17 of whom are self-employed and three who are full-time employees of BPIF, oversees the training. The co-ordinators cover all of the regions, working from home. Their work is co-ordinated by a national field manager who has regular contact with the team. Training co-ordinators liaise with employers, provide training and monitor trainees' progress. Records of trainees' progress and co-ordinators' activities are filed centrally at the London office for data analysis. This is where the senior management team is based. The BPIF is recognised as an Investor in People.

The main weaknesses identified at the first inspection were:

- ◆ lack of written feedback to managers and skilled observers, of reviews
- ◆ underdeveloped tracking and management information systems
- ◆ key skills given a low priority
- ◆ no integration of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some trainees have limited opportunity to acquire appropriate occupational knowledge at work

30. The strengths in management of training identified at the first inspection have been maintained. New practices being trialed on a pilot basis at the time of the first inspection have improved management of training and are becoming established. The BPIF still seeks to ensure that training co-ordinators are adequately qualified and experienced to enable them to carry out their roles. Recently, a number of new training co-ordinators have been appointed as company employees, rather than following the previous practice of subcontracting the role of training co-ordinators to self-employed people. This promotes consistency in the approach to management of training at an operational level. The directly employed co-ordinators now have responsibility for a group of trainees previously managed by several subcontracted training co-ordinators.

31. Some aspects of the weaknesses identified at the time of the first inspection are still apparent. However, several have been addressed. The company is aware of outstanding issues and highlighted them in the report prepared before reinspection, setting out in an action plan measures by which they would be resolved. The grade

awarded for management of training following reinspection was the same as the grade given in the company's report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good communication within the company and across the different regions
- ◆ effective changes made to operational practices
- ◆ excellent working relationships among employers, trainees and training co-ordinators

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little integration of on-the-job training with college-based learning
- ◆ poor communication between head office and employers
- ◆ lack of understanding by some skilled observers of their role

32. There is a structured and effective system for collecting and distributing information at all levels of the organisation. This includes regular meetings of training co-ordinators, internal verifiers, health and safety groups, workbook author groups and managers. Head office staff are briefed, at monthly intervals, on the outcomes of senior management meetings. There is a network of people within the organisation with differing specialist backgrounds and skills. Training co-ordinators are set targets for the recruitment of trainees and NVQ achievement. Qualified workplace assessors are invited to join internal meetings, and all discussions are well recorded. Training managers value the quality of the communications network, having found input from colleagues to be valuable in the development of the organisation.

33. There has been a significant increase in the number of visits by training co-ordinators to monitor trainees attending off-the-job training at college. Visits have increased from four to a minimum of eight each year. It is too early to judge the impact of this increased frequency. However, some trainees feel that the additional visits and associated guidance are beneficial, as they are acquiring a greater understanding of the link between theoretical knowledge gained off the job and on-the-job practices. Several trainees value their time off the job because this gives them the opportunity to experiment with and experience a wider range of practical skills than are available at work. For trainees not attending off the job training, co-ordinator visits have been maintained at monthly intervals but can be more frequent if it is considered the trainee requires additional support.

34. As well as these new arrangements, revised progress review forms have been introduced for training co-ordinators to complete at each visit to trainees. The review report ensures that monitoring of health and safety in the workplace is ongoing, that trainees' attendance at work is checked, that progress towards completion of their qualifications is reviewed and any action required noted.



Training co-ordinators, trainees and employers add comments to the review forms, all parties sign the form, and each retain a copy. A copy of this form is forwarded to the head office for monitoring purposes. One result of the review is that an action plan form is completed, which indicates the learning and development to be carried out by the trainee in the workplace and at home. The action plan sets target dates for completion of activities leading to assessment, is signed off and copies kept by the training co-ordinator, trainee and company representative. Trainees have commented favourably on the use of a grading scheme during review. They feel that this initiative is an incentive towards progression. It is linked to action-planning, and allows able trainees to progress towards their qualification more speedily than before. The revised review arrangements quickly identify trainees who are experiencing difficulties with learning, and additional support is given by the training co-ordinator.

35. Training co-ordinators are required to submit records of reviews of their visits to trainees to the BPIF's field co-ordinator. The field officer monitors the work of co-ordinators and, with the co-ordinators, reviews the progress of trainees, frequency of training support visits, assessment, and internal verification arrangements. Each add their comments to the review form and action required or support needed is identified. This procedure is a valuable tool, encourages consistency across the whole of the organisation and is helpful to all parties.

36. The working relationships among trainees, employers and training co-ordinators are excellent. Training co-ordinators, assessors, workplace skilled observers and trainees work productively together in both informal and formal settings. There are, however, instances where trainees do not have access to skilled observers and their working routine places constraints upon their ability to meet all elements of the NVQ. Training co-ordinators attempt to compensate for this during training sessions at work. Some trainees are taking longer to achieve their NVQ than is necessary.

37. At the time of the first inspection, modern apprentices were largely unaware of key skills. Materials are available to help them to develop key skills, but these were not introduced until the trainee progressed to level 3. Even then, there was a tendency to leave key skills until the trainee had almost completed the qualification. For trainees nearing the end of their qualification this is still the case. But for trainees part-way through their qualification, key skills are now an integral part of training and development. A new key skills monitoring sheet is being used by training co-ordinators to ensure that trainees are gathering evidence for key skills assessment. Evidence from working practices is being used to demonstrate key skills competencies, rather than the trainee carrying out separate exercises to build an evidence base. Training co-ordinators are now working towards key skills practitioner and assessor awards. Since the last inspection, one co-ordinator has achieved a key skills qualification and passed on the knowledge gained to colleagues.

38. One quarter of all trainees attend college courses to complete the City & Guilds 5260 award, helping them to develop their knowledge and understanding beyond the

NVQ level 3 requirements. Trainees do not always understand how this additional qualification relates to their modern apprenticeship programme. In some instances, college courses run independently of the work-based training programme, and there is little exchange of information between the college and the training co-ordinators and employers. Opportunities to integrate trainees' workplace activities with their college courses are often missed. The BPIF's training co-ordinators are now required to visit trainees at their off-the-job training in college more frequently and work with the colleges. Also, it is now common practice for college staff to be invited to attend the BPIF's regional offices to participate in the regular group meetings of training co-ordinators and the BPIF's training field officer. It is too early to assess the impact of the new arrangements. The company is currently evaluating the traditional method of theory training. It is comparing college arrangements for off-the-job training against the same training being provided by other organisations and the training given by training co-ordinators, during their workplace visits.

39. Some employers express concern that the information flow from the BPIF's head office to the employers' network is slow, and at times, there is none. They find the BPIF's telephone help line unhelpful, with enquiries being passed from one employee to another without an answer. Others had made enquiries by letter and at regional meetings, but did not receive answers. Most enquiries were concerned with training issues.

40. Most skilled observers understand the NVQ framework and their role in the training, of providing expert witness evidence for assessment and a mentoring role for the trainee. However, some skilled observers do not have a full grasp of the NVQ framework and are unsure about their role. In a few instances, skilled observers understand their role to be one concerned with assessment itself rather than acting as an expert witnesses of trainees' achievements.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

41. The BPIF meets several external quality assurance standards, including ISO 9001 and the standards required by the TECs and the National Training Partnership with which it contracts. The BPIF's quality assurance system covers all aspects of the business, except new initiatives, and is linked to the business plan. The framework consists of two parallel, but integrated, systems. A detailed manual covers the complete system, with an abridged version available for training co-ordinators. Procedures are regularly reviewed. The organisation has a designated manager responsible for quality assurance issues, and staff contribute to the system.

42. Prior to the first inspection the company identified two strengths and one weakness in its self-assessment report. Both strengths represented no more than normal practice. The weakness was agreed on by inspectors at the time of



inspection. Inspectors identified both additional strengths and additional weaknesses. Overall, the self-assessment report prepared for the first inspection was not sufficiently rigorous. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that given in the company's self-assessment report.

The main weaknesses identified at the first inspection were:

- ◆ quality assurance procedures not applied consistently across all training aspects
- ◆ poor internal verification practice
- ◆ over-reliance on skilled observers
- ◆ no formal evaluation of trainees' destination data
- ◆ no systems to measure quality of college training

43. The strengths identified in quality assurance during the first inspection are being maintained and effectively built upon. Several of the weaknesses apparent during the first inspection have now been addressed. Others have not been resolved. A report produced by the BPIF prior to reinspection recognised the outstanding weaknesses and an accompanying action plan set out measures by which the company would address these. The BPIF's report indicated that quality assurance arrangements contained a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors identified two strengths and two weaknesses. The grade awarded following reinspection of quality assurance arrangements is the same as that given in the company's report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good use made of feedback from trainees and employers
- ◆ improvements to quality assurance arrangements having a positive impact

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment and verification procedures
- ◆ lack of effective systems to monitor quality of training in colleges

44. The organisation conducts a comprehensive annual satisfaction survey, using questionnaires, at regular intervals. This is aimed at both employers and trainees, as part of the BPIF's policy of continuous improvement. As part of its communications strategy, the results of the survey are published and circulated to all trainees and employers, giving detailed analyses of on- and off-the-job training, training co-ordination and trainees' records. The results of the survey are used by the BPIF to identify whether changes to practices following self-assessment and action-planning have had an impact upon the quality of and arrangements for training. Bringing issues identified in the satisfaction surveys into the cycle of self-assessment and action-planning helps to ensure continuous improvement.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*It is good practice when, as an aid to establishing new practices, BPIF training managers make regular customer care visits throughout the regions to ensure the systems put in place to improve operational practices are being implemented in a consistent and appropriate manner. Additionally, managers are able to discuss with employers and colleges any evident weaknesses in current practices and seek by their influence to support training co-ordinators as they work towards improvement.*

45. At the first inspection it was identified that although the organisation's quality assurance system was understood by staff, there was a lack of consistency across the organisation in its application, including understanding of key skills, the review process, the frequency of review visits, the arrangements for college training and the time allocated to trainees by employers for NVQ portfolio-building. The BPIF sets recruitment and NVQ targets for staff and monitors performance against these. It uses management meetings to review organisational weaknesses and for self-assessment. Considerable progress has been made since the first inspection to address the issues highlighted. The majority of trainees now have key skills integrated within their learning programme, training co-ordinators are working towards and have achieved key skills awards to ensure that training practices are consistent throughout the organisation, the review process is much improved and the frequency of review visits has increased. Arrangements for college training are still unsatisfactory, but the BPIF is making efforts to encourage the colleges to integrate on- and off-the-job training. Employers still do not allocate sufficient time to trainees for portfolio-building.

46. At the time of the first inspection, although the BPIF's quality assurance system met external standards, it had little impact on the training of trainees. A significant part of the system was concerned with completion of the appropriate documents, and much of this was carried out by training co-ordinators on review and monitoring visits. Many of the individual administrative procedures were carried out to ensure that the quality assurance systems were implemented, rather than to improve the quality of training. New arrangements have now reversed this practice. Revised review documents and action-planning forms are designed to ensure that training co-ordinators' visits focus on training, progress reviews, and targets and assessment. Training co-ordinators' visits are now focused upon training issues and assessment is carried out satisfactorily. The completed paperwork now produces performance evidence about the trainee.

47. Using review reports produced by co-ordinators, the results of trainees and employers' surveys and other sources, the BPIF has started to prepare detailed sets of training performance progress indicators. Each report details registrations and numbers of trainees on programmes against targets, frequency of trainees' reviews and employers' support for trainees, assessment and achievement data, analysis of leavers and equal opportunities data. However, only some elements of the reports contain targets against which progress indicators can be measured. The reports have not yet been distributed to training co-ordinators. Co-ordinators are keen to discover whether the new systems are bringing about improvement. Training managers recognise the frustration that the delay is causing, but wish to evaluate the gathered data and review its value.

48. At the first inspection there was little internal verification carried out during the programmes; most internal verification work was carried out only when NVQs had been completed. Internal verification did not take place in the workplace, control over the quality and consistency of assessments taking place in the workplace was poor and the internal verifier was not provided with direct access to the trainee.



Changes to assessment and internal verification arrangements have now been made. A quarterly check is carried out where internal verifiers observe assessments, and the awarding body's external verifier has indicated satisfaction with current arrangements. However, these new practices are not being applied systematically.

49. In its self-assessment report, the BPIF recognised that it has no systems to measure the quality of training in colleges. There are only a few colleges which maintain good links between on- and off-the-job training and the BPIF does not adequately monitor the quality of the training delivered by colleges or ensure its relevance to on-the-job learning.