



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 1999

Summerhouse Education and Equitation Centre

SUMMARY

Summerhouse Education and Equitation Centre offers training in equine studies. It delivers good training, supported by good resources and well-qualified and experienced staff. There are good formal training plans, which are effectively and consistently used. The initial assessment process lacks inclusion of basic and key skills. As a result, there is late identification of learning difficulties. Programmes are adjusted to enable trainees with family commitments to participate. There is well-planned induction. All training is managed effectively, including that of subcontractors. There are high employment and achievement rates. There are good systems to ensure quality of training, but they are not yet fully established across the organisation.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned training
- ◆ well-documented and reviewed assessment procedures
- ◆ comprehensive trainee induction effectively delivered and reviewed
- ◆ well-documented and effective management process

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of integration of effectively developed key skills in the vocational programme
- ◆ no initial assessment of basic or key skills
- ◆ new procedures and processes not yet fully established

INTRODUCTION

1. Summerhouse Education and Equitation Centre (Summerhouse), formed in 1979, is situated three miles from the city centre of Gloucester. Until 1997, it was a riding school, teaching mainly recreational riding, with a couple of students a year training for British Horse Society examinations. Staff levels have grown from eight, with no assessors or internal verifiers, to an organisation which now has 17 members of staff, including nine qualified assessors and two internal verifiers. Facilities have grown to include extensions of both the indoor and outdoor school. The company has become a training supplier for a land-based college in a neighbouring county, and students attend Summerhouse full time. In 1997, the company applied for a direct employer contract for a total of five trainees with what was then known as Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The organisation converted to a training supplier in July 1998. The contract with the Link Group is the sole contract for government-funded training. Trainees are based at either Summerhouse or a subcontractor. All training takes place at these two centres.

2. There are 25 trainees: 13 at Summerhouse (11 youth trainees and two modern apprentices) and 12 trainees at the subcontractor. All trainees at the subcontractor are modern apprentices. Trainees are following national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3. The company caters for young people with a wide range of learning difficulties/disabilities. Young people staying on in education number 72.3 per cent. The number of unemployed young people aged 16 to 24 has declined significantly from 26 to 22 per cent. Unemployment remains at 2 per cent below the national average of 5.2 per cent. Progress towards the National Training and Education Targets (NTET) is faster locally than regionally or nationally: 47 per cent of adults are qualified to craft level and 29 per cent to degree level. There is a small minority ethnic group population in the county, of 1.8 per cent, with 6 per cent of these people living in the city of Gloucester itself. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 51.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent, for 1998.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. All staff contributed to the process of self-assessment. Training took place through the TEC; the company has included self-assessment as part of the weekly staff meetings. The self-assessment report was largely accurate, and inspectors agreed with the grading in all areas except equine studies and management of training, where further strengths were identified, and a higher grade was awarded.

4. A team of two inspectors spent a total of five days at Summerhouse during January 1999. They met 19 trainees, and company and subcontractors' staff. They reviewed company and awarding body documents along with trainees' portfolios. They observed one assessment and seven sessions of training.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture	1	6				7
Total	1	6	0	0	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture (equine studies)

Grade 2

5. Summerhouse has 25 trainees, of whom 14 are employed and undertaking a modern apprenticeship in horse care and management at NVQ level 3. Eleven trainees are unemployed and taking other training leading to NVQ level 2 and 3, in horse care and management. All trainees are work-based and training is delivered at either Summerhouse or the subcontractor's premises. Equipment and facilities are good and very appropriate for programmes up to and beyond NVQ level 3. Both training centres are approved by the awarding body and are British Horse School (BHS) examination centres. Staff are vocationally qualified, including two based at the subcontractor's, who are assessor trained and qualified. The self-assessment report identified several areas which were no more than normal practice, but the company was correct in the strengths it identified. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good resources and facilities
- ◆ well-planned training with good teaching
- ◆ well-documented and regularly reviewed assessment procedures

- ◆ high employment and achievement rates
- ◆ good range of added-value qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not yet effectively developed or integrated in the vocational programme
- ◆ unrealistic timescales for achievement of NVQ level 3
- ◆ missed opportunities for diverse range of evidence collection

6. Summerhouse and its subcontractor are good equine establishments, each having good resources and facilities which provide trainees with everything needed for effective training. Library books, CD-ROMs and learning resources are available. Each centre has good horses, stables and ancillary equipment, used by trainees to develop their competence in a sound commercial environment. A few trainees leave before completing the whole programme, but most trainees are readily employed, on leaving the programme, and take qualifications which can be used effectively in the equine industry. Achievement rates are good at approximately 85 per cent. Staff are all vocationally qualified and take continuous and regular staff training. All assessors hold appropriate assessor qualifications. Internal verification procedures are well documented, and regular sampling is undertaken and recorded. External verifiers' reports do not identify any action plans. The delivery of both BHS stage examinations and BHS NVQ qualifications adds additional value to the training provision and is well received by trainees and the equine industry. Key skills for trainees on the modern apprenticeship programme are not yet effectively developed or integrated into the programme. Summerhouse and the subcontractor are aware of the key skills requirements, and make good progress towards their implementation. Some trainees take a long time to achieve NVQ level 3: training is geared towards achievement of the BHS examinations, with accreditation of prior learning being applied, where mapping exists, before trainees continue training and follow the NVQ programme. Because the NVQ is introduced after the BHS programme trainees do not gather evidence for assessment at an early stage in their NVQ programme. A wider use of diverse sources of evidence is not encouraged, and this leads to missed opportunities for collection of evidence.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

7. Summerhouse has a well-worded policy which meets the needs of those in the organisation as well as the TEC contract and awarding bodies. The company caters for a wide range of individuals with disabilities, although only three are funded by the TEC. All trainees are timetabled to assist with the Riding for Disabled riding session which takes place every Thursday morning. Staff and trainees are aware of the company's equal opportunities policy and grievance procedures. Selection procedures ensure equality of opportunity. A member of staff has had an extension to the usual rôle to include equal opportunities promotion. The self-assessment

report did not pinpoint all the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors, but the grade awarded is the same as that in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training programmes adjusted to suit personal circumstances
- ◆ collaborative project to promote industry to minority ethnic community

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no use of collected data to improve participation by under-represented groups
- ◆ marketing literature does not promote all aspects of equal opportunities

8. The company takes trainees' personal circumstances into account when considering attendance at training sessions. Two single mothers attend when the children are cared for, with attendance adjusted to suit their circumstances. Other trainees have younger siblings to care for. Therefore, training is structured to fit in with school patterns. Staff are also included in this pattern of attendance. A city farm in Gloucester, situated in an area with a large population from minority ethnic groups, opened six months ago, and works with the equal opportunities officer to promote equine careers. The company has taken horses and ponies into the farm. During the next school half term, the process is being repeated, and 11 schools in the area have been invited to attend. The project is in its early stages and it is, as yet, too early to assess the outcome of the project. The company's mission statement clearly states that it offers training to all, with equality of opportunity. The subcontractor is visited every two weeks for monitoring purposes in all aspects of training, as well as equal opportunities. Recruitment data from the subcontractor are collated and monitored.

9. Clear recording and monitoring of all aspects of equal opportunities are kept, from gender, ethnicity and other needs, but the company has not yet used this information to increase participation by under-represented groups. New promotional literature is being produced, but, in the section covering amenities for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, it mentions only riding for those with disabilities. No statement is made that the company welcomes and accepts clients and trainees with a wide range of diverse needs and backgrounds or that it will structure a training programme to accommodate those needs.

Trainee support

Grade 3

10. The company has a clearly documented recruitment policy and procedures. Links have been established with the careers service, schools and job centres. Many trainees are recruited through direct referral by the careers service or by word of mouth. There is a comprehensive induction programme. All trainees are interviewed

and provided with a two-day or one-week taster, before making a final decision on their chosen training and qualification route. Personal mentors are allocated to each trainee. Trainees with social and learning difficulties are dealt with effectively. Careers guidance information is available. The self-assessment report identified induction as a strength, but repeated other strengths already identified. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified by the company. Further strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors resulted in the same grade being awarded as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive trainee induction
- ◆ highly effective personal mentor scheme
- ◆ effective and structured reviews
- ◆ some additional support exceeding programme requirements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ initial assessment does not include basic or key skills
- ◆ some lack of objective advice concerning training programmes
- ◆ lack of formal accreditation of prior learning procedures
- ◆ learning difficulties not always immediately identified or requirements met

11. Trainees undertake a two-day or one-week taster programme, when they are individually interviewed and assessed for previous vocational experience. This allows potential trainees to gain experience of working in the industry. This process significantly reduces the number of trainees who leave programmes very early. Individual training plans are drawn up and updated regularly. Initial assessment does not include basic skills or key skills assessment. This is mainly due to a lack of awareness from Summerhouse of TEC requirements, rather than a deliberate omission. The company provides each trainee with a comprehensive induction to the programme, to the workplace, the NVQ programme and to health and safety. The induction process is further enhanced by a review some two weeks into the training programme. Any instances of misunderstanding are dealt with. Trainees are allowed to choose their own personal mentor, who provides both learning and pastoral support. Accreditation of prior learning is not effectively implemented at initial assessment, leading to missed opportunities for individual trainees to take their qualifications more quickly.

12. Because initial assessment does not include basic skills assessment, some trainees with learning difficulties are not identified until some time into their programme. Once identified, they are offered additional resources and specialist help. Trainee surveys are carried out monthly and are subsequently reviewed. The results of these surveys are very positive. Some trainees with additional support needs are well catered for. Additional support needs, dealt with effectively by the

company, include ex-offenders, blind trainees, single parents and slow learners. Trainee support is appropriately recorded. There are well-documented and clearly understood counselling, guidance and appeals procedures. Results of assessment are properly fed back to trainees and suitably recorded with sufficient detail to be of use in the future. There is some good advice on careers and progression opportunities. Trainees are part of the company, and communication to staff and trainees is very good. The company spends considerable amounts of effort in ensuring that trainees are well supported.

Management of training

Grade 2

13. Summerhouse has a clearly documented staffing structure. Staff have job descriptions and managers undertake individual staff appraisals annually. Staff development is an integral part of employment in the company. There are documented staffing rôles with clear responsibilities. Internal communication is good. All training and assessment are work-based. The company uses information technology to maintain information on the company, trainees and management. There are training and assessment plans, policies and processes. Inspectors identified further strengths to those identified by the company and awarded a higher grade than proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and open communication across all aspects of the programme
- ◆ accurate management information readily available and used to inform decision-making
- ◆ well-documented and applied staff induction, appraisal and development
- ◆ well-written management processes, effectively applied to planning and organisation of the whole business

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ subcontractor does not always immediately implement policies and procedures
- ◆ many new procedures and processes not yet fully established

14. Summerhouse generally manages its subcontracted provision effectively. There are well-written and comprehensive processes and procedures, including the subcontractor's handbook. Regular staff input to subcontracted training is evident and recorded. Team meetings, training and assessment development and residential away-days for staff have led to good communications across all aspects of provision. The company has invested in good information technology and is able to generate effective and accurate management information. A staff handbook is used to effectively support new staff through a comprehensive induction process. Staff retention, teamwork and motivation is high, and many staff have worked at

Summerhouse since leaving school. There are well-written staff reviews and regular staff development. Staffing levels and administrative support are good and all staff are effectively deployed. An innovative staff bonus scheme is used monthly; all staff are able to vote for the person showing commitment to their job over and above normal expectations. A similar scheme is in operation for trainee of the month. The training and overall operation of the whole business are good. Trainees are well catered for and effectively trained. The subcontractor values the information provided by Summerhouse, but has been slow to implement some of the procedures and documents. An action plan has been drawn up to deal with these issues, but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

15. The company has been active in implementing formal procedures to inform and ensure the quality of training. The process of self-assessment has encouraged the company to focus on identifying requirements for training. The action plan clearly identifies how to eradicate weaknesses, consolidate strengths and improve on normal practice. The portfolio of evidence produced for inspection is now being developed into the quality assurance manual for the company as a whole. The company is new to the formal procedures of quality assurance and did not identify any strengths in the quality assurance aspect of the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses, and did identify strengths, resulting in the same grade being awarded as that proposed by the company in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ monthly standard-setting days to aid accurate assessment
- ◆ rapid development of quality assurance systems
- ◆ good guidelines for assessment procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ effectiveness of newly established quality assurance systems not yet proved
- ◆ lack of understanding of the total requirements of government-funded training

16. Summerhouse has a long history of providing a high standard of training in the field of equine studies. The inclusion of NVQs and work-based training, and the requirements necessary to support the process, have been clearly identified by Summerhouse. The company introduced a standard-setting day in the autumn, organised by internal verifiers, to enable staff who are qualified assessors, or working towards qualifications, to be able to gain experience at assessing and to clearly identify the standard required for each unit or element of the NVQ. The exercise has now been included as a monthly aspect to improve the quality of training and assessment. Good guidelines to the assessment procedure, from initial



contact to portfolio completion have developed as a result. This format for producing guidelines to the company's activities is being further developed across all aspects of training. The company has built very rapidly on the process of self-assessment to inform staff and the subcontractor of quality assurance procedures and policies. The production of good internal verification systems has enabled an effective process to be established across all assessment procedures. Owing to the recent implementation of these systems, the company has not yet conducted any internal audits or been able to quantify the success of the process. The company recognises it is at an early stage of developing appropriate quality assurance procedures to ensure good quality training and continuous improvement.