



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

WEBS Training Limited

SUMMARY

WEBS Training Ltd offers publicly funded training for young people in furniture manufacturing and business administration. It provides good training in furniture manufacturing and satisfactory training in business administration. Staff are dedicated to ensuring that trainees gain good occupational skills in a supportive atmosphere. The company promotes equality of opportunity. It has an open management style. Morale is high amongst trainees and staff. Trainees' achievement rates are high. On- and off-the-job training are not well co-ordinated. Insufficient action is taken on the results of trainees' initial assessment. Some aspects of national vocational qualification (NVQ) procedures are weak.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Manufacturing	2
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular and rigorous work-based assessment
- ◆ trainees' high respect for their trainers
- ◆ above-average achievement rates
- ◆ the importance placed upon equal opportunities during trainees' induction
- ◆ personal development opportunities for trainees
- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ trainees' enthusiasm for, and high satisfaction with, their training
- ◆ open management style with good communications
- ◆ culture of continuous improvement

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ NVQ evidence gaps not systematically identified
- ◆ overcrowded workshop space in training centre
- ◆ failure to take appropriate action on results of initial assessment
- ◆ poor links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. WEBS Training Ltd has been involved in training for the furniture industry since 1968. It was originally set up as a training association by a group of employers from the East Midlands for the benefit of the furniture industry locally. The managing directors of four of Long Eaton's major manufacturing companies founded the training association. The name, 'WEBS' is made up of the first letter of each of these companies' names: **W**ade Upholstery Company, **E**verest Furniture, **B**eauvaley Furnishings and **G**rimson and **S**later.
2. As the membership grew to 10 companies, WEBS became instrumental in developing and facilitating training strategies and programmes. It then promoted the training of young people to a wider network of employers. From 1982, following the demise of the Furniture and Timber Industry Training Board, the association extended its services to include non-member companies. It also extended its training programmes to include business administration and information technology.
3. In 1988, the association became a limited company. The board of directors was established from the companies directly involved with WEBS and the promotion of training for the industry. The directors take no personal financial reward from the company and no dividends are paid to shareholders. Throughout the history of WEBS, it has operated as a non-profit-driven organisation. Any limited surpluses are used to sustain and improve training provision.
4. About 4,500 people are employed in the furniture industry within the travel-to-work areas of Derby and Nottingham. WEBS Training has been involved in the training of almost 2,000 of these people.
5. WEBS currently has six full-time employees and a total of 113 trainees. The trainees are on national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in furniture production trades, business administration and information technology. WEBS has contracts with Greater Nottingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and Southern Derbyshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). The Nottingham TEC contract has 20 trainees on modern apprenticeships and 26 on work-based training for young people. The Southern Derbyshire CCTE contract has 17 trainees on modern apprenticeship programmes and 47 on work-based training for young people.
6. WEBS subcontracts its wood machining and polishing off-the-job training to a local college of further education. All other courses are taught and assessed by WEBS.
7. The East Midlands area has a diverse economy with several pockets of large manufacturing enterprises in which the main employment is in aerospace, textiles and clothing, engineering, tobacco and electronics. There is also a growth in the service sectors, especially banking, insurance and call-centres. During the past five to six years, the majority of coal mines in the area have closed and those which have

reopened have a greatly reduced workforce.

8. Unemployment in the Southern Derbyshire area is 4.7 per cent, which is below the national average of 5.2 per cent. In the Greater Nottingham area, the unemployment rate is 5.6 per cent. Minority ethnic groups account for 10 per cent of the population of the city of Derby, and 5.6 per cent of the Greater Nottingham TEC area.

9. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in the Nottingham area was 26.1 per cent and in South Derbyshire schools, 38.2 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

10. WEBS Training completed its first self-assessment report in January 1999. The WEBS managing director and a member of the training staff completed the report.

11. The inspection team consisted of four inspectors who spent a total of 14 days at WEBS Training at the beginning of March 1999. They interviewed 15 staff and 48 trainees, observed four training sessions and one assessment, and visited nine employers and the subcontracted college. Inspectors also examined assessment records, trainees' portfolios and training documentation.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		1				1
Manufacturing	1	2				3
Total	1	3	0	0	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

12. WEBS has offered training in this occupational area for the past eight years. There are currently 16 trainees: five modern apprentices and 11 on youth programmes. Of these 16, two are men and the rest women. All trainees have employed status and work in a range of small businesses in the local area. The trainees start by working towards a level 2 NVQ in business administration and then have the option of progressing to a modern apprenticeship. No modern apprenticeships have been completed to date, as this option is a relatively new development. Trainees can also gain a computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT) qualification, a level 2 NVQ in information technology or a text-processing qualification, depending on the nature of their jobs and their preferences. Trainees attend the WEBS training centre once a fortnight, where they can use computers, receive help with portfolio-building and take part in training sessions. These sessions cover a range of skills, including numeracy and communication. A well-qualified and experienced trainer/assessor runs the programmes. Inspectors agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of trainees' portfolio work
- ◆ stimulating and well-delivered off-the-job training
- ◆ enthusiastic and responsive trainees

- ◆ trainees' good understanding of the NVQ process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to fully cover NVQ requirements
- ◆ NVQ evidence gaps not systematically identified
- ◆ insufficiently demanding achievement targets

13. Evidence of trainees' competency, for the purposes of NVQ assessment, is mainly gathered in the workplace. The standard of work in trainees' portfolios is high. Trainees attend training sessions regularly. These are well planned and imaginative and trainees participate in training activities with enthusiasm. Key skills are an integral part of training for modern apprentices. For example, trainees were tackling a task which involved rewriting a newspaper article in order to change its readability rating. A session on CV writing included a lively discussion of equal opportunities issues, which was well handled by the trainer. Trainees respond well to the opportunities offered. Trainees at a fairly early stage of their programme have an exceptionally good grasp of the content of the NVQ standards. This understanding is developed through the use of logbooks, where trainees record their work under the relevant unit and element. Some trainees felt too much time is spent filling in logbooks, but there are clear benefits from this activity, especially in the early stages of training.

14. Evidence of trainees' competencies is mainly derived from trainees' performance in naturally occurring activities in the workplace. In some instances, however, trainees do not have the opportunity in their jobs to demonstrate the full range of competencies covered by the NVQ standards and there are significant gaps in their portfolios. These gaps are not systematically identified at an early stage. The problem is compounded because trainees do not have detailed individual training plans to identify potential gaps in their coverage of the requisite NVQ competencies at work. Internal verification is not continuous. It takes place only at the end of the training programme and becomes delayed.

15. The achievement rates of trainees who complete training are excellent. Over the period 1995-98, 28 trainees began business administration programmes. Of these, eight left before completing a qualification. Of the remainder, nine have completed a level 2 NVQ and 11 are working towards a level 2 NVQ or are on a modern apprenticeship. However, some trainees expressed frustration at their rate of progress. As a rule, level 2 is gained after two years. Not all trainees felt they were on track to complete on target. Some expressed a desire to attend the training centre more often in order to complete their programmes more quickly. The targets for these well-motivated trainees were insufficiently demanding. The company has recognised this and recently it enabled two trainees to achieve their level 2 NVQ in a shorter time.

Manufacturing (furniture production, wood trades, upholstery, cutting & sewing)**Grade 2**

16. WEBS Training currently offers training leading to NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in furniture production, wood trades, upholstery and cutting and sewing. The trainees follow either work-based training for young people or modern apprenticeship programmes. Currently, there are 33 upholsterers, five sewing machinists, three cutters, 11 chair/frame makers, 17 cabinet-makers, 23 wood machinists and four polishers on the training programmes. Of these, 10 upholsterers, 13 wood machinists, six cabinet-makers and two polishers are on modern apprenticeship programmes. The off-the-job training and assessment element, which is carried out on a day-release basis for all except the wood machinists and polishers, takes place either in the company's training centre or in the workplace. The wood machinists and polishers attend the subcontracted further education college on day-release. The workshops at the college and the centre are well equipped and provide sound training facilities. Training staff at the centre are well qualified and have appropriate vocational and assessor qualifications. About half the applicants are referred to WEBS by the careers service; the remainder are either from families already in the trade or from the families of former WEBS trainees. Suitable work placements with a range of local companies are arranged by WEBS training staff to give trainees on-the-job training and work experience. Inspectors agreed with the overall grade for both areas of manufacturing which was given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular and rigorous work-based assessment
- ◆ well-established links with local employers
- ◆ trainees' high respect for their trainers
- ◆ trainees' good understanding of assessment procedures
- ◆ above average achievement rates
- ◆ ability of trainees to work without direct supervision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ overcrowded workshop space in training centre
- ◆ narrowly restricted range of workplace experience for some trainees

17. Relationships between trainees and trainers are good, and trainees' progress towards their NVQ is well planned and recorded. Trainees' understand and are fully involved in the assessment process. Individual trainees' achievements are well documented. Trainees record their progress in the workplace in logbooks. In addition to continuous off-the-job assessment, upholsterers and furniture production trainees are assessed in the workplace. Assessments are well planned and recorded and the results are kept in trainees' files. Trainees are well motivated and recognise the

relevance of off-the-job training to their experience in the workplace. Training staff are well qualified and have appropriate occupational competency, experience and assessor qualifications. Trainees acknowledge the skills and competency of their trainers, and carry out their workshop projects with skill and confidence. They are able to work without direct supervision where appropriate. The range of work placement and employment opportunities available to trainees is good. There are some well-established links with a number of local employers, many of whom are WEBS member companies. Employers are satisfied with the performance of their trainees and their positive attitude toward work. Trainees' NVQ results have shown a steady improvement. For the three years from 1996 to 1999, the proportions of trainees achieving NVQs have been 63 per cent, 67 per cent and 79 per cent, respectively. In the same period, the proportions of trainees who leave the programme early have declined and have been 30 per cent, 28 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively.

18. Facilities at the training centre are good, although the space available for training is reduced because it is used for storage purposes. The company intends to resolve this problem by building a mezzanine floor.

19. Some trainees' experience in the workplace is narrowly restricted to retrieving work from the back of moulding machines. This work is dull and repetitive and it requires little from the trainees in terms of skills and knowledge.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

20. WEBS has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and policy statement which were last updated in May 1998. During initial induction, trainees receive training about their rights and responsibilities in respect of equality of opportunity. The company provides clear handouts for trainees about its harassment policy and grievance and discipline procedures. The subcontracted college also reinforces trainees' understanding of equal opportunities issues when trainees commence training on its site. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report for equal opportunities.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ prominence given to equality of opportunity during trainees' induction
- ◆ training for staff on equal opportunities
- ◆ effective communication of harassment policy to trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ informal monitoring of equal opportunities

- ◆ failure to communicate the equal opportunities policy effectively to employers and the subcontractor

21. Trainees' induction at WEBS is thorough and includes a session about equal opportunities. Trainees are given clear information about equal opportunities and they are able to recall this and talk about the need to have respect for others regardless of their race, religion, sexual orientation and disability. The training also includes information about harassment, and trainees receive detailed information about what constitutes harassment and how to deal with it.

22. A member of the WEBS staff has responsibility for equal opportunities and has received training in this area. This training has been cascaded down to others in the organisation to update their knowledge and understanding. Following the training, the company's policies have been reviewed to bring them up to date with current legislative requirements.

23. The company is analysing information about applicants to training programmes to try and find out why some do not attend for interview, and whether factors such as the area in which they live influence their decision not to do so. So far, the company has not come up with any conclusive findings upon which it can take action to widen participation in its training programmes.

24. Data about trainees' ethnicity, sex and disabilities are recorded. The data are not analysed, however, in order to ascertain whether the numbers of trainees from particular groups are proportionate to those in the local community.

25. The company states its commitment to the promotion of equal opportunities in its job advertisements and marketing materials, and on trainee application forms. It does not, however, communicate its equal opportunities policies effectively to employers and the subcontractor.

Trainee support

Grade 2

26. WEBS Training demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting trainees from diverse educational backgrounds. The self-assessment report describes the majority of these as low achievers who are not up to modern apprenticeship standard, and inspectors agreed with this finding. Prior to the commencement of the programme, applicants and their parents are invited to a briefing session at which the programme and employment arrangements are explained. They are introduced to all the WEBS training staff who describe their job functions. All trainees are given a test in basic numeracy and literacy and an interview; prospective employers subsequently interview trainees. Prior to placement, trainees undertake an induction programme covering all aspects of their training. In addition to this, trainees also receive a workplace induction checklist which, when completed, is returned to WEBS to confirm that induction has taken place. Training officers monitor progress in the workplace and at the training centre, and trainees have access to personal

counselling and advice. The company supports trainees with special training needs and tries wherever possible to find placements for them. Reviews of trainees' progress take place regularly. At these, trainees are set targets which are adjusted in line with their progress. Inspectors found some weaknesses in trainee support which the company had not identified and they awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ personal development opportunities for trainees
- ◆ good links with local schools
- ◆ thorough introduction and induction to the company
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ high levels of trainee satisfaction
- ◆ good key skills provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to use results of initial assessment effectively
- ◆ some trainees' lack of awareness of progression routes

GOOD PRACTICE

WEBS have for many years provided trainees with additional personal development training in the form of sending trainees on Outward Bound © courses. These courses involve outdoor physical activities away from home to develop the trainees personal, team and leadership skills. The benefits derived from this training are considered by WEBS to be important in developing young people, even though it is a large additional expense

27. The use of Outward Bound © training as part of the training programmes gives individual trainees good opportunities for personal development. Initially, many trainees are apprehensive about the Outward Bound training; however, post-course evidence shows that the majority view it as a positive and rewarding experience. WEBS training staff have developed effective links with local schools, and attend careers evenings where potential trainees are given information about the range of programmes available. In addition, WEBS offers regular opportunities for potential trainees and their parents to visit the company's centre to view the facilities and receive additional programme information. These sessions are held on Wednesday evenings and/or Saturday mornings to give parents maximum opportunity to attend. Induction is thorough, with strong emphasis on health and safety. All trainees are given information about equal opportunities and receive a copy of the company's equal opportunities policy. Trainees' progress reviews take place regularly, and work-based supervisors are involved in the process. The level of pastoral support is good, and personal counselling and advice are offered to trainees by training staff, often in conjunction with work-based supervisors. Trainers carry out regular work-based assessment. Trainees' achievement rates are good. Trainees are successful in finding employment. They have said that they are highly satisfied with the quality of their training. Company staff have successfully identified ways in which modern apprentices can provide evidence of their attainment in key skills, for the purposes of NVQ assessment.

28. Trainees are given an initial assessment at the interview stage of the programme. The results of this assessment, however, are not taken into account when drawing up training plans. Provision of learning support is not arranged

systematically and it is not necessarily offered to trainees who performed poorly in their initial assessment. Although the training programme and details of the NVQ are explained to trainees during induction, they are not aware of NVQ progression routes.

Management of training

Grade 2

29. WEBS has clear written documentation of its management systems to provide staff with guidance on how the training is managed. This guidance is contained in a manual which is updated regularly. The manual contains a simple form showing which documents within it have been changed, and when. There is also a date of issue on each document. Communication within the organisation takes place through informal contacts between staff, and formal meetings. Inspectors gave management of training a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive subcontractor service-level agreement
- ◆ good relationships between employers, subcontractor and WEBS
- ◆ effective internal communications
- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ managers' encouragement of open debate between staff
- ◆ setting of staff objectives reflecting company targets
- ◆ business planning is strategically focused

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ failure to share trainees' initial assessment results with subcontractor

30. The contract for the provision of off-the-job training clearly specifies the level of service being purchased. This contract is renegotiated and signed by both parties on an annual basis.

31. In discussions, the employers and the subcontractor expressed their high regard for training provided by WEBS.

32. A full staff meeting takes place every fortnight at WEBS; formal agendas and minutes are available to each member of staff. Staff feel these meetings are effective in providing a forum for both the giving and receiving of information which they require in order to do their jobs effectively. The meetings are chaired by the managing director and are seen as being a positive two-way process where staff are encouraged to contribute freely. The management gives continuous encouragement to staff to engage in open debate, generate stimulating ideas and resolve their own

problems.

33. Details of staff development are carefully recorded. Staff and managers evaluate training courses provided. Appraisals are conducted on an annual basis and include target-setting in line with the business plan, and discussion about any training which staff need in order to do their jobs well.

34. The business plan focuses on both the short- and long-term needs of the company and takes account of factors which may affect the organisation's future strategies. Matters such as location, threats, opportunities, and environmental and industry requirements are given careful consideration. For example, when selecting its current premises, the company considered future expansion opportunities, the location of relevant employers and the catchment area for trainees.

35. There is usually little relationship between training in the workplace and training which is carried out by the subcontracted college or at the WEBS training centre. Workplace supervisors are not aware of the content of off-the-job training. They said, however, that they were confident that they could help trainees with specific aspects of their off-the-job training if they knew when these were being covered. Although employers support work-based training, they are not involved in the planning of training, and they are not familiar with the requirements and structure of the NVQ system. In the past, the company has provided seminars for placement providers about NVQs. Copies of the results of work-based assessment, which are kept in trainees' files, are not given to trainees to cross-reference in their achievement record. Trainees who achieve NVQ level 2 may have the option to convert to modern apprenticeships. Some trainees, however, are not fully aware of this option, or of the details and requirements of NVQ level 3. Results of initial assessment of trainees, which is carried out at WEBS, are not shared with the subcontracted college.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

36. The company's quality assurance arrangements meet the standards of the TEC. There is an operational procedure manual for quality assurance, to which staff have access. The manual describes policy and procedures relating to quality assurance and is a comprehensive document. The managing director is responsible for quality assurance throughout the organisation. Inspectors agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report, although they found different strengths and weaknesses from those given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly documented quality assurance arrangements understood and implemented by staff
- ◆ culture of continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification

37. WEBS staff have a good understanding of the importance of quality assurance arrangements, and implement them well. The manual is reviewed and updated as necessary. The company has a culture of continuous improvement. This is, however, not carried out systematically but is dependent upon the initiative of individual staff.

38. Monitoring of training is carried out informally by individual staff. There are no systematic procedures for evaluating the quality of training. The internal verification process is underdeveloped and it is not carried out with consistent thoroughness.

39. Trainees' views on the quality of training have recently been sought. No analysis has been made of them to inform planning of improvements to provision. The managing director produced the self-assessment report with some contributions from staff. Employers' views were not collected as part of the self-assessment process. Judgements in the report are not supported by enough evidence. The self-assessment process was insufficiently rigorous to enable staff and managers to assess the quality of their work accurately. Inspectors considered that most of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than contractual requirements. They found both strengths and weaknesses which the company had not identified. The self-assessment process did not produce an effective evaluation of the quality of provision, nor did it help staff to improve their own monitoring of training. Until recently, the company has met its contracts with the TECs in full and has received performance bonuses and preferred supplier status.