



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MARCH 2000

Milltech
(originally published as
Youngsave Ltd)

SUMMARY

Milltech offers work-based training for young people and modern apprenticeships in engineering, administration and retailing and customer service. Training in business administration is satisfactory. At the time of the first inspection, the engineering programme and the retail programme, including distribution, sales and customer service, were less than satisfactory. In both engineering and retailing, off-the-job training was poor. However, the quality of work placements and work-based learning was generally good across all occupational sectors. Equal opportunities practices were underdeveloped and failed to guarantee equality of opportunity for all trainees. Measures to support trainees through their programmes were fragmented, with too much reliance placed on pre-entry tests. Management of the programme was satisfactory, with good systems to support staff development. However, on- and off-the-job training was not planned, and management-information systems were underdeveloped. Quality assurance systems did not promote continuous improvement throughout the training. Milltech was reinspected 10 months after the original report was published. Training in both engineering and retailing and customer service is now satisfactory. Since the last inspection, considerable efforts have been made to increase the promotion and understanding of equal opportunities among staff, trainees and employers, and this aspect is now satisfactory. Trainee support measures are also now satisfactory with particular attention paid to the provision of additional support. Although the problem of early leavers has not been put right, considerable measures have been introduced to promote continuous improvement. Most of the weaknesses identified at the first inspection have been rectified and quality assurance is now satisfactory.

As a result of the reinspection of Milltech, the original published report text for engineering, retailing and customer service, equal opportunities, trainee support and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Engineering	4
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	4

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

REINSPECTION	
Engineering	3
Retailing & customer service	3

REINSPECTION	
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ stable network of employers providing good placements
- ◆ well-qualified staff committed to the company's success
- ◆ well-managed personnel processes
- ◆ good learning opportunities at work
- ◆ buoyant recruitment
- ◆ effective action to promote continuous improvement
- ◆ active promotion of equal opportunities

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ high proportion of trainees leave early
- ◆ poor achievement levels
- ◆ little planned training on-the-job
- ◆ weak review process

INTRODUCTION

1. Youngsave Ltd, now trading as Milltech, was first established in 1983 as the training division of a large regional motor-vehicle supplier. The parent company was sold in 1992. The new owners of the parent company made it known that they intended to sell off Milltech, the training division. In February 1993, there was a management buy-out of the training operation. Milltech is now an independent private training provider, with a staff of 18. Over the last year, there have been several staff changes, but staffing levels remain unchanged from those found at the time of the first inspection. Milltech operates from a central location in the city of Sunderland. A satellite centre based in a local school was used at the time of the first inspection to provide off-the-job training facilities for trainees on the motor-vehicle engineering programme. This is now closed and all off-the-job training takes place at Milltech's head-office premises in Sunderland.

2. All of Milltech's work is funded through the City of Sunderland Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). At the time of the first inspection, there were 166 trainees working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering, business administration and retailing and customer service at levels 2 and 3. One hundred and five were modern apprentices and 58 trainees were on other work-based learning programmes for young people. At the time of the first inspection, Milltech was also involved in providing off-the-job training for employed New Deal clients. There were three trainees following these programmes. At reinspection, there were 163 trainees. One hundred and forty-one are modern apprentices, 11 are on national traineeships and 11 are on other work-based learning programmes for young people. There are no clients on the New Deal.

3. The City of Sunderland is made up of the city itself and surrounding urban areas, including the town of Washington and the former coal-mining communities of Houghton-le-Spring, Hetton and Easington. Sunderland has a population of 294,000. Employment stood at 6 per cent in March 2000, although in some wards the figure is much higher. The national unemployment rate for March 2000 is 3.9 per cent.

4. Fourteen per cent of the young people who left school at the end of the academic year in June 1999 have found employment. This figure includes modern apprentices. Many of those who gain employment do so as machine operators or assemblers, with smaller numbers entering clerical professions. Eleven per cent entered work-based training while 56 per cent remain in full-time education. Twelve per cent are registered as unemployed. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 32.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, this had risen slightly to 33.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Minority ethnic group representation in the community is low, at around 1 per cent.



5. Over recent years, there has been a major change in employment patterns in Sunderland, shifting away from the declining shipbuilding and mining industries. Most employment is now to be found in the service and public sectors. This is particularly true of the call-centre industry, with several major employers establishing call-centre operations in the area. Other significant sectors are engineering, including motor-vehicle manufacturing, retailing and distribution.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. All members of staff contributed to the self-assessment process. The company secretary compiled the report, with support from senior training staff and the managing director. The draft self-assessment report was circulated to all staff for comment. Trainees and employers' feedback was also sought. Self-assessment was completed in January 1999. The report was consistently insufficiently self-critical in all of its sections. After the first inspection, Milltech produced an action plan describing how corrective action would be introduced to address the weaknesses identified in the inspection report. All staff were involved in the development and implementation of the action plan, and progress towards agreed goals has been regularly reviewed. All members of staff took part in the self-assessment process during late 1999, and the revised self-assessment report was completed in January 2000. This was more accurate and self-critical, and inspectors agreed with all the grades in the new report.

7. Five inspectors took part in the first inspection in March 1999. They spent 18 days carrying out the inspection. They visited 22 employers, interviewed 51 trainees and 20 workplace supervisors. Ten of Milltech's staff were also interviewed. A broad range of documents was examined, including 37 NVQ portfolios, assessment records, review documents, trainees' files and external verifiers' reports. Two sessions of learning and assessment were observed.

8. Reinspection took place at the end of March 2000. A team of three inspectors spent nine days at Milltech. They visited 18 employers, interviewed 32 trainees and 16 workplace supervisors. Seven of Milltech's staff were interviewed. Twenty-eight NVQ portfolios were examined, together with a wide range of documents, including policies and procedures, assessment records, review documents, trainees' files, external verifiers' reports, and feedback from trainees and employers. No assessments or reviews took place during the reinspection. Opportunities to observe formal training were few owing to the closure of the satellite centre and the nature of the off-the-job training now provided. However, two sessions, one for each occupational area being reinspected, were observed. These were both satisfactory.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering (motor vehicle)

Grade 3

9. There are 75 trainees on motor-vehicle programmes, of whom 55 are following NVQs in light and heavy motor-vehicle repair at levels 2 and 3 and 20 are following NVQs in body repair and refinishing at levels 2 and 3. Sixty trainees are modern apprentices and six are national trainees. The remaining nine are on other work-based learning programmes for young people. All trainees are employed or placed,

usually with small to medium-sized local franchised or independent garages. They attend off-the-job training sessions at Milltech's training centre, usually once every two weeks, for around 20 planned sessions each year. Off-the-job training consists of theory, key skills development and portfolio support sessions. There are no facilities at Milltech for practical off-the-job training. Practical training takes place entirely at work. Motor-vehicle training and assessment co-ordinators are responsible for off-the-job training, on-the-job assessments and trainees' reviews. Trainees are assessed frequently in the workplace by their trainer/assessor, usually every two or three weeks.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ some work-based assessments lack rigour
- ◆ trainees do not compile their own portfolios
- ◆ some trainees unaware of their progress
- ◆ poor attendance for off-the-job training sessions
- ◆ poor off-the-job provision
- ◆ key skills not integrated

10. The action plan submitted by the organisation included measures to remedy these weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, identified others as no more than normal practice and identified new ones. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent assessments in the workplace
- ◆ effective induction of workplace supervisor
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ well-qualified and occupationally experienced staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal on-the-job training plans for workplace supervisors
- ◆ poor achievement rate for modern apprentices

11. Since the last inspection, many of the systems and procedures for training and assessment have been revised and improved. In addition, the use of a satellite training facility has been discontinued, and all off-the-job training now takes place at Milltech's training centre. Workplace assessments are now conducted and recorded in a more formalised way and are rigorously monitored by the internal verifier. During off-the-job training, trainees work through a pre-planned programme of theory topics. They were observed working through materials which described the operation and types of suspension systems. Well-qualified and occupationally experienced trainers present training sessions. After each topic,

trainees complete assignment work which checks their knowledge and understanding. The assignment work often incorporates key skills development and leads to evidence of trainees' competence. Attendance at the training sessions is closely monitored and non-attendance is quickly followed up.

12. During off-the-job training staff also help trainees to identify relevant portfolio evidence from among that generated in the workplace. All trainees are responsible for compiling their own portfolio, which gives them a greater understanding of the qualification. A new computerised system has been introduced to help staff monitor each trainee's progress throughout the NVQ. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace to conduct assessments and then update the computerised system. A progress report is produced which is issued to trainees.

13. Visits by assessors occur at least once every four weeks, but often more frequently. Each assessment is recorded in a report detailing the activities of the trainee and the questions asked by the assessor during the assessment. When completed, assessor, trainee and supervisor sign the report. Each party receives a copy, which is then filed and/or used as evidence for the trainee's portfolio. The reports often suggest future action required of the trainee, but this is not done systematically and it can be difficult to measure trainees' progress on subsequent visits. Workplace supervisors are not issued with sufficiently detailed on-the-job training plans that would assist the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Verbal guidance is sometimes given to supervisors. Supervisors and assessors find it difficult to measure trainees' progress.

14. Milltech presently has contacts with some 90 local garages where trainees are either employed or on work placement. All of those visited were of a very high standard and trainees had access to good workshop and reception facilities and excellent opportunities for learning.

15. NVQ achievement data shows that, of those trainees who started on modern apprenticeships in 1996-97, 68 per cent achieved NVQs at level 2 or 3. In 1997-98, 60 per cent achieved level 2 or 3 and in 1998-99, 40 per cent achieved level 2 or 3. There are still some trainees continuing their programme from each of these start years. The achievement of the full modern apprenticeship framework, which includes key skills accreditation, is less than satisfactory. Only 12 per cent of trainees who started in 1996-97 and 15 per cent who started in 1997-98 achieved their modern apprenticeship as detailed in their individual training plans.

Business administration

Grade 3

16. There are 82 trainees following NVQs in business administration. Sixty-two trainees are modern apprentices and 20 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. All of the latter and 27 of the modern apprentices are following NVQ level 2 in business administration. The remaining modern apprentices are working towards NVQ level 3 administration. All the modern

apprentices are placed with local organisations, including public- and service-sector employers. Trainees attend off-the-job training fortnightly. In addition to working towards their administration NVQ, they have the opportunity to develop their information technology skills and work towards the computer literacy and information technology certificate at level 1. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well managed work placements
- ◆ supportive working relationships between trainees and all staff
- ◆ good level 3 portfolios

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee's placement was terminated by her work-placement provider at 5pm on Friday, on the basis that it could not afford to keep her. The trainee returned to Milltech on the Monday morning. An interview was arranged with another employer for the same afternoon. The trainee was successful and started a new placement the following day, having lost only one day's placement.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little integration of key skills
- ◆ work-based supervisors not adequately briefed on NVQ requirements
- ◆ individual training plans not used to give structure to learning
- ◆ trainees are unaware of their progress

17. There is a wide variety of good-quality placements available to business administration trainees. The network of employers is well managed. Trainees are placed in appropriate work environments which meet their career aims and give them the opportunity to develop skills. Milltech quickly resolves problems or concerns which may affect trainees' performance. Where this requires a change of placement, Milltech has a bank of placements available for transferring trainees. Milltech's training staff deliver off-the-job training sessions and also carry out visits to trainees at work. Trainees receive a high level of practical support throughout their programme. This support is further strengthened by the excellent working relationships which have been developed among assessors and work-based supervisors.

POOR PRACTICE

One trainee had carried out a particular activity and signed that it had been completed. The supervisor did not countersign the record of the activity to confirm that he/she had observed it being carried out, until eight months after the event.

18. Many modern apprentices produce excellent NVQ portfolios at level 3, which are well structured, clearly cross-referenced and contain good-quality evidence from a variety of sources. However, the quality of the level 2 portfolios is less impressive, but still satisfactory. All assessment takes place on the job, and emphasis is placed on reliable observation testimonies from work-based supervisors. However, although there is no lack of enthusiasm for this rôle, most employers do not understand the process or what is expected of them.

19. The teaching and assessment of key skills are not integrated with the vocational programme. Although this is being addressed, there are still trainees for whom key skills are taught as an add-on at the end of their level 3 programme. Where key skills are introduced earlier in the programme during off-the-job training, many trainees do not relate them to their work. Trainees do not have individual training plans based on initial assessment. Every trainee attends each off-the-job

training session, regardless of whether they already possess the skills and knowledge being taught. However, the overall standard of off-the-job training is satisfactory. Trainees are unaware of their progress and do not know their achievement target dates. Training and assessment is unplanned, and many trainees do not know which elements of their NVQ have been assessed and which remain to be completed.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

20. There are 15 trainees, all working at NVQ level 2 or 3. Thirteen are working towards NVQs in distribution and warehousing, and two in selling. Fourteen trainees are modern apprentices, and one trainee is on other work-based learning for young people. Recruitment takes place throughout the year. Most trainees are recruited by Milltech and then placed with employers, although some are already employed at the time of joining the programme. Some gain employment after achieving an NVQ while on placement. Most trainees are placed with employers in the motor trade. The assessor visits trainees and their supervisors regularly and frequently. Assessment, monitoring and review of progress take place during the visits. Most trainees attend off-the-job training at Milltech's premises. Arrangements for this differ, according to trainees and employers' needs. The off-the-job training sessions are designed to cover underpinning knowledge and key skills.

At the first inspection the main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ no links between the workplace and training off the job
- ◆ off-the-job training not valued by trainees or employers
- ◆ trainees and workplace supervisors not aware of progress towards NVQ
- ◆ some trainees and work-based supervisors lack programme knowledge

21. On reinspection, inspectors identified that three of the issues from the original weaknesses had been rectified. They agreed with the strengths and weakness identified in the most recent self-assessment report and found others. Inspectors awarded the same grade as given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent relationships between trainers, trainees and employers
- ◆ training valued by employers and trainees
- ◆ effective monitoring of trainees' progress by assessors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal links between the workplace and training off the job
- ◆ informal assessment planning

22. Since the original inspection, many changes and improvements have been made. Trainees and work-based supervisors are now aware of progress towards the NVQ and no longer lack programme knowledge. Workplace supervisors are now fully aware of the programme content. New documents for assessment have been developed and put into use. Trainees, assessors and workplace supervisors now have a clearer understanding of the training process.

23. Trainees and employers interviewed value off-the-job training. Previously this was not the case. Changes in responsibilities and training staff have brought this about. All, including staff, confirm the benefits. Trainees who have been on their programme for over two years without achieving a single unit have, in the past eight months, completed their programmes and been awarded their NVQ certificates. One trainee confirmed that she was overjoyed at achieving her NVQ.

24. Assessment procedures have been much improved. Assessors spend time with each trainee, explaining in detail how the NVQ performance criteria of each unit fits with their job role. An abridged version of this process is carried out with workplace supervisors. At each visit, assessors meet and discuss with both the trainee and the supervisor the trainee's progress to date and agree on the action required to be completed at work before the next visit. Consequently, trainees now clearly understand their NVQs and how to gather evidence generated at work. Trainees' portfolios contain a wealth of different types of evidence. Trainees and workplace supervisors value the benefits of the new training and assessment arrangements.

25. Trainees meet with their assessor frequently and regularly. Workplace assessors visit to monitor progress on a four-weekly cycle, but some trainees are visited weekly, dependent on their individual needs. In addition, trainees are also invited to attend off-the-job training sessions designed specifically to provide the theoretical knowledge requirements of the NVQ and the key skills awards. The training centre is well equipped. Equipment includes television, video playback, flipchart, overhead projector, up-to-date computer hardware and software of industry standard with scanning facilities and a colour printer. Handouts given to trainees at training sessions are of a good standard and are pitched at a level appropriate to trainees' abilities. One result of this frequent and effective contact is the excellent working relationships between all parties involved in the training programme.

26. Work placements are identified by Milltech's work-placement officer. There are good, long-standing working relationships between Milltech and local employers. The quality of the on-the-job experience provided by employers is good, although learning is not formally planned. The training information gathered for on-the-job activities does not contribute to individual training programmes, and information regarding on-the-job training is not recorded in the trainees' records. When the assessor is allocated a new trainee, it is not always possible to establish from recorded information what the workplace duties are. In these cases, the assessor cannot easily prepare a customised training programme. A further visit by the

assessor is necessary to establish what the workplace duties are. The details and information gathered at the second meeting are not routinely recorded.

27. There is no systematic long-term planning of assessments, but assessments are rigorous and frequent. They take place during the four-weekly visits. Assessment is carried out on the job, by observation, with some reliance on witness testimonies from workplace supervisors. There is no agreement between trainee, assessor and workplace supervisor on what is to be assessed or when and how assessment will be carried out. Assessment judgements and practice meet awarding body's requirements. Assessments are recorded but sometimes lack detail. Written feedback to trainees on assessment decisions is at times insufficiently detailed.

28. Numbers in this occupational area are low. Achievements over the past three years are poor. Forty per cent of all trainees who joined the programme left early. All trainees who left early did so before achieving or completing the aims and objectives of their individual training programme.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

29. Milltech has a clearly defined equal opportunities policy. During induction, staff and trainees receive instruction, guidance and copies of the equal opportunities policy, as well as grievance, harassment and disability awareness literature. Trainees' recruitment patterns are monitored for gender, ethnicity and disability. Traditional gender imbalance exists within occupational areas. The implementation of the policy is monitored and reviewed as part of the quality assurance system. Advertisements carry a statement confirming Milltech's commitment to equality of opportunity.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ policy not effectively promoted or managed
- ◆ equal opportunities not understood by employers or trainees
- ◆ equal opportunities data not analysed to inform managers
- ◆ equal opportunities policy not effectively reviewed
- ◆ selection procedures do not ensure equality of opportunity

30. Milltech's action plan included measures to remedy these weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses, while others represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified further strengths and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ well-written and comprehensive equal opportunities policy

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ data not used to target under-represented groups

31. Since the last inspection, the equal opportunities policy and procedures have been included in the organisation's quality assurance procedures. Equal opportunities issues are also a regular agenda item at the management and team meetings and there is clear evidence that actions agreed on at these discussions are carried out and reported on at subsequent meetings. The policy has recently been updated and enhanced with supplementary material covering harassment, bullying and disability awareness. Milltech's staff have attended in-house equal opportunities awareness-raising sessions.

32. Attempts are now being made to become more involved with outside organisations to increase minority groups' awareness of equal opportunities and gain access to under-represented groups. A database, revised since the first inspection, produces management data covering a wide range of recruitment information, including gender, ethnicity and disability. Recruitment and selection criteria do not now automatically screen out less able applicants and decisions are based on a variety of factors including attitude, enthusiasm, presentation, and communication. Aptitude is tested, but poor results do not now routinely exclude less able individuals.

33. The revised equal opportunities policy forms a significant part of the trainees' induction, and trainees freely recall, and can discuss, equality, harassment and disability awareness issues. These issues, along with NVQ awareness, are actively and effectively promoted to work-placements and employers. Milltech's staff conduct formal presentations to workplace supervisors who sign a record confirming their involvement and commitment to equality of opportunity. All supervisors are given a folder in which they keep the policies and other trainee-related documents. Part of Milltech's quality assurance procedure is to survey the opinions of workplace supervisors, and equal opportunities awareness is covered in this survey.

34. Although facilities now exist to retrieve recruitment data, there has been no attempt to target under-represented groups or break down traditional gender stereotyping. Existing promotional materials show men and women in their traditional occupational roles.

35. There is poor access to Milltech's premises for trainees with mobility difficulties, although Milltech does make this known to the careers service and alternative meeting places can be arranged.

Trainee support

Grade 3

36. Approximately 65 per cent of trainees are referred to Milltech from the careers service. A further 30 per cent come directly from promotions to schools, while the remaining five per cent are already in employment when they join the programmes as modern apprentices. Every trainee, whether employed or unemployed, is required to apply formally for a position. Based on the strength of their application, potential trainees are selected to attend initial entry and key skills tests and an interview. All successful trainees have a three-day induction at the training centre. Induction into the NVQ and training programme extends to the workplace. Training officers give one-to-one induction sessions to workplace supervisors. Assessors visit every four weeks. Formal review meetings with trainees are held every 12 weeks. Training staff provide additional occupational support and guidance where appropriate.

At the first inspection the main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ no systematic procedures for supporting less able trainees
- ◆ initial assessment screens out less able candidates
- ◆ results of initial assessment do not inform individual training plans
- ◆ no assessment of basic skills or accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ low retention

37. At reinspection inspectors identified that most of the original weaknesses have been rectified. One weakness is now a quality assurance issue. The revised self-assessment report identified several strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of them. One additional weakness was identified. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ good system to record and address problems affecting trainees
- ◆ good, frequent one-to-one support
- ◆ comprehensive, well-structured induction

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak review process
- ◆ trainees' workplace duties not used to influence training plans
- ◆ no access to specialist additional support

38. Milltech's assessors conduct placement visits more regularly than the contract requires. These visits take place monthly, and some trainees are visited weekly. Assessors' diaries are computerised. Pre-set appointments are made and managed

GOOD PRACTICE

Training staff use a formal system to record problems concerning trainees. Issues are logged and passed to the work-placement officer for action. When the problem has been resolved, or agreement reached, both the placement officer and the trainee concerned sign the form. Forms are then archived.

centrally by an administrator. There is enough flexibility in the assessors' timetable to allow cancelled visits to be re-scheduled at a time suitable to both the assessor and the trainee. If a trainee is identified as needing additional time then this can also be accommodated, as can staff-sickness cover. Each meeting is well recorded. Any concerns raised by training staff, trainees or employers are recorded and dealt with promptly. Staff concerns about individual trainees are also recorded and action taken. The work-placement officer is responsible for recording and acting on all such concerns.

39. The initial assessment of basic, occupational and key skills highlights weak areas in some trainees' abilities. Assessors discuss the results of initial assessment with the trainee and the workplace supervisor. A schedule of relevant off-the-job training sessions, designed to assist the trainee, is agreed. The trainees are supported by their occupational assessor. Extra time is arranged for one-to-one sessions. These sessions are sometimes as often as weekly, and can take place either at the training centre or the workplace.

40. Trainees' induction takes place over three days. It is well structured and comprehensive. It includes trainees getting to know one another and the history of Milltech. Trainers explain equal opportunities and health and safety arrangements including personal hygiene, fire and first aid. They introduce NVQ procedure. Trainees remember what they learn and have a good understanding of their training programmes. Assessors visit supervisors to explain their roles and responsibilities with respect to trainees.

41. Progress reviews take place regularly every 12 weeks, but there are no set documents to record the comments of the trainees and workplace supervisors. There is a review plan, but it only shows target dates for the next 12-week period for the NVQ. No measure is taken at these meetings of trainees' progress towards the aims and objectives stipulated in their individual training plans. There is no means of monitoring trainees' progress on the existing paperwork. Other forms are often substituted and used as a review document. This document has the facility for the reviewer, trainee and supervisor to sign but does not have sections for the trainee's and/or workplace supervisor's comments to be recorded.

42. A series of discussions around each trainee's workplace duties takes place between Milltech and the employer. These discussions form the basis of the decisions made regarding which training programme, NVQ and level each trainee undertakes. None of these decisions is recorded, neither is the information gathered used to influence the individual training plans. Where employers offer their own in-house training, the knowledge trainees gain and evidence generated are not used for the purposes of the NVQ programme.

43. Access to experts in additional learning support is not available to trainees. Milltech is negotiating with an organisation which supplies specialist assistance to provide this service. The plan is to purchase a set amount of time per week to provide the learning support needed. No contracts have yet been signed. As an

interim measure, trainees requiring additional support are directed to the local college of further education.

Management of training

Grade 3

44. The management structure of Milltech is simple and effective. The company is owned and managed by two directors: the managing director and company secretary. They are supported by a senior training officer, who co-ordinates daily training and assessment activities and also acts as lead internal verifier. Milltech became an Investor in People in August 1998. The company has undergone some major changes of staff over recent years. Management has already identified several problems, and some remedial action has been taken to address these issues, to improve the quality of the provision, although the process is by no means complete. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than Milltech in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good staff development, appraisal and performance review
- ◆ good target-setting for individual staff
- ◆ open and effective internal communications
- ◆ clearly documented policies and procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unplanned training
- ◆ some policies and procedures not understood by employers
- ◆ no links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ underdeveloped management-information systems

GOOD PRACTICE

Milltech frequently holds residential staff conferences and development weekends, enabling a range of strategic management issues to be discussed openly away from the distractions of the normal working environment.

45. Working relationships among Milltech, employers, referral agencies and local schools are strong and well developed. Policies and procedures are well documented and understood by staff but, employers do not understand some policies, procedures and the values of the organisation. Communications in Milltech are simple and effective, with an open-door management system encouraging contributions and debate from all members of staff.

46. Staff are encouraged to develop their skills. The staff development programme is good and includes a formal programme of training for all staff each Friday afternoon. Appraisal is comprehensive and linked to the review of performance against mutually agreed targets. Potential for advancement in the organisation is also discussed and recorded. Targets are set, given to all staff and monitored closely. These are not solely concerned with meeting the TEC contract, but also include development work and other operational matters, such as refining training programmes, introducing management-information systems and reviewing and

revising internal verification practices. Part of the appraisal system requires staff to submit a report covering their progress against their quarterly objectives.

47. On- and off-the-job training is not co-ordinated and there are no links between work-based and day-release activities. Training, both on and off the job, is not planned, and learning is coincidental through work. Trainees and employers are not aware of the content of off-the-job training programmes. Employers have little formal involvement in the NVQ process. Many also have little understanding of NVQs, and opportunities are missed to increase their knowledge, understanding and involvement in the process.

48. Management-information systems are underdeveloped, and data are not systematically collected or used to inform wider management issues. Milltech is introducing a new computerised system, but this is not yet operational, and there are no manual systems to track or record trainees' progress. Before inspection, Milltech was asked to generate historical management information, covering performance and trainees' retention. The data provided were incomplete, and their value and accuracy could not be tested.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

49. Milltech has maintained a comprehensive quality assurance system which has been built up and improved over an eight-year period. It is reviewed annually and covers a wide range of quality assurance issues, including staff and trainee matters, health and safety and training and assessment. Changes to procedures are disseminated to staff through formal management and staff meetings and by memoranda. The quality assurance system has been expanded to include areas omitted at the time of the first inspection, including procedures for equality of opportunity, supporting less able trainees and internal verification. There is also now a formal planned programme of continuous improvement. Milltech satisfies the quality requirements of the TEC and the awarding bodies.

At the first inspection the main weakness identified were:

- ◆ key control procedures missing from quality assurance manual
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of training quality
- ◆ internal verification procedures not rigorous
- ◆ quality assurance not understood by employers or work-placement providers
- ◆ unresolved problem of early leavers
- ◆ Insufficiently critical self-assessment

50. The self-assessment report cited several strengths and weaknesses. Some of the former represented no more than would be considered as normal practice, but inspectors agreed with the others. Inspectors agreed with only one of the weaknesses, and attention had been given to address the others over the previous two months. A marked improvement in quality assurance is evident and inspectors

did not identify any additional significant strengths or weaknesses. They awarded is the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly written and comprehensive quality assurance procedures
- ◆ positive, effective action to promote continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unresolved problem of early leavers

51. Since the first inspection, Milltech has taken major steps to rectify the weaknesses identified by inspectors, not only in quality assurance but across the organisation as a whole. The quality assurance manual has been updated and contains a well-produced, comprehensive and logical set of procedures. These procedures are reviewed and new ones added where appropriate. All staff have embraced the need to take action to ensure the quality of the training and that quality assurance procedures work well. Staff work hard to ensure that existing well-established quality procedures, as well as those newly introduced, work as well as possible. All staff understand the importance of quality assurance. Employers and work-placement providers understand the importance of quality assuring the training process, how it applies to their trainees and their place within the system.

52. Formal management and staff meetings are frequently held and well recorded. Quality improvement underlies all discussions. All staff are informed in writing of all decisions taken and the actions agreed on. The action plan drawn up following the first inspection is discussed and updated regularly as progress is made to build on strengths and rectify weaknesses.

53. At the time of the first inspection, Milltech's quality assurance procedures were not managed and only partly effective. Some key areas, such as ensuring equality of opportunity, trainee support procedures, programme review and subcontractors' compliance were not included in the manual. These omissions have now been put right and new procedures have been introduced and implemented. Not all new procedures, however, are sufficiently established to enable their impact to be evaluated.

54. The procedures for monitoring and recording the quality of training have been revised and are now rigorous, ensuring continuous improvement across all occupational areas. Internal verification is no longer reactive. A computerised system is used to plan and record internal verification activity. Random sampling also takes place across all portfolios and training sessions are regularly observed and evaluated. This information is shared with each individual trainer. Trainees' progress is clearly recorded, and trainees understand their progress and how they will achieve all the units in their NVQ.

55. Trainees and employers' views are sought and their feedback is used to improve training. The off-the-job training timetable was previously inflexible, and trainees were required to attend regardless of whether or not they had already covered the subject at work. As a result of trainees' feedback, this system is under review, and in future, only those with an identified training need will be required to attend. For example, where their routine at work would not enable them to demonstrate competence in a particular activity and so complete their NVQ.

56. Milltech has a history of trainees leaving the programme early, without achieving their full qualification aims. Only 16 per cent of all trainees starting a modern apprenticeship since 1996 have completed the full framework. Over the same period, 44 per cent of all modern apprentices failed to complete their training programme and left early. Similarly, since 1996 there have been 409 starts on the work-based learning programme for young people. While 37 per cent subsequently converted to modern apprenticeship programmes, and 19 per cent left the programme having found work, only 12 per cent have completed their individual training programmes. Twenty-eight per cent left without achieving any qualifications. Milltech is aware of the problem of early leavers and is taking steps to address it. There has been a small reduction in the number of early leavers in one occupational area. Data are collected on the reasons why trainees leave the programme early. This information is discussed and analysed on a monthly basis with the relevant training officer. The reasons for leaving are well recorded and targets have been set to reduce the number of early leavers. However, measures have not resulted in any significant improvements, and the situation remains serious and unresolved.

57. Self-assessment was rigorous, comprehensive and involved all staff. The company secretary produced the self-assessment report, with support from the managing director and training staff. The self-assessment process was highly self-critical and staff and managers generally assessed the quality of their work accurately. In all areas the grades given reflected the balance of strengths and weaknesses identified through self-assessment, and matched the grades subsequently awarded by the inspectors. A number of strengths cited in the self-assessment report were confirmed, although some represent no more than standard practice. All could be supported by evidence. Several of the weaknesses claimed in the self-assessment report had already been rectified by the time of the reinspection.