



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT FEBRUARY 1999

REINSPECTION FEBRUARY 2000

BECTG Limited
(Birmingham Electrical
Training)

SUMMARY

Birmingham Electrical Training provides satisfactory support for trainees, who receive a thorough initial assessment of their basic skills and high levels of pastoral help and guidance. However, at the time of the first inspection, construction, equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Many trainees failed to complete their training. There was an insufficient number staff to ensure that trainees were regularly visited in the workplace. There was no systematic quality assurance process. All areas reinspected are now satisfactory. There is a high standard of on- and off-the-job training in construction. Trainees receive a thorough explanation of equal opportunities at their induction and now have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues. There is still little action taken to attract under-represented groups to training programmes. There is a well-structured and appropriate staff development programme. Management of subcontractors lacks rigour. The self-assessment process is effective. There are good quality assurance arrangements with subcontractors although there is little systematic review and evaluation of the programmes.

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original published report text for construction, equal opportunities, management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Construction	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good standard of on-and off-the-job training
- ◆ good monitoring and recording of trainees' progress
- ◆ effective review of equal opportunities at employers
- ◆ thorough initial assessment of trainees' basic skills
- ◆ high level of pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ well-structured and appropriate staff development
- ◆ good analysis of management data
- ◆ well-structured quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors
- ◆ effectiveness of self-assessment process in identifying weaknesses

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress for some trainees
- ◆ lack of understanding by trainees and employers of key skills
- ◆ little action to address under-represented groups on training programmes
- ◆ lack of rigour in management of subcontractors
- ◆ few targets set for improvement
- ◆ little systematic review and evaluation of programmes

INTRODUCTION

1. BECTG Limited offers training in the installation and commissioning of electrical and electrotechnical systems and equipment for young people in the West Midlands. The company trades under the name Birmingham Electrical Training (BET). It was formed in 1990 through a joint collaboration between the Birmingham Electrical Contractors Training Group (BECTG) and local further education colleges. BECTG is a network of electrical contractors in the West Midlands, set up to share good practice and stay abreast of the industry's requirements. BET was set up to manage BECTG's training activities on behalf of its members and to help young people gain jobs in the electrical installations sector of the construction industry. BET moved to its present location in Sutton Coldfield in May 1998.

2. BET has a contract with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide modern apprenticeships and other work-based training programmes for young people. Trainees work towards qualifications in either electrical or electrotechnical systems and equipment. At the first inspection there were 276 trainees, of whom 109 were modern apprentices. There are now 292 trainees, including 139 modern apprentices. All trainees work towards nationally recognised vocational qualifications and nationally recognised practical tests in addition to national vocational qualifications (NVQs). These are requirements for employment in skilled grades throughout much of the electrical installation industry. Between them, eighty-one of BECTG's members employ all the trainees. The number of employers has risen from around 70 at the first inspection. The company has no other training contracts.

3. The company's chairman and the five other directors are elected by the membership of BECTG. They are all directors or senior managers of BECTG's member companies and provide their services on a voluntary basis. The operational management of the company is the responsibility of the centre manager supported by an office manager. There are two full-time training staff as well as two full-time and two part-time administrative staff. The company has experienced major organisational change over the past two years, following the departure of the previous manager. There have been a number of staff changes that meant the company has been operating with reduced numbers of staff for most of this period. During the original inspection, there were four staff including the centre manager and an administration manager. Three were full-time and one was part-time. The administration manager has since left the company and has been replaced by an office manager. The full staff complement of eight, identified in the company's business plans, has only been in place since January 2000. The company is based in premises owned by a local further education college some distance from the college's main site. The company has no training rooms of its own but hires training rooms within the same building for initial assessments, induction sessions and staff training when required. All off-the-job training, assessment and verification is subcontracted to four local further education colleges. The company has just been

accredited as a satellite centre for a local further education college that is registered with the awarding body as an approved centre. This means that BET will be able to carry out its own assessment and verification of the level 3 NVQ on the electrotechnical programme starting this year.

4. BET recruits most of its trainees from Walsall, Birmingham and the surrounding areas within the West Midlands. Employment in the area is concentrated in the manufacturing, distribution, financial and public service sectors. The construction sector employs 4.3 per cent of the resident population but accounts for over 11 per cent of businesses. Companies in the construction sector are generally small- and medium-sized enterprises. Overall, unemployment in the West Midlands is high, standing at 5.7 per cent in December 1999, compared with 3.8 per cent in England. Unemployment in Walsall is 5 per cent while in Birmingham it is particularly high at 6.7 per cent. Unemployment in the 18-24 age group represents 25.5 per cent of the total in the West Midlands, compared with 26.3 per cent in Birmingham and in England of 24.1 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 38.1 per cent, 36.1 per cent and 40.9 per cent respectively, in Birmingham, Walsall and the area covered by Birmingham and Solihull TEC, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In the West Midlands, 66 per cent of 16 year olds and 56 per cent of 17 year olds are in full-time education. In Birmingham, the proportions are slightly higher while in Walsall they are 61 per cent and 48 per cent respectively. In the Birmingham TEC area, 10 per cent of 16 year olds and 9 per cent of 17 year olds participate in government-funded training. These compare with the averages for England of 10 per cent and 11 per cent respectively. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups in the West Midlands is 14.6 per cent. This varies widely across the area. For example, in Birmingham it is 21.5 per cent, in Walsall it is 9.6 per cent and in Solihull it is 2.9 per cent. The average for the Birmingham and Solihull TEC area is 17.7 per cent. Unemployment rates for most minority ethnic groups are higher than the average across the population as a whole.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. BET produced its first self-assessment report for the original inspection. Its managers attended a series of workshops provided by Birmingham and Solihull TEC, designed to explain the self-assessment process and support BET in producing the report. An external consultant was employed to co-ordinate the collection of information and the report's production. All staff took part in the self-assessment process. The centre manager and the administration manager wrote the first self-assessment report. This failed to identify a number of key weaknesses in the occupational area and in management of training. The company produced its second self-assessment report in July 1999. A brief annex was added in November 1999 to update the report with respect to staffing issues and the latest staff complement. All staff contributed to the self-assessment process. A nominated advisor from Birmingham and Solihull TEC assisted in the process. The centre manager and the administration manager wrote the second self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grades in the occupational area and the three generic aspects that were reinspected. The self-assessment report still fails to identify some key weaknesses.

6. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at BET in February 2000. Inspectors interviewed 35 trainees and six of BET's staff. Inspectors visited 14 employers on 18 different sites and interviewed four employers and eight workplace supervisors as well as observing an on-the-job training session and two progress reviews. Inspectors also visited two subcontractors, interviewed seven of the subcontractors' staff and observed one training session. Inspectors examined a range of written material including trainees' portfolios and personal files, assessment records, verification reports, quality assurance procedures and other documents, management reports and minutes of meetings. The grades awarded to the training sessions observed by the inspectors are given in the table below.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		4	2			6
Total	0	4	2	0	0	6

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the reinspection

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

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. BET offers modern apprenticeships and other work-based training programmes for young people in the electrical installation sector of the construction industry. Training programmes in this sector are going through significant change. Qualifications in electrical installation are being phased out and replaced with new electrotechnical qualifications. All trainees on electrical installation programmes work towards a level 2 NVQ in installing electrical systems and equipment and a level 3 NVQ in installing and commissioning electrical systems and equipment. To complete their programmes, they also have to achieve parts 1 and 2 of an examination-based vocational qualification in electrical installation and the achievement measurement 1 and 2 practical skills tests (AM1 and AM2). Key skills are integrated into the level 3 NVQ. These are not certificated separately, as the awarding body does not require separate certification for completion of the modern apprenticeship. All trainees on the new electrotechnical programme work towards an examination-based vocational qualification in knowledge of electrical installation engineering, the AM2 practical skills test and a level 3 NVQ in installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems and equipment. Key skills are integrated into the level 3 NVQ but three of the five necessary units are certificated separately to meet the awarding body requirements. Modern apprentices registered on the electrotechnical programme before January 2000 do not have to complete the level 2 NVQ in installing electrotechnical systems to meet the requirements of the award. No trainees have been registered since December 1999.

8. There are 292 trainees. Ninety-eight modern apprentices and 65 other trainees are on the electrotechnical programme. Forty-one modern apprentices and 88 other trainees are on the electrical installation programme. All trainees are employed. Most trainees work on a variety of sites during their training. The sites range from domestic premises and light industrial units through to large manufacturing facilities. Employers provide on-the-job training throughout the training programme. Trainees attend one of four further education colleges, either on a block- or day-release basis during their first year and for either 14 or 16 weeks in two- or four-week blocks during their second year. Trainees on the electrical installation programme work towards the level 2 NVQ, the AM1 test and the vocational qualification at college during this time. Trainees on the electrotechnical programme work towards the appropriate vocational qualification. During their third year, trainees complete their vocational qualifications before working towards the level 3 NVQ and the AM2 test in their fourth and subsequent years. Trainees receive help and advice in preparing their portfolios, both from BET and from the colleges' staff. Sessions at the colleges, attended by BET and college staff, are available on Saturday mornings to provide additional access for trainees. All assessment and verification is subcontracted to the colleges.

9. Most trainees have an individual training plan extending to five years. BET introduced its modern apprenticeship programme in 1996. Of those trainees starting

a modern apprenticeship, 70 per cent are still with BET. Five trainees have just completed their modern apprenticeship. Of those starting other training programmes since 1997, 63 per cent are still with the company. On other training programmes, 39 per cent of leavers since 1996 have completed their programmes. Sixty-nine per cent of modern apprentices and other trainees who have been registered for an NVQ at level 2 have achieved the qualification. BET employs a training officer and a training co-ordinator. Their responsibilities include recruitment, initial assessment, trainees' progress monitoring and reviews, health and safety audits and equal opportunities audits at employers. The training co-ordinator holds a qualification in health and safety while the training officer is working towards a similar qualification. The centre manager is qualified as an assessor, internal verifier and in the accreditation of prior achievement. The training officer is working towards assessor qualifications. BET has no training facilities of its own. Training rooms in the same building are hired from the college when required.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficient qualified staff at BET
- ◆ inadequately designed training programme
- ◆ insufficient involvement of employers in training
- ◆ failure of many trainees to progress to NVQ level 3
- ◆ failure of many trainees to complete training

10. The self-assessment report indicates that the first three of these weaknesses have been addressed satisfactorily. Inspectors agreed with this judgement following reinspection. The self-assessment report does not address the remaining two weaknesses. Inspectors identified improvements in retention and achievement but also identified a number of trainees making slow progress. Self-assessment accurately identified one of the other weaknesses identified during reinspection but did not identify key skills as an issue to be tackled. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified by BET through self-assessment although BET did not place sufficient emphasis on the strength of its health and safety practices. The grade awarded at reinspection is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good monitoring and recording of progress
- ◆ comprehensive health and safety practices during on- and off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress for some trainees
- ◆ many trainees lack understanding of NVQs and key skills

GOOD PRACTICE

This is a good example of structured on-the-job training. A trainee and employer meet regularly to discuss the trainee's progress on the job. The day-to-day site operations of all contracts the employer is working on are matched to the parts of the NVQ the trainee has still to achieve. The trainee is then assigned to the contract and trained in those jobs that will provide the best opportunity to progress towards the NVQ.

11. All trainees are employed in local companies. Most employers are small- or medium-sized electrical contractors although some are larger manufacturing companies. All employers offer trainees a variety of opportunities to collect evidence covering all aspects required for their NVQ, together with a high standard of on-the-job training. On many of the contract sites the variety of work undertaken allows trainees to experience a range of tasks beyond that required to complete their NVQ. This allows trainees to develop their competence in electrical installation to a high standard. Off-the-job training carried out by the colleges is good and is carried out by well-qualified staff in well-resourced electrical installation workshops. A wide range of training is covered. Trainees have a high regard for their tutors and the trainees' work shows a high level of skill.

12. There is good monitoring and recording of trainees' progress. Assessments are recorded, dated and signed. A copy is then included in the trainee's portfolio while another copy is retained in the college's assessment files. A checklist of the units achieved by each trainee is completed to indicate their progress to date. This is displayed in the workshop area to enable college staff and trainees to identify their progress at any given time. Emphasis is placed on health and safety procedures both on and off the job. Trainees' inductions carried out by BET, by colleges and by employers include detailed coverage of health and safety. Health and safety audits are carried out annually by BET with each employer and also with trainees at each review. In addition, on moving to a new contract site each trainee receives instruction on health and safety on the site. One employer has devised a programme of talks which are periodically given on site by the service manager, site engineer or projects manager and cover health and safety procedures in great detail.

POOR PRACTICE

This is an example of poor practice in assessment. One member of staff working towards assessor qualifications is carrying out assessments that are not being countersigned by a qualified assessor.

13. Some trainees make slow progress towards their level 3 NVQ. Almost one-quarter of trainees on the other training programmes are in their fifth or sixth year with BET. Many are still some way from completing their level 3 NVQ. Over a quarter of trainees recruited during or before 1997 have yet to start their level 3 NVQ. Progress reviews are not used to set demanding targets for trainees. Employers are rarely present during progress reviews. Some trainees feel demotivated by their lack of progress. Many trainees leave training when they have achieved their level 2 NVQ. Many trainees show little awareness or understanding of the NVQ system and requirements for assessment. Some trainees do not know which NVQ they are working towards or its content. Many trainees are unable to influence their training programme, as they are unaware of what is required. Few employers help trainees by structuring the on-the-job training around the requirements of the NVQ, even when there are clear opportunities to do so. Most trainees have little understanding of key skills. These are not covered in the induction programme or at any stage in the review process. Trainees are not aware that key skills are integrated into the level 3 NVQ. Modern apprentices on the new electrotechnical programme are not aware that they require separate certification of three of the key skills units in order to complete their modern apprenticeship.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. BET has a written equal opportunities policy, policy statement and code of practice. The general manager is responsible for equal opportunities. Most trainees are referred to the company by the careers service. Some trainees approach the company directly or are referred by local employers, many of whom are members of the association. The company monitors all applicants for gender and ethnic background. Trainees are required by the awarding body to pass a medical examination, which includes a test for colour blindness, before they can be registered on the electrical installation programme. BET promotes its training through visits to local schools. Since the initial inspection, staff have been trained in equal opportunities. Over half of the company's staff are women. Equal opportunities have also been introduced into the trainees' induction programme. This includes details of the company's grievance procedures. Equal opportunities are included in trainees' reviews and in the annual review of employers. The company monitors equal opportunities at its subcontractors. There is an annual review of equal opportunities with college staff. Published inspection reports, and the college's self-assessment reports are also used as a source of evidence to implement equal opportunities. All trainees on the electrical installation programme are men. There have been no women on this programme since 1997. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is 8.6 per cent. The average proportion of the local working age population from minority ethnic groups across the region covered by Birmingham and Solihull TEC is 17.7 per cent. However, there are wide local variations. For example in Walsall, the proportion is 9.6 per cent and in Solihull it is 2.9 per cent.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ failure to cover equal opportunities in trainees' induction
- ◆ no analysis of statistics on trainees ethnicity or gender to inform recruitment policy
- ◆ little promotion of equal opportunities with trainees or employers
- ◆ little action to address under-representation of specific groups on training programmes
- ◆ no staff development to raise awareness of equality of opportunity issues

15. The latest self-assessment report, produced in July 1999, identifies the same strengths and two of the weaknesses from the original inspection report. An additional weakness in the self-assessment report is that there is no monitoring of trainees' understanding of equal opportunities. This weakness has now been addressed. Two of the strengths relate to previous efforts to introduce women into the training programmes, which have had some success. Inspectors considered these not to be current strengths and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and well-written equal opportunities policy and code of practice
- ◆ effective coverage of equal opportunities during trainees' induction
- ◆ high level of awareness of equal opportunities among trainees
- ◆ good review of equal opportunities at most employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no targets set to attract under-represented groups to training
- ◆ selection procedures not evaluated for equality of opportunity
- ◆ lack of positive images of under-represented groups in promotional material

16. BET's equal opportunity policy and procedures are thorough and clearly identify the company's approach to all aspects of equal opportunities. Staff are aware of the procedures as well as the issues surrounding discriminatory practice and how it should be avoided. This is reinforced through staff training. Trainees are now given a thorough explanation of equal opportunities during their induction. The induction covers the company's approach to all aspects of equal opportunities and includes information on its grievance procedures. Trainees have a good recollection of their induction, including the equal opportunities part. All trainees, including those who have not benefited from the new induction procedures, show a high level of awareness of equal opportunities. This is important in a male-dominated industry. Equal opportunities issues are reinforced during trainees' reviews.

17. The company systematically reviews the equal opportunities practices of employers. Each new employer receives an equal opportunities assessment before trainees are sent for interview. Existing employers are given an annual assessment of their equal opportunities practices at the same time as the annual health and safety assessment. This is included in BET's agreement with employers, which is renewed annually. Most employers have had at least one annual equal opportunities review. Many employers have good equal opportunities policies and procedures. BET does not allow employers to set restrictions on applicants for training places. Employers are required to fill in and return a questionnaire on each applicant they interview for a training place, stating the precise reasons for accepting or rejecting the candidate. These are analysed and any anomalies investigated.

18. BET does not set targets for increasing the participation of under-represented groups on its training programmes. Some initiatives designed to attract more women and those from minority ethnic groups into training have been identified and are being implemented. For example, staff have arranged to visit girls' schools and those with a high proportion of students from minority ethnic groups. However, without targets linked to an action plan, the effectiveness of these initiatives is difficult to assess. There is no evaluation of the company's selection processes for equality of opportunity. The proportion of under-represented groups on the training programmes is different from those of applicants. There is a higher drop-out rate

from under-represented groups during the selection process than for other groups. The company rigorously monitors the gender, ethnic group and disabilities of applicants for its training programmes and staff appointments. These groups are not monitored through the various stages of evaluation and selection to establish any trends in the proportions of each group passing to the next stage of the process. There is no analysis of the differences between applicants and trainees in order to make improvements to the selection process. There is little promotional literature available to help to recruit trainees. That which exists does not contain positive images of under-represented groups. Promotional leaflets do not address the cultural barriers that might prevent women and some minority ethnic groups from entering construction programmes. The leaflets are only available in English.

Trainee support

Grade 3

19. BET recruits its trainees through two routes: most are recruited directly by BET and a few are recruited by their employers and referred to BET for inclusion on a training programme. Promotional material, open-days and the interview procedures used by BET provide potential trainees with accurate advice about the industry and the training schemes which they are proposing to enter. All applicants for training take a battery of standard tests, designed to assess aptitude for the industry. BET does not validate the results. Where an employer has recruited an applicant whose test results suggest that he or she is unsuited to training, that person is advised about an appropriate remedial programme which will equip him/her to enter the training programme a year later. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but they identified some significant strengths and weaknesses which the company failed to identify. The company is addressing some of the weaknesses, however, through its action plan. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ provision of accurate advice and guidance to potential trainees
- ◆ thorough initial assessment of trainees' basic skills
- ◆ good provision of additional support
- ◆ strong emphasis at induction on health and safety
- ◆ good pastoral support for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic evaluation of the results of initial assessment
- ◆ insufficiently detailed individual training plans
- ◆ unco-ordinated induction
- ◆ failure to hold progress reviews in the workplace or involve employers in them
- ◆ poor recording of the advice, guidance and support given to trainees

20. BET recruits once a year. When trainees first attend a further education college in September, their basic skills are thoroughly assessed by the college. The results of the assessment are returned to the company which then arranges for the college to provide additional learning support for those trainees who need it. Generally, the support provided is good, but trainees' attendance at support sessions and the effectiveness of the support are not systematically monitored by BET. Individual training plans form a part of the comprehensive and well-organised trainees' files. Although the plans meet the contractual requirements of the TEC, they are not sufficiently detailed to provide the trainee, employer or BET with an adequate basis for target-setting and for progress reviews.

21. Arrangements for trainees' induction are fragmented. All trainees undertake an individual induction to BET, but this focuses primarily on administrative requirements. Trainees also receive various forms of induction to the workplace and have a separate induction to college. These induction processes are not co-ordinated or rigorously monitored by BET. Health and safety has a high profile, and trainees' awareness of the importance of health and safety is effectively raised during induction and maintained throughout the training programme. Trainees are provided with protective clothing, and some employers provide assistance to enable them to acquire the right tools.

22. In their roles as acting training managers, the manager and administration manager make monthly visits to individual trainees in college. Although the trainees' progress towards achievement of the NVQ is reviewed during these visits, trainees consider that the visits have more to do with their general welfare than with their performance and attainments on the training programme. Trainees feel well supported in their training, but see their employers and college as the main source of that support. They regard BET's staff as providing primarily pastoral support. Trainees, employers and college staff feel readily able to contact BET's staff and are confident that any problems raised will be quickly resolved. Since the change in staffing structure, BET's staff have not carried out many progress review visits in the workplace, and employers are not really involved in the review process. There is a high level of pastoral support for trainees. The administration manager visits the NVQ level 3 trainees at college on Saturdays. Both managers meet trainees to discuss problems in the evenings, if necessary. Some trainees have received considerable help when, for example, they have been temporarily without accommodation or money. Much of the support and assistance given to trainees is unrecorded and its effectiveness is not assessed.

Management of training

Grade 3

23. BET has a chairman and a board of five directors, all of whom are part-time and work on a voluntary basis. The board of directors meets monthly. BET has undergone substantial staff changes since the original inspection and has increased its staff from four to eight, six of whom have joined BET within the last year. The

operational management of BET is the responsibility of the centre manager supported by an office manager. There are a further four full-time and two part-time staff. Two staff are responsible for trainees' recruitment, initial assessment, progress monitoring and reviews and for visiting trainees in the workplace. The office manager is responsible for trainees' induction and for liaising with employers and subcontractors. A further member of staff acts as the office contact for trainees and employers. Staff visits to trainees have increased significantly since the first inspection and are now made to the workplace as well as at the colleges. Each member of staff has a copy of their own job description. These clearly identify their roles and responsibilities. Each member of staff has an annual appraisal and a training and development plan. Staff meet weekly for a formal management meeting. Minutes of these meetings are kept. Staff also meet daily to discuss trainees' progress. These meetings are not recorded. Information on trainees is held on two computer systems. One provides information on performance against the contract for Birmingham and Solihull TEC. The other provides information on trainees, their progress and achievements. The latter system is still in the process of being developed.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate staffing levels to ensure effective management
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of subcontractors' provision
- ◆ poor management of trainees' progression from NVQ level 2
- ◆ low awareness among employers of NVQ occupational standards

24. Staffing levels are now adequate, following the recruitment of further staff. Management of trainees' progression onto level 3 NVQs has improved and is now satisfactory. Some improvements have been made with regard to the other weaknesses in accordance with the post-inspection action plan, although not everything in the action plan has been achieved. This is partly because of some severe staffing problems in the last 12 months. BET's second self-assessment report includes most of the strengths and weaknesses identified during reinspection. The self-assessment process did not identify the lack of involvement of most employers in planning their employees' training programmes. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong links with subcontractors and employers
- ◆ good teamwork among staff
- ◆ well-structured and appropriate staff development
- ◆ good analysis of management data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little involvement of employers in planning training programmes

- ◆ low awareness of NVQ occupational standards among employers
- ◆ management of subcontractors lacks rigour

25. BET has established strong links with the further education colleges it uses as subcontractors for its training. The staff at the colleges use BET as a link between themselves and employers. One college now holds a Saturday morning session to provide additional training and help with trainees' portfolios. The company also has long-established links with the local companies which employ its trainees. The breadth of training offered by employers depends on the work required by their customers. Some small employers find that the range of work they do becomes limited after taking on a trainee. One benefit of the strong links with BET is that trainees are transferred to other companies when the original employer has been unable to provide training in all the skills necessary for the trainee to complete their qualification. There is good teamwork among staff, most of whom have joined BET within the last year. Staff work well together and display a high level of mutual support and encouragement. The introduction of the new electrotechnical training programmes during the last year has been well managed despite the major changes in personnel. Staff attend the Saturday morning college sessions on a voluntary basis. Communication among staff is good and staff meetings are held weekly. Minutes of the meetings are kept. These contain actions and responsibilities. Actions are followed up at the next meeting.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good use of technology in the management of training. One subcontractor, a college of further education, sends weekly progress reports to BET's manager by e-mail. These include, as e-mail attachments, the updated spreadsheets used within the college to record trainees' progress. The spreadsheets also make imaginative use of notes to expand on the data.

26. Staff development is well structured. Most staff are appropriately qualified for the positions they hold. One member of staff who has recently joined the company is working towards assessor and health and safety qualifications. Staff development is also designed to help staff to make a contribution to the development of training within the company. Two staff are working towards an NVQ in management and one in administration, all at level 3. Another member of staff is completing two NVQs at level 3, one in administration and one in customer service. A further member of staff is completing a modern apprenticeship in business administration with a local private training company. Most staff have had training in equal opportunities. Further training has been arranged for new staff and to reinforce the understanding of staff who have already had some training. BET collects considerable amounts of data and has made significant progress with developing methods of analysis to identify trends. For example, data on trainees' progress at the two main subcontractors are sought regularly and comparative analysis has shown significant differences in trainees' progress.

27. BET does not systematically work with employers to plan or directly influence on-the-job training. Some employers work closely with their own trainees and BET to match the on-the-job training with the requirements of the NVQ and the trainees' college-based work. However, there is little attempt to encourage all employers to adopt this good practice. BET has not organised meetings to which all employers are invited. Employers' attendance at the company's annual general meetings is low. Most trainees' workplace supervisors and managers have a low level of awareness of the NVQ standards and the assessment process. Many trainees receive little guidance on the relevance and importance of the NVQs from their

employer. Staff at some employers express dislike towards the level 3 NVQ although they support the level 2 qualification. Many employers and trainees believe that the additional mandatory qualification in the modern apprenticeship framework is the most important, rather than the level 3 NVQ. BET does not manage its subcontractors rigorously. The terms of the contracts are not consistently met. For example, attendance data are often not provided on time. BET is not always informed on the day if trainees fail to attend college. There are no regular, formal meetings with subcontractors to review their performance.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

28. BET has a quality assurance policy and written procedures. The procedures have been developed since the original inspection. Some of them have only recently been implemented. There is no procedure covering internal verification. One procedure requires the company to carry out regular audits of the effectiveness of its quality assurance system. Some audits have taken place. There is a schedule for future audits. The company subcontracts training, assessment and internal verification to four local further education colleges. It has a contract with each college which specifies quality assurance arrangements. The company has agreements with all employers and work-placement providers. As part of the quality assurance process, BET uses questionnaires to gather the views of trainees, employers and those trainees who leave before completing their training. The responses are analysed and discussed. The company has a written business plan. This contains some performance targets. Trainees' achievements are monitored and reviewed regularly. The self-assessment process forms part of the company's quality assurance procedures. All staff are involved in the process.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic quality assurance process
- ◆ no mechanism to ensure sharing of good practice in training
- ◆ no formal arrangements for programme review and evaluation
- ◆ no setting of standards and targets

29. Two of these weaknesses have now been addressed. BET acknowledges in its latest self-assessment report that the other two weaknesses remain. The limitations of the company's existing performance targets are not identified in the self-assessment report. The strengths identified during the first inspection have been developed. The self-assessment grade is the same as that awarded by inspectors following reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective self-assessment process
- ◆ well-structured quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors
- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little systematic monitoring of verification
- ◆ few targets set for making improvements
- ◆ no mechanism to ensure sharing of good practice in training

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of a good training agreement with employers and work-placement providers. The agreement lasts for one year and stipulates the employers' responsibilities with respect to training, health and safety and equal opportunities. BET carries out an annual performance review of each employer. This includes both health and safety and equal opportunities assessments. Only if the results of the review are satisfactory, is the agreement renewed for a further year.

30. BET's self-assessment process is effective. It has enabled the company to identify many key weaknesses and, through the resulting action plan, to introduce improvements. The improvements in some aspects identified as weaknesses in BET's first self-assessment report, are so significant that they have been identified as strengths during reinspection, for example the introduction of equal opportunities in trainees' induction programme. Action-planning following on from self-assessment is well structured. For example, the action plan to increase retention identifies a number of areas for improvement including recruitment, delivery and incentives. An action plan for each area has been prepared and is being implemented.

31. Quality assurance arrangements with subcontracted colleges are well managed. Contracts include the details and standards required of training and assessment, how these are to be monitored and reviewed, the information to be supplied to BET on trainees' progress and attendance, and health and safety requirements. Attendance, progress and achievement data are required weekly. One college provides the required data by e-mail. BET's staff observe training at the colleges. The company reviews each college's performance against their contract every year. As a result of this process, no new trainees are placed with a college which does not meet BET's standards. Publicly available inspection reports on the colleges and the colleges' self-assessment reports are used to supplement the annual reviews. There is good use of information gathered from trainees, employers and those leaving before they finish their training. The information is taken from questionnaires, trainees' reviews and regular meetings with trainees' employers and work-based supervisors. Telephone questionnaires are being introduced to improve the response rate from trainees leaving their programmes early. The information is analysed and discussed at staff meetings. It is used to identify areas for improvement.

32. There is little systematic monitoring of verification. Most internal verification is still subcontracted. There are no systematic procedures for monitoring the quality of internal verification at subcontractors. BET does not hold copies of its subcontractors' internal verification procedures. The company does not receive copies of all internal and external verification reports. Copies are sent when



requested by BET but sometimes these have been difficult to obtain. BET's quality assurance system does not define the company's standards for internal verification or contain procedures for their implementation. The company sets few specific quality improvement targets. The business plan identifies objectives for improving training but few of these are translated into specific targets. Where targets are set, they are mainly related to meeting contractual requirements. There are no arrangements for sharing good practice in training among employers. The quality, range and scope of on-the-job training vary across the wide range of employers. Although there are many examples of good practice at individual employers, these are rarely shared. Employers are reluctant to attend meetings for this purpose. The action plan following on from the original inspection proposes the circulation of a newsletter containing articles on good practice to all employers. This has not been done.