



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 2000

KTS Training Limited

SUMMARY

KTS Training Limited is located in Kingswood, Bristol. It offers good quality work placements for trainees on administration, information technology and customer service national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes. Its five-day fork-lift truck training programme is well designed and implemented. Its foundation programme serves those needing prevocational training and job-search skills. Some parts of the foundation programmes have an over-emphasis on group work rather than individual study. Staff are not yet qualified to provide basic literacy and numeracy training. A good level of help and guidance is given to trainees in their search for jobs. Equal opportunities are well promoted. Managers plan training improvements carefully. Quality assurance systems include rigorous internal verification.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	2
Foundation for work	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly stated aims for NVQ programmes
- ◆ frequent visits by assessors to trainees' workplaces
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good fork-lift truck training programme
- ◆ good jobsearch activities in the foundation programme
- ◆ good off-the-job training in current occupational practices
- ◆ continuous staff development programme
- ◆ rigorous internal verification

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention rates for modern apprentices
- ◆ little off-the-job training
- ◆ poorly qualified staff for literacy and numeracy training
- ◆ inadequate managerial awareness of foundation programmes
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ no procedures for evaluating quality of training

INTRODUCTION

1. KTS Training Limited is located in the Kingswood district of Bristol. In 1980, it was first known as Kingswood Charitable Voluntary Services, helping unemployed adults to develop skills and confidence. In 1991 it was purchased by the Bristol Tool and Gauge Group which took advantage of government funding to set the company on a sound financial footing. It was then renamed Kingswood Training Services Limited and in 1995 was taken over by the KTS Group. This allowed the company to grow further and it was renamed KTS Training Limited

2. The company has been frequently restructured to meet the demands of its contracts. Staff numbers have risen and fallen without affecting the ability of the company to improve its services to trainees. The company's headquarters contains two suites for foundation programmes, two information technology and administration training suites, an employment workshop, a conference room, offices and staff rooms. The centre is clean and bright with good lighting and some attractively presented art on the walls.

3. KTS Training Limited is part of the New Deal consortium led by City of Bristol College, but has not yet received any New Deal clients. Its main government-funded contract is with the Western Training and Enterprise Council (WESTEC). It offers work-based learning for adults, modern apprenticeships and national traineeships and other youth training. The company also offers private NVQ training and commercial training in information technology.

4. KTS Training Limited has 17 full- and four part-time staff and one modern apprentice. The chief operations manager runs the centre and reports to the managing director of the KTS Group. The chief operations manager works with the head of training to manage the day-to-day personnel, training and assessment activities. At the time of inspection there were 113 trainees working towards qualifications funded by WESTEC.

5. Kingswood is located in the labour market area of south Gloucestershire. This had a population of 223,000 when measured in 1994. Of these, 32,000 were recorded in the 1991 census as living in Kingswood. The 1991 census recorded that 1.2 per cent of the population south Gloucestershire were employed people of minority ethnic origin compared with 2.8 per cent from the WESTEC area. Total unemployment in south Gloucestershire fell by 66 per cent between 1966 and 1996. Between 1996 and 1998 it had fallen further from 5 per cent to less than 2 per cent.

6. In the Bristol area, 67 per cent of 16 year olds and 54 per cent of 17 year olds are in full-time education. In the south Gloucestershire area the figures are 74 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. These figures compare with national averages of 69 per cent for 16 year olds and 57 per cent for 17 year olds. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education

(GCSEs) at grade C and above was 47.6 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. The proportion of young people in this area achieving no GCSE passes is only 4.9 per cent, which compares well with the national figure of 6.0 per cent and better still with the percentage for Bristol of 10.7 per cent. Employers in south Gloucestershire are more likely to provide matched funding for training in the workplace for their employees than employers in the WESTEC area as a whole. The 57 per cent who are willing to do so are significantly above the average number.

7. WESTEC has undertaken an analysis of the skill needs in south Gloucestershire. It shows that 32 per cent of employers stated that employees lacked some general skills. The most important need was for training in basic information technology. Sixty-nine per cent of all employers in the area began to address this problem through the introduction of in-house training. When key skills were examined it was found that about one third of the workforce had basic or no skills in information technology. Employers stated that they were most satisfied with young people's willingness to learn and most dissatisfied with their ability to write good English and to communicate properly. The level of basic literacy and numeracy skills is 3 per cent better in south Gloucestershire than the 12 per cent of the national population recorded achieving poor levels of literacy and the 15 per cent of the population with poor numeracy skills.

8. The main sectors of business in the south Gloucestershire area are wholesale and retail with associated distribution and repair, financial and business services, public services and administration, including defence, health and social work, transport and storage, the manufacturing of transportation equipment and, lastly, construction. There has been a marked increase in full-time posts for women compared with those for men. In the recent past there has been only a 2 per cent increase in posts for men in the area compared with a 28 per cent increase in posts for women.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

9. The company produced its latest self-assessment report two months before the inspection. A small group of staff members, led by the chief operations manager, researched and compiled the report. The report was comprehensive with clear descriptive passages, a glossary of terms, descriptions of the main programmes, evaluative comments and gradings. Extensive tables of statistics on trainees' achievement rates and other respects of the scheme's operation were included as annexes. A comprehensive action plan for improvement was also included. This detailed plan contained strategies to remedy weaknesses but did not identify ways in which strengths might be maintained. Inspectors agreed with some grades but found that the company had underestimated some of the quality of the work done.

10. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at KTS in February 2000. Inspectors interviewed 43 trainees. They visited 17 placements and talked to 14 supervisors and managers. They discussed training, assessment, management and verification matters during 16 interviews with KTS staff. They observed four assessments, three reviews and observed three training sessions. All of these were graded, as shown in the table below. A range of policy documents and trainees' files were also examined.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration			2			2
Retailing & customer service		3	1			4
Foundation for work		2	1	1		4
Total	0	5	4	1	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

11. KTS Training Limited has 63 trainees in this occupational area. There are 24 national trainees, three youth trainees, 23 modern apprentices and 13 adults. Trainees are working towards NVQs in either administration at levels 2 and 3, or information technology at levels 1, 2 and 3. Twenty-four trainees are male, and 39 female. The majority of trainees are in work placements organised by KTS. Some attend KTS's premises for specific training including aspects of information technology. Many trainees are referred to KTS through links with the local careers

service. Following an initial assessment of trainees' basic skills there is an induction programme which includes information on the training programme and health and safety. Staff have appropriate qualifications and occupational experience. Resources are sufficient and modern, and include good computing hardware and software. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear aims for NVQ programmes
- ◆ frequent visits by assessors to trainees' workplaces
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good opportunities for additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention of trainees
- ◆ little off-the-job training
- ◆ poor understanding of NVQs by most workplace supervisors

GOOD PRACTICE

A member of the training staff was determined to understand how to assess key skills. She studied all the aspects of the various key skills requirements and learned how to practise them. As a result of her enthusiasm, she became the first person to gain the key skills assessor award in the WESTEC area.

12. The business administration programme at KTS is now improving after some problems with poor retention and achievements rates. Trainees agree on their NVQ aims with training company staff in a well-devised process. The aims are clearly recorded, are signed by the trainee, and a copy is retained in the trainee's portfolio for reference purposes. Aims are measurable, and an agreed timescale for their achievement is negotiated with the trainee. When an aim has been met and assessed, the outcome is clearly noted in the portfolio. Trainees have a good awareness of their progress towards completion of the qualification. They accept the rigour of having clearly defined aims as a means of maintaining their commitment to the agreed training programme. KTS's staff monitor trainees' progress on visits to work placements. The aims are revised where necessary to allow for changes, for example, in a trainee's workplace responsibilities and roles.

13. The training company has allocated considerable resources to enable staff to make frequent visits to trainees in their work placement. Trainees are visited at least once every two weeks and, where necessary, on a weekly basis if it is felt that such help is required. The main purpose of these visits is to monitor trainees' progress and to provide assistance. These visits are also used for the observation of trainees at work and for the assessment of NVQ elements and units agreed in trainees' action plans. The visits also provide opportunities for staff to guide and advise trainees in the collection of evidence towards their qualification. Trainees' portfolios sampled during inspection are of a good standard and reflect the clear advice and guidance available to trainees from KTS. Some training is provided during these visits in response to requests from trainees for clarification and

information relating to tasks to be performed in the workplace. Staff work well with trainees. Some trainees had made a direct approach to the company for training as a consequence of the positive reputation the company enjoys among young people in the area.

14. Work placements are good. They offer good opportunities for gathering evidence towards the agreed qualification, and for the personal learning and improvement of the trainee. The training company has designated staff with responsibility for securing and monitoring placements. The range of placements reflects the economy of the area. They include placements in insurance, information technology, engineering and car companies. In many instances, work placements have become permanent posts, and in the period from April 1998 to the date of inspection, 70 per cent of national trainee placements have become permanent posts. Trainees are made aware of and encouraged to obtain additional qualifications. Many trainees, having completed a qualification in administration, are helped to achieve qualifications in either customer service or information technology. Qualifications in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and integrated business technology (IBT) are popular among trainees.

15. The number of trainees leaving some programmes early and without a qualification has been high. Information as to why trainees are failing to achieve a qualification is not available. The company does not conduct exit interviews with trainees who leave a programme early. Plans to introduce exit interviews have been devised but have not yet been introduced. Over a three-year period from 1996-97 to 1998-99, 154 modern apprentices began training. Of these, 70 left before they could achieve their main aim, a loss of potential modern apprentices of 45 per cent. The national trainee programme began in 1998-99. In this year 26 trainees began training and 12 left before achieving their main aim, a loss of 46 per cent. The programme for other youth trainees has had a similarly large loss of trainees. Over the three-year period from 1996-97 to 1998-99, 182 trainees began to train. Of these, 98 left before they could achieve their main aim, a loss of potential youth trainees of 53 per cent. When the statistics for all three youth programmes are added together, it can be seen that 362 trainees began training and 180 left without achieving their main aim, an average loss to national training programmes of nearly 50 per cent.

16. The company has good data for those trainees who did remain on the programme, or left early with some achievement. Modern apprentices achieved 41 level 3 NVQs, eight level 2 NVQs and one level 1 NVQ in 1996-97. In 1997-98 the figures were 18, 11 and two respectively. In 1998-99 they were 11, eight and one. In 1999-2000 modern apprentices have yet to achieve any NVQs. The national trainee programme has only been offered for two years. On this programme in 1998-1999 10 level 2 NVQs were achieved and so far this year two have been achieved. The other youth training programme has ensured that in 1996-97 42 level 2 NVQs and three level 3 NVQs were gained. In 1997-98, 41 level 2 NVQs were achieved. Numbers on the other youth trainee programme were smaller because the NT programme began, and seven level 2 NVQs and three level 3 NVQs were

achieved. In 1996-97 the work-based training for adults programme enabled trainees to achieve 70 level 1 NVQs, 16 level 2 NVQs and five level 3 NVQs. In 1997-98 they achieved 28 level 1 NVQs and 20 level 2 NVQs. In 1998-99 they gained one level 1 and 26 level 2 NVQs. So far this year they have achieved two level 1 NVQs and 15 level 2 NVQs.

17. The work-based training for adults programme has a similar poor retention rate. Over the three-year period between 1996-97 and 1998-99, 305 adults began training and 167 left without gaining a qualification, a loss of 54.75 per cent. Of this group of 305 adults, 138 gained at least one qualification and 107 gained a job. However, of the 305 who started, 198 (almost 65 per cent) did not find work on leaving. When considered year by year, the number of trainees leaving without a qualification is falling as management tackles the problems of earlier years. In 1998-99, for example, 32 out of the 39 trainees who began training left with a qualification, an achievement rate of 82.05 per cent. Half of the trainees who left gained jobs on leaving.

18. There is some off-the-job training provided for trainees seeking qualifications in information technology. Such trainees attend KTS's premises. For most trainees, however, there is no structured off-the-job training which would increase the trainees' understanding of the occupational area. Training company staff see themselves primarily as assessors, and while information and advice are provided on occasions during workplace visits, such training is neither planned nor recorded.

19. Workplace supervisors welcome the opportunity to help trainees learn about work. However, most of those interviewed have little knowledge and understanding of the NVQ process. A consequence of this is that there is no involvement of supervisors in the assessment of trainees. Opportunities for assessment in these good placements are not always identified and acted upon. Supervisory placement staff are sometimes aware that aims are being agreed for their staff, but they do not understand the structure of the NVQ programmes within which the aims are set. This weakness adversely affects the overall quality of the training programme and the rate of trainees progress.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

20. KTS Training Limited have 30 trainees working towards customer service NVQs or fork-lift truck qualifications. Of these, 20 are male and 10 female. There are no retailing operations or warehouse and distribution NVQs being offered by the training company. Six modern apprentices are working towards either a level 2 and a level 3 NVQ in customer service or have begun directly at level 3, depending on their occupational experience. There are 11 national trainees who are working towards a level 2 NVQ in customer service. Seven of these are employed and the remaining four are in work placements. There is one trainee on a youth traineeship

programme who is working towards a level 2 NVQ in customer service. Training for customer service is carried out in the workplace by the training company. The range of customer service placements includes companies dealing with transport, computers, engineering, garage work and finance. The remaining 12 trainees are adults on the national plant operators register for either reach or counterbalance fork-lift truck work. The five-day fork-lift truck training course is subcontracted to a specialist training company. The present contractor has had the contract since January 1999. The qualification is tested by practical examination at the end of the training week. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths given in the self-assessment report but found others to be no more than normal practice. Additional strengths were identified. Weaknesses identified in the report were agreed on and a further one identified. Inspectors awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent assessment opportunities for customer service trainees
- ◆ productive customer service work placements
- ◆ wide variety of well-presented evidence in trainees' portfolios
- ◆ good fork-lift training programme
- ◆ fork-lift trainees gain additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little accreditation of prior achievement in customer service
- ◆ late start of key skills training in customer service
- ◆ little off-the-job training in customer service

21. There are frequent assessment opportunities for customer service trainees. Assessors visit trainees at least fortnightly and often weekly. During these visits working practices are observed and evidence which naturally occurs in the workplace is gathered. On each visit precise and measurable aims are discussed and agreed with trainees. These aims provide a focus for the assessment process. They not only identify evidence sources but also set realistic timetables for their completion. The visits also establish a close and productive relationship between the assessors and trainees. Assessors have a clear understanding of the workplace activity and know what evidence is available to the trainee. Workplaces are well chosen to ensure that the trainees can collect naturally occurring evidence in their day-to-day duties. Employers are happy to assist with the collection of evidence and to co-operate with assessors. There is a wide range of good-quality evidence in the trainees' customer service portfolios. For example, good use is made of employers' material, such as company literature and forms, examples of trainees' work and of employer statements describing the work trainees have carried out. Assessors

augment this where necessary with either worksheets, which the training company has purchased, or other worksheets and handouts which assessors have designed themselves. In addition, there are good case studies which trainees have produced.

22. Recent achievements of modern apprentices and national trainees in customer service are satisfactory. Out of 13 trainees joining the modern apprentice programme last year three are still on the programme. Out of the 10 who have left so far, nine gained the qualification. This year the three modern apprentices who joined the programme are still attending. Out of last year's 10 national trainees on the customer service programme, three are still on the programme and out of the seven who have left, four gained the qualification. This year out of 10 trainees who started, one has gained a qualification, one has left without completing the course and eight remain. The programme for other youth trainees showed very poor achievement rates in the early years but has now gradually improved through good management and staff action. Fifty-three youth trainees started in 1996-97 and only seven completed the training, an achievement rate of only 13 per cent. In 1997-98 21 started and six completed, an achievement rate of 28.57 per cent. In 1998-99 13 started and 11 completed, a much better achievement rate of just under 85 per cent.

23. The fork-lift programme is well run. Training takes place in a commercial warehouse. The trainees are either trained for counterbalance or reach-truck work. Counterbalance trucks have the forks at the front and are generally used outside warehouses. Reach trucks have their forks at the side. They are electrically powered and are generally used indoors. The qualification is achieved by formal testing by qualified staff. Trainees do not need to produce portfolios of evidence. The training session was well planned and trainees were participating fully. Normal industrial standard fork-lift trucks are used. Trainees receive tutoring in groups of three. The trainer was aware of the groups' specialist needs and met them sensitively. In 1999-2000 90 trainees began fork-lift training, 61 gained a qualification, 17 left without a qualification and 12 remain on the programme. Of the trainees who left, 46 gained a job and 32 left without a job. Since August 1999, of the 55 trainees who have attended the centre 51 have passed, an outstanding achievement rate of almost 93 per cent. The course is five days long as opposed to the more usual three days. If a trainee can achieve one qualification in three days they are entered for the other one. Out of the last 51 trainees who passed one qualification, 43 also gained the other qualification. This is an excellent result. All the trainees are unemployed and have identified the qualification as a means of increasing their employability. The opportunity to gain two fork-lift truck qualifications increases their employment prospects. This dual qualification also increases the trainees' confidence.

24. There is limited accreditation of prior achievement in both customer service and key skills within the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes. Previous NVQ and general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) achievements are not considered at the start of the programme. Previous work experience is not taken into account. In one example a trainee had achieved four qualifications which might have been used as evidence. Two of the qualifications at level 2 were three

years old but the other two at level 3 were within two years of achievement. The potential for accreditation was not checked. The trainee is now working towards a level 2 qualification. Key skills within the modern apprenticeships and national traineeships are not introduced until the primary qualification is either underway or in many cases completed. Most trainees were unsure of their qualification aims in key skills. This has impeded the collection of evidence as trainees have to first refer back to previous evidence presented for their NVQ and then add to it if necessary to produce evidence of their competence in key skills. They then have to provide additional evidence to fill any gaps. There is little cross-referencing of key skills and the NVQ. This lack of integration delays trainees' completion of the programme.

25. The NVQ programmes in customer service require trainees to achieve competence in order to be assessed. However, there is little off-the-job training to enable trainees to gain competence in specific elements. The training company's assessors carry out their assessment role well but make little contribution to the training. The onus of providing training falls on some employers, some of whom have little knowledge of how NVQs work, and, in some cases, are not involved in the setting of aims. In some cases, trainees do their NVQ work either at home or in their lunch times. Some employers actively train their trainees in company procedures and methods while others expect the trainee to pick it up as they go along. The training company has no training programme in customer service which could supplement the employer's programme. This disadvantages trainees since they do not always receive the assistance they need.

Foundation for work

Grade 3

26. KTS Training's foundation for work programme enables adults to receive basic training to prepare them for employment. There are currently 20 trainees on the foundation programme, 15 men and five women. The foundation training department offers training for three days each week. Many of the adults enter the programme after long periods of unemployment. In some cases this is a period of 20 years. Other adults lack confidence to work. They may have a physical or mental disability or have difficulty entering employment for some other significant reason. The initial aim of the programme is to identify barriers to employment. A training programme is designed which includes training in literacy and numeracy, information technology, help in searching for a job, confidence-building and work-related skills to improve their chances of finding employment. The foundation programme is intended to meet individual trainees' needs and consists of training at the company's premises, plus the opportunity to undertake a five-week period of work experience. The aim of the work experience is to give trainees the opportunity to undertake work they might enjoy. They are helped to make choices about the kinds of employment they might consider and its suitability. Individual and group sessions are offered in literacy and numeracy. These sessions form the major part of the company's training programme. All trainees undertake a job-search

programme and some trainees study for information technology qualifications. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and relevant targets set and reviewed for individual trainees
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to gain additional qualifications
- ◆ good job-search programme for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ staff not qualified to implement basic literacy and numeracy training
- ◆ some inappropriate training materials for individual trainees' needs
- ◆ little consideration of trainees' concerns

27. Well-considered procedures enable trainees' needs to be identified and the action which trainees need to take to achieve their aims to be established. Each trainee receives a folder containing their action plan and all their work. The folders encourage trainees to develop a sense of responsibility for their own work. The action plans are clear and legible, taking into account the fact that some trainees have difficulties in reading. Tasks to be achieved are specific and the timescales for their completion are clearly indicated. All action plans are kept in the trainee's own folder and a copy taken for company records. Analysis of a trainee's written work is provided on a one-to-one basis, both orally and in writing on a record sheet. This is then attached to the individual pieces of work, thereby enhancing the trainee's understanding of what they have done and what they need to do next.

28. A number of qualifications are available for trainees. Those who have poor literacy and numeracy skills work towards wordpower and numberpower qualifications. These are available at both foundation level and at level 1. A level 1 NVQ in information technology is offered to some trainees. Where appropriate, the accreditation of information technology skills can be gained through the national skills profile qualification. Health and safety certification is offered to some trainees. At the end of their training, all aspects of a trainee's achievements are acknowledged in the company's own certificate, which details the skills and achievements gained while on the foundation programme.

29. Trainees undertake job-search activities as part of the foundation programme. All trainees attend these sessions for one afternoon each week while they are on the programme. Numbers in the groups are small and training takes place using a variety of techniques, including small group work and on a one-to-one basis. Use is made of role play, group discussion and videos which help to engage and sustain the interest and motivation of trainees. Training is well structured and highly relevant. It takes place in a relaxed atmosphere which enables all trainees to contribute. They

also have the opportunity to discuss and practise interview techniques. Trainees find these sessions useful in helping them develop skills needed for employment.

30. Although training in literacy and numeracy forms the largest part of the company's training, none of the staff implementing this part of the programme currently holds any basic skills qualifications. Staff recognise the need for further improvement and training to equip them with the necessary skills to assess and teach basic skills. This was recognised by the company prior to the completion of the self-assessment report. Staff are now working towards essential qualifications.

31. Sessions for the improvement of background skills and knowledge are timetabled into the training programme and include both whole group and individual sessions. Whole group sessions occur each day and are identical in both their format and the tasks set. These sessions are lengthy, lasting for over an hour and fail to meet the needs of most trainees, in terms of their content, relevance and level. Many trainees do not understand the purpose of the tasks. A variety of dictionaries are used. Although some are new, most are old, outdated and worn. During the inspection, the company made efforts to improve this situation by buying new dictionaries.

32. Sessions are also held each day to enable trainees to work independently to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. The intention is that materials offered to trainees should suit their individual learning needs. However, there is no detailed identification or recording of the specific skills and knowledge required by individual trainees. The trainers do not always set appropriate work nor is it always clear to the trainee which skills are being taught in these sessions.

33. There are clear systems to record the views of trainees on the quality of training they receive. These include weekly meetings with individual trainees as well as written and unwritten reviews. Sometimes it takes too long to resolve trainees' concerns satisfactorily. Occasionally, decisions are made which some trainees do not understand and some trainees feel that issues raised through this system are not followed up at all.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

34. The training company has an equal opportunities policy which meets both statutory and TEC requirements. The policy was revised in 1999 and incorporates references to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The policy forms part of the company's agreements with trainees and employers. The training company is situated in an area in which the latest statistics show a minority ethnic population of 1.1 per cent. However, the training company also attracts trainees from other areas in which the proportion of persons from minority ethnic groups is larger. The self-

assessment report listed strengths, some of which were also identified by inspectors and others which were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses and identified a further one. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and clearly stated policy
- ◆ strong focus on improvement
- ◆ well-designed monitoring system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no reference to equal opportunities after induction.
- ◆ improvements not fully established
- ◆ no involvement of subcontractor in company's policy

35. The equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and covers most aspects of social diversity and social inclusion. It was last revised in 1999 and addresses issues relating to ethnicity, gender, disability, anti-bullying and harassment. It is written in an easily readable format. Supporting the policy there is a client handbook, an equal opportunities statement, grievance and disability procedures and equal opportunity monitoring forms. The client handbook explains what constitutes inequality of opportunity and how to identify it. Since the beginning of February 2000, equality of opportunity has been monitored with the same emphasis as is placed on health and safety. The training company has demonstrated its firm commitment to equality of opportunity by applying for the bronze award of the Equality Foundation. A committee of five employees, chaired by the equal opportunities officer, is responsible for looking at all areas of company activity to ensure that equality of opportunity is kept to the forefront of company activity. To achieve the award the company must compile evidence that is presented in a portfolio. The evidence includes action plans with target dates. The committee has re-timetabled staff meetings in order to facilitate greater attendance. The first of the current action plans is to arrange for the systematic collection of equal opportunities data. The second goal is to ensure that managers regularly discuss and review progress. The third action plan is to establish a current collection of equal opportunities references so that the training company is in tune with current developments. The training company's aim is to achieve the bronze award and then progress to a silver award and then on to gold. The strength of the scheme is that all staff are now focusing on equal opportunities.

36. There is a strong emphasis on training in equal opportunities matters. Members of the group and the chief operations manager have attended recent training events. A member of staff who has had increased commitments at home was able to

transfer from full- to part-time employment. As a result of the revised equal opportunities policy of management initiatives and of advice from the bronze award group, there is now a well-designed monitoring system. Training company staff have already been monitored. Figures show that 9 per cent of the staff have a disability, 70 per cent of the staff are full-time and 8 per cent have a non-European ethnic origin. The new complaints procedure has already been used to deal with staff and trainees' problems. A lot of data on equal opportunities are now being produced to enable the committee and management to focus on improving equality of opportunity and diversity.

37. Until the beginning of February 2000 information on equal opportunities was given to trainees at induction but not referred to again. In some cases, where the induction was work-based, trainees were given the policy and asked to read it. Consequently, trainees have little or no knowledge of equality of opportunity nor of the concept of diversity. As trainees are unaware of what can constitute inequality of opportunity, they are unable to identify possible situations in which they can seek redress. Although there is a comprehensive and easily understood equal opportunities policy, it is very new. Some of the procedures are under a month old. Aspects of the action plans which the equal opportunities committee has addressed are still at the consultation stage.

38. Much of the evidence on equal opportunities which has been gathered has been analysed but not yet used to secure improvements. The 1991 census figures show the Kingswood area as having a minority ethnic population of 1.1 per cent. However, the training company operates over a wider area in which there have been gradual increases in the minority ethnic population. The number of trainees who have declared their ethnic origins exceeds the average minority ethnic population across the area. On some programmes, for example, the total number of trainees embarking on training and declaring themselves to be of minority ethnic origin is as high as 9 per cent. Proportionally fewer of them achieve a qualification than the trainees who declare themselves to be not of minority ethnic origin.

39. Trainees with disabilities are more successful than trainees without a disability. Proportionally, on some programmes, more gain qualifications than trainees with no declared disabilities. Since the training company runs a series of adult foundation courses there is a high proportion of trainees with disabilities. Company statistics not only show imbalances in the achievements of those trainees from minority ethnic groups compared with the achievements of other trainees, but there are also gender imbalances throughout the programmes. To date, although the imbalances have been identified, there are no plans to address the situation. The training company is in possession of current and useful information on equal opportunities. Training company members who have attended various courses are now knowledgeable on the subject. However, the subcontractor's equal opportunity data are not monitored. Nor does KTS promote its equal opportunity policies and documents to the subcontractor.

Trainee support

Grade 2

40. All the trainees are invited to attend the company for an initial assessment prior to starting their training. The needs of the trainees are assessed and a suitable training programme is then offered. All trainees complete a literacy and numeracy test. There are four separate methods of selection and review. These are designed for adults, for those with basic educational needs, for fork-lift truck trainees and for modern apprentices and national trainees as a group. If appropriate training staff offer potential trainees additional advice and guidance on pastoral and other issues. If the training company cannot offer sufficient help trainees may be referred to other external agencies. Trainees on the work-based learning for adults programme have an additional interview, followed by an additional induction, normally lasting a day. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than was given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support and specialist advice
- ◆ careful matching of work placements to trainees' needs
- ◆ high levels of contact with trainees
- ◆ good off-the-job training in current occupational practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ poor explanation of some induction materials to trainees
- ◆ little involvement of some employers in trainees' reviews

41. Working relationships between staff and trainees are strong. Many staff make an effort to offer and provide help over and above that required by the company. This is a significant factor in enabling trainees to complete their programme successfully. For example, staff drive trainees to job interviews and take them to employers' premises until they feel able to complete the journey by themselves. Trainees in work placements are given the reviewer's telephone number, which they are encouraged to use if they have any concerns about work-related or pastoral issues. Links between the company and outside agencies are good and external organisations provide specialist assistance for trainees, such as assessments and counselling for trainees with dyslexia.

42. The allocation of suitable placements to trainees is carefully done. Thoughtful consideration is given to placements and work experience in order to give trainees the best opportunity to succeed. There is a careful matching of the specific needs of the employer to the strengths of the trainee. Special account is taken of trainees'

particular needs. As a result, work placements are highly effective. They allow trainees to grow in confidence, acquire skills and undertake training, as well as satisfying employers.

GOOD PRACTICE

A long term unemployed trainee with severe attitude problems expressed an interest in learning computer skills. With sensitive help he made excellent progress, gaining his NVQ at level 1 in information technology and very quickly went on to complete level 2. When his training ended he came back as a volunteer, helping trainees to learn computer skills. This trainee is still furthering his knowledge and is also learning clerical skills.

43. Visits to trainees in the workplace are frequent and in some cases take place each week. A range of KTS's staff, including the assessor and the reviewer, carry these out. Owing to this high level of contact, concerns or issues can be dealt with quickly whether these are related to training or are of a pastoral nature. This allows trainees to raise issues or problems with their reviewer if they do not wish to discuss them with their assessor. The trainees receive a charter which sets out the level of service that they can expect. It includes induction, training, health and safety issues and equality of opportunity. It also details the commitment required from trainees for their part in the training process, including regular attendance, good behaviour at work and in off-the-job training, and care for equipment. The clear grievance procedure is set out in three stages. Grievances are first to be raised with training supervisors. They may then be reviewed by the head of training or the chief operations manager. Finally they may be dealt with by the company's managing director. The procedure includes oral cautions and a series of written cautions leading, under certain circumstances, to dismissal. These are clearly set out and are aimed mainly at protecting trainees and staff from health and safety violations or harassment.

44. KTS Training's staff ensure that all trainees are kept up-to-date as far as occupational requirements are concerned. This is important for those trainees who may not have worked for many years. Most trainees have access to modern working equipment in their placements. However, occasionally, trainees are in work placements which do not have the most up-to-date equipment, for example, the hardware or software for information technology. If they need this to complete their NVQs, they are offered special training at KTS Training's premises, by agreement with the employer. They may, for example, come into the training centre to be given specific training on computer software for databases or spreadsheets. As a result, trainees are able to continue to train and gain confidence in their work environment.

45. There is no initial assessment of key skills within the company, either during induction or at any other stage in the training programme. New documents have recently been produced but at the time of inspection had not been introduced. Some of the content of induction has little impact on trainees as it is not sufficiently memorable. Most trainees could not recall any information about the company's equal opportunities policy. A few referred to the written equal opportunities statement contained in the company's handbook which is provided to all trainees as part of the induction. None of the trainees was able to offer any clear explanation of what it might mean for them as a trainee within the organisation. Employers' involvement in trainees' reviews is sometimes limited. While some employers take a full and active part in the process, the vast majority have no involvement apart from signing documentation once the review has ended. As a result, many employers have a limited understanding of the NVQ process. Some are unaware of the specific training required by the trainee in order to complete specific elements of

the NVQ before the next review. Consequently, training is sometimes insufficiently focused. Some trainees are not aware of the separate appeals process which enables NVQ trainees to query assessment outcomes.

Management of training

Grade 3

46. The managers of the company make information readily available to staff. Communication with staff takes place through recorded and informal meetings, face to face briefings, and e-mail. Each office has a computer workstation, and staff can gain access to the electronic versions of manuals and contract data. The managing director allocates full responsibility for strategic and day-to-day management to his chief operations manager, who manages 22 staff. There is a head of training who also acts as an internal verifier, and a training supervisor. Staff are organised into teams, responsible for training and assessment, prevocational tutelage and business-planning. Staff are well motivated, and appointments for special duties include an equal opportunities officer, a health and safety officer, fire and assistant fire officers and two staff with responsibility for first aid. The company achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1997, and was re-accredited for this award in January 2000. There is a smart house style and a corporate image on all publicity and paperwork. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company through self-assessment, and the grade awarded is the same as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear lines of accountability for staff
- ◆ continuous staff development programme
- ◆ strong internal communication

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor use of management information
- ◆ poor knowledge by managers of some aspects of foundation training

47. The structure of the training company is well defined and understood by all staff. Company procedures relating to the appointment and employment of staff are strictly followed. Employees have up-to-date written job specifications, and are clear about their job roles and to whom within the organisation they are accountable. Staff work as members of teams with the company, responsible for areas such as assessment, training and business improvement. In practice, a number of staff have dual responsibilities, combining the roles of assessor and trainer. Business development staff play a major role in securing placements and

monitoring trainees in them. This combination of responsibilities works well and contributes to the good working relationships staff enjoy with trainees.

48. Staff hold appropriate qualifications. There is continuous monitoring of staff instead of an annual appraisal system. A procedure exists to allow staff to identify and notify management about the training or development they consider necessary to support their current job roles and personal improvement needs. Comprehensive staff training records confirm the support from management for this procedure. Involving staff in this way in identifying their own development and training needs promotes understanding of the range of training offered by the company. Staff achievements are acknowledged. For example, a member of KTS's staff was the first in the WESTEC area to gain a key skills assessor award.

49. There are good written and unwritten systems of communication with staff. Management holds monthly meetings involving all staff. These meetings are minuted. All units within the company also meet on a regular basis. Assessors meet every two weeks to discuss trainees' progress and to share good practice. Business development officers meet every Monday, Wednesday and Friday to keep abreast of changes and improvements in their area of responsibility. The chief operations manager attends these meetings. Staff have a good awareness of the company's goals, and they all receive a copy of the business plan. Access to managers is good and staff feel that if they have a concern or a problem relating to training, managers can be easily contacted for advice and information.

50. The monitoring of contracts, the setting of aims and the monitoring of trainees' progress are carried out using a sophisticated computerised system devised by the training company. The information, however, is primarily focused on the company's performance and is not systematically used to influence management decisions relating to improvements in training programmes. There is, for example, no regular evaluation of specific programmes. There are no exit interviews of trainees who leave programmes early and who fail to meet their aims. Exit interviews are to be introduced for all trainees, but there are no examples of management information being used to improve the retention of trainees.

51. There is good general management of the foundation for work programme but its overall quality is limited by a lack of management knowledge of some aspects of the programme. This has led to insufficient monitoring of some training strategies, especially those concerned with individuals' tuition needs and the relevance and quality of learning materials used by staff.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

52. KTS Training Limited has a set of quality assurance standards covering almost all of the most important aspects of its work. Each standard is defined in a paragraph setting out its purpose and scope, and reference is made to the

documents to be used and the procedure covered by the quality assurance process. The standards specify the staff with overall responsibility for managing the standard and ensuring that it is applied across the training programmes. The standards are regularly revised. Staff are informed by memorandum or letter when changes are made. Recently, staff have begun to gain access to the standards from the electronic copies kept on the company's intranet. A team of managers and staff compiled the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-defined quality procedures
- ◆ rigorous internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no quality assurance procedures for key skills
- ◆ no procedures for the regular evaluation of training

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good practice in the validation of NVQ evidence. Each assessor has a small hand stamp with a separate number. Each has use of a separate coloured ink. The NVQ evidence is stamped upon receipt from the trainee. This indicates that the assessor has validated the evidence and accepted it for portfolio use. The stamp marks are dated. A covering letter in the front of each portfolio which has been internally verified warns trainees not to remove or alter any evidence thus accepted.

53. Strict rules of behaviour and for the operation of the company's systems are set out in well-written documents. Rules relating to attendance, absence, sickness, holiday entitlement, smoking and dress are included. The rules are detailed and cover such issues as the possible nuisance caused by mobile phones and personal stereos. There is a comprehensive procedure for the implementation of the equal opportunities policy. Each training programme has a defined quality assurance process. The quality requirements cover the selection of trainees, induction, completion of documentation, subcontracting arrangements, their monitoring of trainees' progress, and the monitoring of the quality of the subcontracted fork-lift truck provision. There is a clear and well-drafted charter for trainees which sets out what they can expect from their training programme and the responsibilities placed on them as trainees. There are staff organisation charts, house rules and guidelines, fire precautions, health and safety, grievance and disciplinary procedures. Further procedures cover the job search programme and procedures for monitoring the trainees when they leave the programme.

54. For each contract with an employer which includes the provision of a work placement, there is a clear set of quality and operating standards. These are each divided into sections dealing with the employer's organisation, staff, premises, training and customer care. Each of these sections is further divided into well-designed minimum quality standards. Staff are allocated responsibility for the implementation of these standards.

55. There is a separate set of generic quality assurance procedures which cover review and evaluation, the completion and checking of TEC claims, equal opportunities, health and safety, staff self-assessment, marketing and business-

planning. All company documents are held in clean, smart and well-organised binders or folders. There are good systems for the implementation and monitoring of staff training, for the surveys of employees' views, health and safety and management meetings, and monthly staff meetings. Each NVQ programme has a folder covering all the documents and records for internal verification. Staff understand and implement these systems to produce a well-ordered set of training programmes. Although there are minor day-to-day problems, the company is well structured and the staff are well informed about quality assurance matters.

56. The company has a chief internal verifier who is also the head of training, and a part time staff member who is the verifier for all NVQ programmes. There is a carefully designed and comprehensive internal verification procedure which contains some innovative ideas. For example, workplace evidence is stamped with a coloured authentication code and trainees are warned in writing not to alter evidence which has been internally verified. The assessment process includes the continuous collection of evidence, observation in the workplace and evidence of competent performance at work which is provided by supervisors. A further essential process to assure the quality of the training is the sampling and verifying of evidence in trainees' portfolios which is carried out every eight weeks. Assessors are observed as they carry out assessments in the workplace. A written appraisal of their performance is given to assessors on each occasion. If improvement in assessment techniques is needed, the action plan is followed-up by the internal verifier. Internal verification is applied firmly. Poor work and incomplete evidence are rejected. Portfolios are referred back to trainees for remedial action if necessary.

57. Although the quality assurance procedures cover most of the company's policies, they do not cover key skills. The NVQ requirements are carefully defined for modern apprenticeships and national traineeships but there is no mention of key skills. There is no bench marking or minimum quality standards for many aspects of the key skills programme. There is no mention of the initial assessment of key skills, of assistance to trainees, the simultaneous gathering of NVQ and key skills evidence, training in the workplace or company for key skills, integrated assessment or the internal verification of key skills. A separate information leaflet on key skills is given to trainees but this is separate from the quality assurance procedures.

58. The quality assurance procedures which are intended to cover training across all the programmes only mention review and evaluation. These standards are well drafted and include questionnaires for trainees and employers but they do not lead to a comprehensive examination of all aspects of on- and off-the-job training and NVQ assessment. There is no thorough examination of the quality of teaching, of training notes or of other materials or equipment. There are no procedures to ensure that the tutors receive a written appraisal of their performance. There is no emphasis on the quality of training and the learning experience, despite the strong focus on the quality of assessment in the company.