



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 2000

Pelcombe Training Limited

SUMMARY

Pelcombe Training Limited provides good engineering training, with good practical training and employers actively involved in the review process. Foundation training is also good, supported by a high level of resources and high achievement rates. Training in construction, business administration and hairdressing is satisfactory. However, training in hospitality and retailing and customer service is less than satisfactory with weak assessment and verification practice. The company's approach to equal opportunities is good and the related policy and procedures are rigorously implemented. Support for trainees is also good, with well-planned inductions and excellent support from employers. The organisation has strong links with external organisations and has developed effective partnerships with other training providers. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory, although Pelcombe Training does not evaluate its assessment and internal verification procedures to the same extent that it evaluates its training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	4
Hospitality	4
Hair & beauty	3
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned and -structured training in engineering
- ◆ rigorous assessment and internal verification in engineering
- ◆ high achievement rates in foundation for work
- ◆ strong links with external agencies
- ◆ rigorous implementation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ well-planned key skills training in many occupational areas

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some weak assessment and internal verification practice
- ◆ lack of placements for information technology training
- ◆ some ineffective management of subcontractors
- ◆ poor retention rates in construction

INTRODUCTION

1. Pelcombe Training Limited (Pelcombe Training) was formed in January 1998 following a management buy-out of the training division from Pelcombe Group Limited. The original activity dates back to 1968 when it was first established as the training arm of Portals Engineering. Pelcombe Training Limited provides government-funded training, working with Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk & Waveney Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). For the purposes of this inspection Essex TEC was identified as the lead TEC. In addition, the company provides professional training for local business and industry.

2. Pelcombe Training Limited provides training for young people and adults, and the programmes include modern apprenticeships, national traineeships, other training for young people and work-based training for adults. The range of occupational areas includes construction, engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, hospitality, hair and beauty, media and design, care and foundation for work. National vocational qualifications (NVQs) are offered at levels 1, 2 and 3 and some training is provided through formal partnership arrangements with local employers and other training providers.

3. The organisation has partnerships with several New Deal providers in the area and also has a small contract for Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)-funded training. The organisation has two private sector lead contracts for New Deal 25+ in Leicestershire and Rutland and South Humber. The head office is in Colchester; however, there are additional sites in Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Leicestershire, Staffordshire and South Humber. Training takes place in Colchester, Ipswich, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth. Staffing levels have increased by 50 per cent in the last two years, with approximately 32 per cent actually involved in training. There are 301 trainees on programmes including 81 modern apprentices, 99 national trainees, 64 trainees on other youth training programmes and 57 adults. In addition there are 16 New Deal clients. There are also 22 trainees on SRB-funded programmes and seven attending a rehabilitation programme, neither of which are TEC funded.

4. Suffolk is predominantly a rural county but it has three large urban centres: Ipswich, Lowestoft and Bury St Edmunds. The working population in Suffolk is about 412,000 with an estimated 77 per cent in employment. The unemployment rate is 3.1 per cent (3.8 per cent in Ipswich). Around 2 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups with the highest number in Ipswich (5.3 per cent). Ninety-one per cent of employers are small and medium-sized enterprises with main areas of employment in transport and communications, public administration, education and health, distribution, hotels and restaurants, manufacturing, banking, finance and insurance. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 47.7 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.



5. The unemployment rate in Essex stands at 4.1 per cent (3.1 per cent in Colchester) compared with the national average of 5 per cent. The area has a wide range of jobs available locally. The main industries are financial services, distribution, hotels and transport, accounting for 29 per cent of total employment. Computing is an area of growth and engineering and manufacturing are declining. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 44 per cent in Colchester and 48.6 in Essex compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Seventy-three per cent of school leavers in the Colchester/Tendring areas opt to stay on in full-time education.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. Pelcombe Training's training director involved most of the staff across the majority of its centres in the self-assessment process. An external consultant was recruited to assist in the process. Pelcombe Training produced a very comprehensive and detailed self-assessment report and action plan. The report was accurate in identifying strengths and weaknesses and several of the action points had been addressed prior to inspection.

7. A team of nine inspectors spent a total of 34 days at Pelcombe Training in February 2000. Inspectors visited 15 employers, 30 work placements, and two subcontractors. Inspectors spoke with 105 of the 348 trainees, 18 workplace supervisors, and had 53 discussions with staff. They also observed seven instruction sessions and examined a wide range of documentation including trainees' files and portfolios, audit reports from TECs and awarding bodies, records of staff meetings, personnel records and policies and procedures. The number of trainees on machine printing programmes were low and as such this sector was not inspected as a separate area.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction						
Engineering	1	1				2
Business administration		2	1			3
Retailing & customer service						
Hospitality						
Hair & beauty						
Foundation for work			2			2
Total	1	3	3	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. Pelcombe Training has a total of 17 trainees/clients in this occupational area. Eight are national trainees, three are on a work-based training for adults programme and five are New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. There is also one trainee in the Gateway who is training in hand skills and has yet to have

a confirmed training programme. Trainees work towards NVQs at level 2 in wood occupations. The two New Deal clients are working towards a basic woodworking hand skills qualification. Two national trainees are employed; the others are trained and assessed at one of the Pelcombe Training's centres. The construction training area in the centre comprises a bench workshop, machine shop, trainees' study area, and roofing, partition work, kitchen unit fitting, door and window fitting, office and storage areas. Employed trainees are on site for four days each week and spend a further day in the training centre for theory training. Other trainees attend the training centre full time. Key skills are taught as part of the NVQ programme with information technology taught separately. Some strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered to be no more than normal practice. However, inspectors agreed with the weaknesses, identified other strengths and awarded the same grade as that given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent assessment opportunities
- ◆ good systems for monitoring trainees' progress
- ◆ well-planned key skills training
- ◆ rigorous assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention rates
- ◆ lack of work placements
- ◆ little progression to employment
- ◆ some tools and equipment do not meet industry standards

9. Trainees receive good training from well-qualified and experienced trainers and all trainees are actively involved in all aspects of the training programme. Pelcombe Training has a wide range of training resources within their own workshops at one of the centres. Trainers encourage trainees to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. Staff have developed many written and practical assignments which are used effectively by trainees. These are monitored and assessed at the end of each training week and trainees given feedback on their performance. Trainees are enthusiastic about their training and attend regularly.

10. The provider has a comprehensive monitoring system, which enables the trainer to record accurate details of trainees' activities and achievements. Employed trainees make good use of their work evidence record diary to record activities undertaken in the workplace. These activities are countersigned by the work-based supervisor and used as evidence towards the NVQ. However, there is sometimes an over-reliance on this type of workplace evidence.

11. Key skills training is well planned and great care is taken by staff to relate key skills to NVQ evidence. Trainees collect evidence from a wide range of sources and where this satisfies the key skills criteria it is recorded in the trainees' key skills portfolios. Information technology is taught separately in the training centre by a qualified trainer. Many portfolios are well structured and organised and contain good-quality documentary evidence towards the NVQ. The assessment process is rigorous and trainees' competence is accurately and fairly assessed. The documentation for assessment planning, assessment briefs, assessment outcomes and feedback to trainees is good. Trainees are fully aware of the assessment process, which units they have achieved and the units to be completed. There is a consistent achievement rate of 80 per cent for those completing their programmes.

12. Although the initial assessment process is satisfactory, retention rates for this occupational area are poor and have remained constant at approximately 50 per cent for the last two years. Over 90 per cent of employers are small- and medium-sized enterprises and construction is not a major sector of employment for the areas covered by Pelcombe Training and there are limited opportunities for work placements in wood occupations. Only two trainees are currently employed. Of the trainees who are not employed and complete their training, few gain employment.

13. There is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training and little assessment of NVQs in the workplace. The training activities at the centre do not always relate to the range of experiences in the workplace or the requirements of the vocational qualification. Job-search assistance is available and trainees are encouraged to attend these sessions but few trainees take up the opportunity.

14. Some tools and equipment used in the training centre are old and worn and not consistent with the standards of the industry. The provider is aware of this issue and some new tools have been purchased as a direct result of feedback from trainees.

Engineering

Grade 2

15. Pelcombe Training offers youth and adult engineering training at two of its centres. There are 85 engineering trainees in mechanical, electrical/electronic engineering and welding and fabrication. There are 30 modern apprentices following level 3 engineering production in technical services, 35 national trainees following NVQs at level 2 in engineering foundation leading to level 3, 12 trainees on work-based learning for adults programmes, and eight trainees on other youth NVQ programmes. Six clients are on the New Deal full-time education and training option. Most trainees are employed and attend Pelcombe Training's centre one day each week for practical training. Trainees attend local colleges of further education for vocational qualifications. Where trainees are unable to attend Pelcombe Training's centres, supplementary practical training is carried out by the provider's staff and employers. Placements for employed trainees cover a variety of industrial

operations such as electrical plant maintenance, refrigeration services, photocopying servicing, container welding companies, fabrication and material manufacturing companies. In 1998-99, approximately 60 per cent of trainees completed youth training programmes, and an average of 80 per cent completed adult programmes. On average, 50 per cent of youth trainees achieved an NVQ compared with 80 per cent of adults. Over 80 per cent of youth trainees gained full-time employment. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report, identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective practical training
- ◆ rigorous assessment and internal verification
- ◆ good monitoring of NVQ progress
- ◆ active involvement of employers in review and action-planning processes
- ◆ additional training opportunities available

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient planning of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some poor health and safety monitoring of workshops

16. Training is offered across a wide range of engineering activities and is carried out by highly qualified and experienced training staff. During the initial planning, the experiences and skills of individual trainees are assessed and used to produce their training plans. In adult training in particular, programmes are well matched to their individual needs. For example, one trainee with extensive turning experience was offered additional milling and screwing training opportunities linked to appropriate NVQ units. Good physical training resources are available for the well-planned foundation training programme. Other practical training carried out in the provider's workshops and on employers' premises is well structured. Training is planned to allow trainees to progress at their own pace through the training programme. In some cases, trainees are moved between various departments within companies to increase the range of opportunities. Trainees often observe tasks being carried out and are then allowed to attempt the task under guidance before finally carrying it out uninterrupted. Key skills are taught effectively.

17. Reviews of trainees' progress on tasks and towards the NVQ is thorough and well recorded. The information recorded by individual tutors is shared with the engineering manager which allows for clear and effective individual target setting. Trainees use a wide range of evidence sources including photography, witness testimonies and observations of their performance by assessors to provide evidence for their portfolios. Assessors also take advantage of opportunities to record instances of naturally occurring evidence. All employers take part in progress

reviews and are actively involved with the action planning and target setting process.

18. Internal verification is well planned and managed and there is good communication between centres. Sampling and recording of assessments is thorough and there are frequent meetings between assessors and verifiers where trainees' progress and programme development is discussed. These meetings are formally recorded.

19. Trainees in work placements are offered the opportunity to gain additional supporting qualifications. These serve to meet employers needs and enable trainees to improve their future employment prospects. One individual gained a welding certificate at national standards level for overhead and vertical weld. This qualification was of particular importance and of benefit to the employer as well as being a good personal development for the trainee.

20. Although good-quality training is carried out at Pelcombe Training's centres and on employers' premises, on- and off-the-job training are not always linked. Tasks set at centres reflect current working practices, but there is often poor co-ordination between individual trainees' work experiences and NVQ requirements. Equipment used within the centres is sufficient for providing training in basic engineering operations. Some equipment reflects dated technology particularly the computerised numerical control machines. Trainees sometimes work without the required protective equipment. Regular maintenance programmes are required within the company's procedures, but one centre carries out corrective rather than preventative maintenance.

Business administration

Grade 3

21. There are 104 trainees following business administration programmes in administration and information technology, which is provided at two of the centres. Of these, 22 are modern apprentices following NVQs at level 3 in administration, 33 are national trainees following level 2 administration and 11 are young people following other training options. Thirty-eight trainees are on work-based learning for adult programmes taking NVQs at level 2. A small number of these adult trainees progress to NVQs at level 3 in information technology and administration, and achieve their qualifications through supervising the level 2 trainees. Three New Deal clients are following the full-time education and training option, while 22 are on a SRB-funded training programme and six are enrolled on a rehabilitation programme. Staff from Pelcombe Training are responsible for training and assessment. Assessors are usually responsible for trainees in specific geographical areas. In-house training takes place in specialist training rooms which are equipped to industry standards. Trainees are on work placements or are employed in a variety of companies in both the private and public sector. In some instances where placements are not readily available, trainees undertake real work for Pelcombe

Training. Trainees who are unable to attend Pelcombe Training's centre receive coaching in the workplace on a one-to-one basis during assessors' visits. Achievement rates are 63.5 per cent in Suffolk and 67.9 per cent in Essex. Inspectors considered that some of the many strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice and some related to generic aspects. One of the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive learning materials for business administration
- ◆ well-planned key skills training
- ◆ effective assessment process
- ◆ additional training opportunities available

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few information technology placements
- ◆ some training lacks structure
- ◆ some slow progress towards NVQ achievement

22. Trainees are given good-quality learning packs containing comprehensive information to help them to identify and gather suitable evidence from the workplace. During the last year the quality of portfolios has improved and the trainees manage their own learning more effectively. They take ownership of their portfolio of evidence. Most employers actively support trainees by providing additional advice and information for their portfolios.

23. All trainees are provided with key skills packs and given a good introduction to key skills at the start of their training programme. Staff, who act as both tutors and assessors, ensure that trainees are fully aware of the ways in which the evidence in the workplace is linked to the key skills units. Trainees are clear about the level of key skills required. All evidence produced by trainees is checked for validity and then cross-referenced to key skills at the same time as it is referenced to the NVQ units. The process is thorough and effective and ensures that trainees are able to progress through their key skills and NVQ at the same time.

24. Assessors visit trainees frequently and often spend substantial periods of time working with them. These visits are often made on a fortnightly basis and there are close and effective working relationships between trainees and assessors. Assessment planning is good. Trainees and assessors are given copies of the detailed written assessment plans. Some workplace supervisors provide witness testimonies for trainees. Where trainee assessors are undertaking assessment, a qualified assessor oversees and countersigns their judgements.

25. Additional qualifications in computer skills such as computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) and text processing are offered to trainees. These additional training opportunities are offered during evenings at the training centres for those trainees in full-time employment. Work from these sessions is also used for key skills evidence. Over 37 per cent of trainees obtain employment after their training course finishes.

26. Around 80 per cent of trainees taking the information technology qualification attend the centres on a full-time basis, mainly due to a lack of work placements. However, in these circumstances evidence for portfolios is not generated under realistic working conditions. Awarding bodies' reports note the lack of work-based evidence. Evidence is generated mainly from work sheets and projects, although some trainees do sometimes produce work for Pelcombe Training's staff. The provider has recognised this weakness and has taken some remedial action. For example, trainees are no longer enrolling on the information technology NVQ unless they have a suitable work placement. Portfolios of evidence are satisfactory.

27. Computer training is mainly informal and unstructured. Trainees take responsibility for their own pace of learning and are supported by staff or trainees following a level 3 programme. Much of the individual support is for portfolio building with few formal training sessions. Business administration trainees who attend the training centres for off-the-job training also receive help with portfolio building. Some specific training, such as in telephone techniques is also carried out on these days. Training is not effectively structured, and realistic and challenging targets are not set for trainees. Though the final target achievement dates are set and trainees' progress is regularly reviewed, interim achievement targets are not systematically set.

28. The progress of some trainees is slow, with some taking a year to achieve two units of the NVQ. A small number of trainees are taking the maximum time available on their programme to gain their NVQ. There is, however, some evidence of improvement in achievement times for trainees who started during the past year.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 4

29. There are 10 trainees on the retailing programme. Four are national trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 in retailing operations, three are modern apprentices currently working towards the level 2 NVQ, and there is one New Deal client on the full-time education and training option. There are two customer service trainees, one is a national trainee and one is a modern apprentice. The trainees are all working in small shops and travel agents in two counties. All assessment is carried out in the workplace by a qualified member of the provider's staff. Pelcombe Training does not offer any off-the-job training in retailing, but has just started providing key skills workshops to help trainees with their information technology skills. The self-assessment report gave a clear and detailed picture of the retailing programme. One of the strengths, relating to assessment practice was

seen as a weakness, and inspectors identified additional weaknesses. The grade awarded was lower than the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive evidence-gathering opportunities
- ◆ excellent working relationships between assessors and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some slow NVQ progress and achievement
- ◆ lack of effective target setting
- ◆ lack of commitment to NVQ process by employers
- ◆ insufficient planned training

30. All the trainees are employed in good working environments when they start the programme. Their job roles give them the opportunity to work in all areas of the business and to gather evidence in the workplace for all aspects of their qualification. Assessors visit trainees every three to four weeks. Visits are made by appointment and times of the visits are varied to make sure that trainees are seen carrying out a variety of duties. Throughout observations, trainees are questioned to check their knowledge and understanding. Assessors carry out an extensive range of observations, which increases the opportunities to observe a wide variety of activities. Owing to these frequent visits, assessors have developed very good working relationships with the trainees. Trainees feel well supported and any problems encountered by trainees are resolved quickly. Several trainees feel that they have stayed in their jobs because of this level of support.

31. Trainees are not making good progress with their qualifications. For example, one trainee has been on the programme for nine months and has not yet achieved any units of the retailing NVQ. At the end of a workplace observation, the assessor takes notes back to the office and transfers these notes to the trainees' NVQ assessment records. They are then cross-referenced to the appropriate units of the qualification. Trainees are not given constructive written feedback and are unsure of how and when they will be completing their qualifications. There is little monitoring of evidence throughout the qualification, with all the evidence being assembled in the portfolio at the end of the NVQ, and all the units being signed off at once. The internal verification process has noted the problem of slow progress, but no action has been taken to improve the situation.

32. Poor use is made of action plans and trainees are not set any clear, short-term targets. The assessor carries out progress reviews, but many are vague and simply repeat the comments from the previous review. The section relating to progress towards the qualification simply repeats 'continue working towards your NVQ' and does not show which units have been achieved or set any new targets or action points.

33. Many employers show little commitment to the NVQ programme. They are willing to let trainees work towards their qualifications in their own time, but are not prepared to give trainees any time within the working week to gather evidence. They are often reluctant to release trainees from the shop floor during assessors' visits, so that any assessment planning and feedback has to take place in the work environment. Some employers do not feel that the trainees' qualifications have any relevance to their businesses and in some cases they are not sure of the qualification being undertaken.

34. When trainees are introduced to their qualification the assessor completes a training plan. However, these plans are not personalised and trainees are not given their own copy. The plans do not contain any individual targets and they are not updated on a regular basis. Many employers provide their own in-house training, but Pelcombe Training does not link this training to the NVQ. There is no off-the-job training offered for trainees to develop their retailing and customer service skills. Pelcombe Training has recently introduced some key skills training to help trainees develop their information technology skills, but trainees are required to attend these sessions in their own time.

Hospitality

Grade 4

35. There are 31 trainees on a range of hospitality programmes. Twenty-six are taking NVQs at level 2 in quick service, of whom four are modern apprentices, two are national trainees and 20 are on other training programmes. The remaining four trainees are on the on licensed premises modern apprenticeship programme, which is subcontracted to a local training provider. One trainee is on a rehabilitation programme. All trainees are in full-time employment within three franchised fast food establishments and four public houses. Most training is provided within the workplace. All trainees have access to resources in the workplace to enable them to apply working practices and meet most of the NVQ requirements.

36. Pelcombe Training has one qualified assessor with retailing experience, one assessor with specific catering experience who is working towards an assessor qualification and one internal verifier with industry experience working towards a verification qualification. The subcontractor has one assessor and one internal verifier. There are currently no work-based assessors. These are relatively new programmes, and to date five trainees have achieved their NVQ since the introduction of the award in 1999. Some trainees were identified as being ineligible and removed from the programme, and so retention figures are inaccurate. The self-assessment report provided useful introductory and supporting information. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths but did agree with the weakness. Other strengths and weaknesses were identified and a lower grade was awarded than the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured on-the-job training for quick service
- ◆ frequent and effective visits by assessors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak assessment practice
- ◆ poor understanding of training by trainees
- ◆ missed opportunities for accreditation of prior achievement
- ◆ slow progress on some NVQs

POOR PRACTICE

This is an example of poor assessment practice. The achievements of one trainee with an NVQ level 2 in quick service have not been mapped to the standards of the new hospitality qualification to identify any additional assessment needs.

37. The employer for quick service training is an international fast food chain with an established and well-recorded training and practical assessment framework. Employees' aptitude and competence are monitored in relation to an internally validated qualification, and then reviewed on an ongoing basis. Trainees are able to gain the relevant work skills and knowledge. A range of useful additional qualifications such as health and safety, food hygiene and first aid are also available for some trainees.

38. Assessors visit trainees frequently, which helps to build good working relationships. There are also frequent assessment opportunities to observe naturally occurring evidence. Assessors occasionally visit trainees in the early morning and late evening for those on shift work.

39. Assessment practice is weak. Assessments carried out by unqualified staff are not countersigned by a qualified member of staff. Some recording of assessment does not meet the requirements of awarding bodies and assessment is, on occasions, insufficient and does not always fully meet the criteria. There is little assessment planning or structured feedback and trainees are unsure of their progress towards the NVQ. Some trainees do not have a full understanding of the actual training programme or qualification being undertaken. There are some missed opportunities for assessment by observation, where activities relating to separate units could be assessed together. Most trainees do not collect additional evidence and do not take ownership of their portfolio.

40. Opportunities are missed to accredit trainees' previous experience by referencing of the fast food employers' practical assessment programme to the requirements of the hospitality quick service qualification. Also, a number of trainees have achieved the retailing and/or customer service NVQ at level 2, but details of the NVQ units achieved have not been transferred to the quick service qualification or recorded in the trainee's individual training plan.

41. Trainees' progress is sometimes delayed. Some employers do not allow the assessor into the placement at certain times of the year, even for observational

assessment. There have been some delays in obtaining NVQ logbooks from one awarding body, particularly when there has been a change in the qualification standards.

Hair & beauty

Grade 3

42. There are 34 trainees on programmes leading to NVQs in hairdressing. Seventeen are modern apprentices working towards level 3 and 17 are national trainees working towards level 2. Pelcombe Training became an accredited centre for hairdressing in March 1999. All trainees are employed in one of six salons. Of these six salons, four belong to a salon group which has its own training school. Pelcombe Training subcontracts off-the-job training to this salon group. All employed trainees within this group attend the training school for one day each week. The rest of the trainees are trained and assessed in the salon in which they work. There are currently 15 work-based assessors, five of whom have formal assessor qualifications. The training officer who is employed jointly by the salon group and by Pelcombe Training reviews trainees in the workplace at least every four weeks. Since it began to offer hairdressing training, Pelcombe Training has had 48 trainees start the programmes. Fourteen left the programme early and of these, two trainees left with a NVQ at level 2 in hairdressing. Some trainees have transferred to another provider of hairdressing training. No trainees to date have completed their framework. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but identified additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees have full understanding of the NVQ
- ◆ comprehensive documents to support the assessment process
- ◆ good access to a wide variety of evidence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ lack of training opportunities for some trainees

43. Trainees fully understand the requirements of their NVQ and manage the assessment documents throughout their programme. The whole assessment process is led by trainees, both in the training school and in the workplace. Trainees know exactly how the knowledge will be covered and are issued with a set of questions for each of the units when they receive their assessment books. Trainees generate natural occurring evidence during the working day in the salon and some trainees make rapid progress with their NVQ. Some level 2 trainees who joined the programme after leaving school in the summer of 1999 have almost completed their programme.

44. Pelcombe Training has developed its own comprehensive assessment documents, which it issues to trainees approximately three months after they start the programme. Each element is split up into plastic wallets and has within it an assessment plan, a client consultation sheet, and a client questionnaire. There is also a sheet which trainees fill in, describing the process they have undertaken along with techniques, products, tools and equipment used. Trainees are enthusiastic and achieve their targets.

45. Trainees have access to and gather a wide variety of evidence towards their NVQ. Good-quality photographic work is used, particularly at level 3, to support the assessments. These photographs are referenced clearly to the activity which they claim to be competent in. Assessors complete checklists based on the evidence put forward and through observing trainees carrying out the activity.

46. There are a large number of inexperienced assessors who have not achieved their assessor qualifications involved in signing off trainees' assessments. In one salon, trainees on their level 3 programmes sign each other's assessments. There is a qualified assessor available in three of the five salons. Some assessment decisions made by unqualified assessors are not checked by a qualified assessor. Awarding body guidelines are not always referred to, and there is some misunderstanding of how the range within the NVQ can be covered or which type of assessment should be used. Internal verification sampling is carried out but insufficient support is given to the assessors.

47. There are insufficient clients available in the training school for all trainees when they attend one day each week. Clients have to be shared among the trainees. For example, one trainee will shampoo the client for an assessment then the client will be passed to other trainees for a cut, then a blow-dry and finish. Often, when trainees are without models, they work on each other and are then assessed. This does not meet the requirement of assessment in a realistic working environment. Trainees are often left to manage their own programme in the workplace with little support. The more experienced assessors are busy with clients in the salon and have little time to support the trainees. Often the assessors in the workplace have limited knowledge themselves, particularly in areas such as key skills, to enable them to offer the necessary support. Level 3 modern apprentices are often the nominated workplace assessors and in many cases do not have assessor qualifications.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

48. Pelcombe Training offers a range of foundation for work programmes at three of its centres. In one county, a private training provider has recently been taken over by Pelcombe Training and has a small number of trainees on the programme. Across the organisation there are two New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option and four trainees on a work-based learning for adults

programme. This programme lasts for an average of 16 weeks and includes basic keyboarding skills and a short period of work experience and is designed mainly to improve employability. In addition there is basic employability training available. Two trainees are on this programme, which lasts for up to 28 weeks and provides a variety of nationally recognised qualifications. Seventeen young people are following a foundation programme known locally as Next Step, which provides personal development opportunities, linked to the national record of achievement. All trainees undergo a recognised basic skills assessment and where appropriate can pursue a wordpower or numberpower qualification. The main aim of this programme is to enable trainees to progress to mainstream training. Training is carried out by suitably qualified staff at all centres. Although, at 60 per cent, the drop-out rate is high, the achievement rate in 1999-2000 in the centre which carries out most of the training is approximately 78 per cent. Pelcombe Training identified strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report which were agreed on by inspectors. Some weaknesses had been addressed successfully and the inspectors awarded a higher grade than the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ good use of training centre working environment
- ◆ high achievement rates at main centre

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of planned occupational training opportunities
- ◆ few work placements in one area

49. Training is carried out in three centres, all of which have adequate and spacious accommodation, which is well lit and provides a good learning environment for trainees. Staff have developed an excellent range of learning materials to support both basic and key skills training. Resource packs are imaginative and relate to the right level of learning for both adult and youth trainees. Trainees' portfolios of evidence for numberpower and wordpower qualifications are structured and well-organised. Effective use is made of information technology resources to allow trainees to work at their own pace to develop basic keyboard skills. In one centre adult trainees use the resources to produce signs for the training rooms and also curriculum vitae for other trainees.

50. Trainees are well supported by qualified and experienced staff. Good use is made of past trainees who are employed by Pelcombe Training and who work well with trainees. This ensures that there is a comfortable and secure environment for learning. In one instance, a trainee with a lack of interpersonal skills, including the ability to mix with others, was able to work in an information technology room in such a way as to provide easy exit from the room. At the same time staff were

able to monitor the trainees' without appearing overprotective. Some staff have a counselling qualification and two have a mentoring qualification.

51. Pelcombe Training makes effective use of the working environment in the training centres. For example, trainees are able to work on reception duties including switchboard operations. Trainees are also encouraged to use the internal computerised network to develop their information technology communications skills. This facility is provided for trainees on a regular basis with rotas drawn up to ensure that all trainees have the opportunity to participate. Trainees are encouraged to support each other and, on occasions, trainees work in pairs to provide mutual support.

52. Trainees' progress through NVQs and wordpower/numberpower qualifications is monitored centrally at each centre and good visual records shown on a master progress sheet ensure that trainees and staff are aware of targets. This monitoring system also records trainees' reviews, which also ensures that reviews are not missed. Trainees attend regularly and are punctual for training sessions. Sessions are both lively and stimulating. Job preparation skills such as interviewing techniques are given a high priority. The other centres have only recently started the programme and so trainees have not yet achieved their qualifications.

53. Although there is a great deal of support for trainees' personal development there are few planned occupational training opportunities. Most trainees enter the programme with a desire to follow a range of vocational options into employment. Some enter the programme with previous practical workskills and experience and are placed on the information technology route to develop basic keyboard skills and become used to attendance and punctuality patterns. Occupational training is given later in the programme for those trainees. Pelcombe Training has recognised this weakness and has action plans to address the issue. In one centre, work placements are difficult to arrange and trainees do not benefit from work experience opportunities. There is a low rate of progression into employment.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

54. Pelcombe Training has a clearly written equal opportunities policy which meets legislative and TEC requirements. Overall responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the projects manager. Data are collected for the purposes of these contracts and this includes trainees' achievements as well as information relating to gender, age, disability and ethnicity. All trainees are given a copy of the trainees' handbook at induction and this states the company's commitment to providing equal opportunities and to investigating complaints and grievances fully. There is a gender balance among the company's staff, with 53 per cent men and 47 per cent women. There is one employee from a minority ethnic group. The number of trainees from

minority ethnic groups reflects the proportion in the local community i.e. in the period 1996-99 there were 54 trainees from minority ethnic groups, on average of 1.5 per cent. In the same period, 9 per cent of trainees described themselves as having a disability. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ rigorous implementation of equal opportunities policy and procedures
- ◆ good staff recruitment practices
- ◆ effective complaints procedures
- ◆ comprehensive staff training programme

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some promotional materials lack reference to equal opportunities
- ◆ no analysis of data on unsuccessful applicants

55. Pelcombe Training is highly self-critical and constructive about its role in promoting equal opportunities. The company has recognised the importance of ensuring that, not only does it comply with legal equal opportunities requirements, but that it should move beyond and identify issues and actively promote them. It has a comprehensive policy setting out its commitment to equality of opportunity. Employers also show good support for equal opportunities. There is clear action planning for a phased introduction of new activities to support equality of opportunity.

56. Pelcombe Training has a simple and reliable recruitment process which is fair and open. It follows a logical sequence, with each stage building on the previous one to ensure a consistent approach. Applicants with disabilities are able to apply over the telephone or in other non-standard ways. All applicants are informed of the result and feedback is provided where requested to unsuccessful applicants. Detailed guidance is provided to all those involved in recruitment and selection. The recruitment and selection procedures and practices throughout the organisation are reviewed annually to ensure that no group is disadvantaged either directly or indirectly.

57. The organisation actively promotes the rights and responsibilities of its employees and trainees. All staff and trainees receive a copy of the summary of the equal opportunities policy and a copy of the written guidance on how to make a complaint is contained in the staff and trainees' handbook. Complaints of discrimination or harassment are treated seriously and are fully investigated with confidentiality and sensitivity.

58. Equal opportunities training was originally addressed on an unplanned basis, with the occasional member of staff attending TEC-organised events as and when they were available. A nominated member of staff now has the role and responsibility to ensure that good practice in equal opportunities is shared with all staff. 'Cultural awareness training' has recently been offered to all members of staff including mini-bus drivers, canteen assistants and representatives from partner companies. Nearly all staff attended. Training managers have attended equal opportunities training from the Engineering Employers Federation. Some staff have also attended drugs awareness and race awareness training sessions provided by the TEC.

59. Some promotional materials for national traineeships and modern apprenticeships do not include any reference to equal opportunities. An action plan is being implemented which includes redrafting of all promotional materials and advertising to include reference to equal opportunities. A recent advertisement by Pelcombe Training in the local newspaper clearly states that the organisation is an equal opportunities employer.

60. The company does not analyse why trainees of one gender or from any particular ethnic group may have a better record in terms of retention rates or the achievement of qualifications or employment. Many potential trainees for Pelcombe Training's programmes do not turn up for interviews, even though transport is offered. Pelcombe Training does not analyse why people do not take up the offer of interview for training.

Trainee support

Grade 2

61. Trainees are recruited onto programmes at Pelcombe Training through the careers service, job centres, employers and by personal recommendation. All trainees are offered an individual interview, where an interview record is completed and, in some cases, trainees are given an initial assessment to determine any literacy and numeracy support needs. Later in their programme trainees undertake initial assessments in key skills. Occupational skills testing is also used effectively in some areas. There are job-search sessions provided by the organisation. Employed trainees are referred directly to the training officer responsible for the occupational area who monitors their progress and looks after their general welfare. There is a four-day formal induction for in-house trainees, which includes health and safety training. All trainees receive a handbook. Reviews are carried out by training staff and regular contact is kept with trainees awaiting work placements. The self-assessment report identified strengths which were agreed on by inspectors. One weakness detailed in the report was also agreed on and a higher grade was awarded than that given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive induction for in-house trainees
- ◆ strong community links
- ◆ good support from employers
- ◆ good support for trainees with learning difficulties

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ some workplace induction lacks rigour

GOOD PRACTICE

An example of good practice is where the organisation provides bus transport for trainees in rural areas. The majority of this cost is met by the provider's own resources and is available free of charge to trainees.

62. Non-employed trainees who join the programme are given a comprehensive induction. The induction is thorough and generally lasts for a period of four days. The programme is carried out at both of the main centres and includes an initial assessment of trainees' basic and key skills. Trainees are issued with a comprehensive handbook which explains all of their rights and responsibilities. The induction also includes awareness training in health and safety, equal opportunities and specialist topics such as manual handling for some trainees. During the induction, trainees have the opportunity to gain a health and safety certificate. In the final stages of the induction, trainees' occupational preference is discussed and training plans are completed detailing the NVQ and training arrangements.

63. Pelcombe Training has strong and long-standing community links with schools and employers as well as community organisations. It is well known for the support it offers trainees within a wide variety of areas of the community. There are many initiatives being implemented within the local school. A mentoring scheme is in operation in one school whereby Pelcombe Training's staff visit the school and hold a surgery where year-11 pupils can drop in to ask for guidance on their career options. A scheme is operated in one centre called 'Save and Pave' where year-11 pupils attend the carpentry and joinery section for two days a week. They do woodworking and can achieve a vocational award. 'Solar Panels' is a programme where Pelcombe Training's engineering tutors go into the local secondary school and work on a project with them building a solar panel which drives a fan.

64. Pelcombe Training has strong links with local employers. It has an open-access policy where employers can come in and interview prospective trainees. Pelcombe Training's premises are attractive and well kept and provide a professional shop-front image. The careers service pays regular visits to the premises and Pelcombe Training's staff visit careers offices to carry out interviews. Staff also serve on the committee of a local sheltered housing accommodation organisation and some are also inaugural members of a local 'social inclusion' partnership.

65. Special equipment is provided for trainees who may be partially sighted or have impaired hearing. Adjustments have also been made for trainees who have back problems, using special chairs with lumbar support. Pelcombe Training has an early

intervention scheme where parents are consulted if problems arise. They provide support to trainees in many ways. Trainees are transported in private cars to and from interviews. If trainees leave due to a lack of entitlement, Pelcombe Training continues to provide training to allow them to complete their NVQ. A psychological assessment has been arranged for a trainee who has lost a limb in an accident to ensure that the trainee would be able to cope with occupational training.

66. Accreditation of prior achievement is not systematically carried out across all occupational areas. Trainees who have achieved NVQs in the past have not had this added to their individual training plans. Assessments have been duplicated, as trainees have retaken assessments that they have already achieved. There are no standard recording systems to ensure that trainees' prior experiences are formally recognised and accredited. Pelcombe Training's staff are often not aware of how to deal with certificates brought forward from previous achievements. Induction in the workplace varies from good to weak. This is dependent on the organisation that trainees are placed in and on the personnel dealing with the induction. Induction is often not reinforced and some trainees have little recall of the induction content.

Management of training

Grade 2

67. The training director has overall responsibility for training taking place at two main centres and two smaller sites across three counties. Pelcombe Training's head office is in Colchester. The training director is directly responsible to the managing director and oversees a team of six managers. Two of these managers have a responsibility for the occupational programmes, one for the recruitment and placement of trainees and the running of a centre on a day-to-day basis. One manages special projects and professional training courses, another deals with claims and contract compliance, and one has the responsibility for managing another of the smaller centres. Staff numbers have more than doubled in the last two years and now stand at 134, with 41 of these being directly associated with the training arm of the company. The majority are centre based with small number's role spanning the centres. The board of directors meets on a monthly basis and the training director reports on the activities of the training centres. The management team meets informally on a weekly basis and formally on a monthly basis.

68. Pelcombe Training works in partnership with two companies, a group of hair salons and one company which offers training leading to NVQs in machine printing. It also subcontracts the training in on-licensed premises. In all three cases, Pelcombe Training is responsible for the management of training. The self-assessment report included strengths which were no more than normal practice. A further strength was identified by inspectors. The weaknesses noted included two that were specific to occupational areas, and three that have been addressed by the action plan in this area. Two further weaknesses were identified and a higher grade awarded than that given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good management of key skills training
- ◆ good opportunities for staff development
- ◆ good co-operative relationships with external organisations

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some ineffective management of subcontractors

69. Key skills are integrated into many of the training programmes. Assessment is well planned and staff play a key role in supporting trainees with the collection of evidence and development of portfolios. Trainees receive a good introduction into key skills and, in many cases, employers play an active role in providing a range of opportunities for trainees to develop their key skills.

70. The first appraisal of a new member of staff takes place three to six months after their start date. Further appraisals held on an annual basis. During appraisal the majority of staff development requirements are identified and acted upon. Opportunities for development are plentiful and not always directed to occupational needs. Pelcombe Training has plans to formalise and focus training. Examples of good staff development include a tutor winning an Essex TEC '20/20 Vision Award' and a staff member being sent on a professional centre management development programme. Six staff have recently completed key skills training and two staff have attended a teacher training course, with three completing last year. Most of the staff have recently attended 'cultural awareness' training.

71. Pelcombe Training has good co-operative relationships with external organisations. Pelcombe Training has a sound business-planning practice in operation based on the collection and use of accurate and relevant data. Targets are set based on performance and are monitored at all levels of the organisation.

72. Pelcombe Training has made some progress with monitoring the provision off-the-job training. This particularly applies to the hairdressing and hospitality external subcontractors where agreements have been developed in an attempt to manage the programme more effectively. This arrangement is in its infancy and does not yet extend to the colleges of further education with which the organisation contracts.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

73. Pelcombe Training has a clear and easy-to-understand quality assurance policy and procedures. It has also achieved the ISO 9001 quality assurance standard. There are copies of the policy in all training centres. Quality assurance systems are the responsibility of the finance and quality assurance director. The system is regularly reviewed and updated and these updates are communicated to all

members of staff. Staff attend regular team meetings which are recorded and action points produced. The training director sets targets for NVQ achievement and retention with team managers. Performance of staff is then measured against these targets. There is an effective complaints procedure. Trainees are made aware of this procedure during their in-house induction and further details are contained in the trainees' handbook.

74. The self-assessment report is clear and easy to understand. It provides an accurate picture of the organisation for each occupational area with clearly defined strengths and weaknesses. There are clear descriptions for each occupational areas, concise bullet points illustrating strengths and weaknesses and many of the areas highlighted for improvement have already been addressed. The self-assessment report identified several strengths which were considered to be no more than normal practice. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as the one given by Pelcombe Training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff involvement in projects to promote continuous improvement
- ◆ effective system for evaluating performance
- ◆ comprehensive and accurate self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ internal verification system lacks rigour in some occupational areas
- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ lack of monitoring of the quality of training

75. All the staff in Pelcombe Training have a good understanding of the quality assurance arrangements and are positive and proactive about improving the overall training experience for their trainees. Quality assurance is discussed at the monthly team meetings and action points are produced as part of the minutes, meaning that good practice is shared. Most of the staff were involved in the self-assessment process and have a clear understanding of their programmes' strengths and weaknesses and of the action plans which have been produced to address the problem areas. Many of the action points have already produced positive results within the organisation.

76. Pelcombe Training has recently introduced a formal procedure involving a series of questionnaires for monitoring trainees and employers' satisfaction with the programmes. It has plans to further evaluate this feedback to provide action points to improve standards within the organisation. The questionnaires are issued when trainees complete or leave their programmes, partway through the programme and to employers. The results of these surveys are evaluated and improvements are introduced. These include a re-designed monthly progress review, improved induction for employed trainees and a re-structuring of the delivery of the CLAIT

qualification. Pelcombe Training also seeks the views of its subcontractors, to ensure that the training is effective and that they are meeting the contractual requirements of the training programme.

77. The internal verification system lacks rigour in some occupational areas. There is a clear internal verification policy, but it is not adhered to in all areas, and Pelcombe Training has failed to pick up inconsistencies in assessment practice. There is insufficient sampling of portfolios, no sampling plan, no observation of assessments and portfolios are only verified on completion of the qualification in some occupational areas. On the hairdressing programme, there is no formal internal verification planning, little support for assessors and little portfolio sampling. There are systems for monitoring trainees' progress, however, in practice, they are not always fully implemented in all occupational areas.

78. Pelcombe Training does not monitor the quality of training across all centres and occupational areas. There are many examples of excellent practice on a number of programmes. However, this good practice is not always shared and there is no standardisation of the quality of training. On the hair programme, for example, standards vary across the six salons and there is no system to make sure that the overall quality of training and assessment is the same in all salons.