



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

# Howarth Hancorn

## SUMMARY

Howarth Hancorn offers good training in retailing and leisure, sport and travel. A key feature of the company is the high degree of individual attention and support offered by managers and staff to trainees and employers. Some 98 per cent of all Howarth Hancorn's trainees are employed within the leisure and sport industry around Herefordshire. The company's approach to equal opportunities is satisfactory but needs further development. The management of Howarth Hancorn are actively involved in the operation and co-ordination of on-and off-the-job training. Quality assurance procedures meet contractual and awarding-body requirements; however, systems to promote continuous improvement have yet to be embedded.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	2
Leisure, sport & travel	2

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-qualified and occupationally experienced staff
- ◆ excellent assessment documents
- ◆ good portfolios with an excellent variety of evidence
- ◆ frequency of reviews over and above contractual requirements
- ◆ excellent working relationships between employers and management
- ◆ strong commitment to training throughout the company

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient involvement of employers in trainees' reviews
- ◆ lack of formal key skills training
- ◆ no promotion or evaluation of equal opportunities
- ◆ some quality assurance procedures incomplete and not implemented

## INTRODUCTION

1. Howarth Hancorn is owned and managed by its founders. The company was formed in April 1996. The partners were the only employees until October 1997, when a training manager in sports and recreation was taken on. The company now employs five full-time staff and one part-time person. At the time of inspection, one full-time training manager was on maternity leave.

2. Initially the company provided sport and recreation assessment for a local college. This was followed by a formal subcontracted agreement with a technology college. In April 1998, the company was awarded its first contract with Herefordshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). Under this contract, the company delivers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other youth training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in business administration, retail and customer service, management and sport and recreation. The company also delivers assessor training to employers. Employers provide on-the-job training, and most trainees are employed. Staff from Howarth Hancorn visit trainees at work for off-the-job training sessions.

3. Howarth Hancorn operates nationally, carrying out a range of commercial projects; however, under the CCTE contract, trainees are located around Herefordshire. There are currently 54 trainees, of whom 51 are modern apprentices, two are national trainees and one is on another youth training programme.

4. Herefordshire is a rural county covering 218,174 hectares and has a population of 167,229. Herefordshire has an ageing population, which is heightened by the number of people moving to the county on retirement; 32 per cent of households are 'pensioner households'. Some 69 per cent of households are owner occupied, and 0.5 per cent of the population is of minority ethnic origin.

5. Unemployment in the county currently stands at 2.9 per cent, which is approximately 1.7 per cent below the average for the West Midlands. Manufacturing (25 per cent) and retail (20 per cent) are the two largest employment areas, with agriculture now only accounting for 9 per cent of employment in the county. One of the other reported growth sectors within the county is leisure and tourism.

6. General certificate of secondary education (GCSE) results in Herefordshire are among the highest in the country. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 47.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. For general certificate of education (GCE) A-level results, 83 per cent of pupils entered gain a grade A to E. However, there is no university in the county, so many young people take up courses outside the area and return only to visit. The county's colleges are increasingly offering degree-level courses, but there is not the variety to satisfy many school/college leavers at 18+.



The minority ethnic population in Herefordshire is 0.5 per cent. There are 15 trainees registered as having a disability in Herefordshire.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. The company produced its self-assessment report following attendance at a series of CCTE-funded workshops. Feedback and contributions were sought from staff, employers, trainees and external bodies, augmented by analysis of performance data. The report was fair and in parts an accurate reflection of the company's strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of the findings in the report, and with the grades awarded by the company. However, some of the strengths and weaknesses were merely contractual compliance.

8. Three inspectors spent a total of nine days at Howarth Hancorn during March 1999. They observed reviews and assessments, looked at trainees' portfolios, observed a workshop session, and interviewed staff at employers' sites as well as within the training provider. In all, 31 trainees were interviewed in the workplace, six employers' premises were visited, and 10 work-based supervisors were interviewed. All staff at Howarth Hancorn were seen, and a range of supplementary evidence was reviewed. Owing to the company being in the first year of its contract, achievement figures were not available at the time of inspection.

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Retailing & customer service

### Grade 2

9. There are 12 trainees in this occupational area. All are working towards the customer service NVQ. One trainee is employed in a local leisure centre, and the remaining 11 work in a large hotel which is part of a national chain. There are 10 modern apprentices and two national trainees, all at various stages of their programmes. All the assessment is carried out in the workplace by Howarth Hancorn's own staff, who have developed very close working relationships with the employers. The company has trained some work-based assessors, but because of the pressures of the hotel's own schedule and fairly high staff turnover, this has not proved to be a very efficient method of assessment. Any training requirements are discussed with the employer and arranged on the job, or through the hotel's own training packages. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-qualified and occupationally experienced staff
- ◆ extremely supportive employers
- ◆ trainees' high level of understanding of the NVQ process
- ◆ excellent assessment documents
- ◆ good portfolios with an excellent variety of evidence

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient use of additional learning materials

10. Howarth Hancorn has built up very strong links with the hotel which is the main employer for its customer service trainees. All the trainees are employed, and are told about the NVQ at their interview and induction. New trainees are not signed up until they have been employed for at least four weeks, to ensure that they are suitable for the job and the NVQ programme. Suitable trainees then have a one-to-one induction and initial assessment in the workplace.

11. The main assessors are the organisation's two partners. They are both well qualified, with commercial backgrounds in customer service. They are highly enthusiastic and have close working relationships with the trainees. Trainees show a great deal of commitment towards their NVQ. Assessors visit the trainees' workplace on a weekly basis, and all trainees are seen at least once a fortnight. Howarth Hancorn gives each trainee a clear action plan, and links it closely to the evidence to be gathered before the next assessment. Assessment documents are clear and accurate, and trainees understand which units they are working towards and what they have achieved. The portfolios, although following a company format, are personalised by each trainee.

12. Assessors encourage trainees to gather a good variety of evidence, and all trainees show a pride in their work. The assessors make good use of observation in the workplace and often visit trainees in the evening or at weekends, as many of the trainees work shifts. The observation records are well documented and clearly cross-referenced to the standards for the NVQ. Trainees are given feedback on a regular basis at the end of each assessment, when future targets are set.

13. Key skills are being integrated into the customer service NVQ, and most of the trainees in the hotel are able to provide the majority of their evidence for portfolios through their normal work activities. However, the company does not run any additional training sessions to fill any gaps in the trainees' knowledge. Open-learning materials are being developed to provide more structured off-the-job training for trainees who are placed with other employers, or those who have additional learning needs.

**Leisure, sport & travel****Grade 2**

14. There are 26 trainees on sport and recreation programmes: 16 men and 10 women. All are modern apprentices. Some are working towards NVQs at level 2, others started the programme at level 3. Trainees are already employed when they begin their programmes. The company's contracts are with organisations in the private and public sectors, including leisure centres and a hotel. All trainees are assessed at least fortnightly in the workplace. The company has started a programme of four training workshops a year, linked to trainees' job roles and the NVQ. In sport and recreation, achievement rates are above sector averages. Three trainees aged over 25 continued to be supported and achieved NVQs in 1998-99. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses reported in the self-assessment report, but two strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by Howarth Hancorn.

*STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good awareness by employers of NVQ process
- ◆ good range of assessment methods
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ good achievement rates

*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inappropriate classroom conditions for some off-the-job sessions

15. Employers have promoted three trainees to higher positions in the last year as a result of their success in achieving NVQs in sport and recreation. Several trainees are progressing to higher level NVQs, including assessor and management qualifications. Trainees are given sufficient time to compile portfolios in the workplace. Employers and the provider are currently encouraging trainees to attend a series of training workshops.

16. Trainees' portfolios contain a wide range of evidence of their competence, including photographs, observations, witness testimonies and work products. Varied assessment methods are used, including observation, verbal questioning and professional discussions. Some assessment areas and classroom conditions are poor.

17. Trainees are well motivated and enjoy their programmes. Challenging targets are set, and trainees generally meet them. Few trainees leave the programme without completing their NVQs. In the last year, of three trainees who did not achieve NVQs, two went into other jobs. The number of trainees achieving NVQs in sport and recreation is higher than the national figures. In 1998, of 13 taking NVQs at level 2, 12 achieved, the remaining trainee having moved to another employer.

18. The option for trainees to take coaching units (for instance, aerobics coaching) at NVQ level 2 is not offered, because the work placements used by Howarth

Hancorn do not have the necessary facilities, even though a member of staff is qualified to teach the coaching units.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

19. Howarth Hancorn has an equal opportunities policy which meets legislative and awarding body requirements, and which is explained to trainees at their induction. There are no minority ethnic trainees at Howarth Hancorn, and none registered as having a disability. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by Howarth Hancorn in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ flexible working patterns for staff
- ◆ sports and recreation employers encouraged to take on under-represented groups

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no promotion of equal opportunities in marketing material
- ◆ no strategy to promote or evaluate equal opportunities

20. Trainees are recruited directly by employers, and although this means that Howarth Hancorn has limited influence, it does monitor equal opportunities in the workplace on an informal basis. Howarth Hancorn is involved in a project which aims to give trainees with additional learning needs, who are in their last year at school, experience in the world of work. One trainee placed through the project has progressed to the work position of lifeguard and won an award for progress and achievement. Howarth Hancorn is also actively encouraging leisure centres to offer placements to 16 to 18 year olds, although the usual policy in this area is to recruit trainees aged 18 and over. The company has two named managers responsible for promoting equal opportunities. Staff are supported well and are able to benefit from flexible working patterns, including extended maternity leave and part-time work. Access for those with disabilities is good at leisure and tourism placements, however, there is no easy access at the training centre itself.

21. Howarth Hancorn does little in its marketing material to promote its programmes to under-represented groups. Promotional and marketing material make no reference to equal opportunities. The company does not have a policy to address harassment issues. Some trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is poor. Howarth Hancorn does not have an action plan for implementing, monitoring, reviewing or updating its equal opportunities procedures. Data received by the company from the CCTE are unclear and do not help it to form strategies. Start, retention and achievement data in terms of equal opportunities are not available.



Staff have had no recent equal opportunities training.

## Trainee support

## Grade 2

22. The management and staff at Howarth Hancorn have developed very close links with employers; there are good working relationships between trainees and employers, and trainees are very highly motivated to achieve their NVQs. Most trainees are employed and are assessed in the workplace by the company's staff. Induction takes place on a one-to-one basis, during which time the initial assessment is carried out. The assessors then visit their trainees regularly, and most trainees are assessed at least once a fortnight. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by Howarth Hancorn in its self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent pastoral support for all trainees
- ◆ excellent relationships between trainees and staff
- ◆ NVQ achievement is linked to trainees' career progression
- ◆ frequency of reviews over and above contractual requirements

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient involvement of employers in trainees' reviews
- ◆ lack of formal key skills training
- ◆ no standard initial assessment procedures until recently

23. Assessors have an informal approach, which encourages trainees to discuss any personal or work-related issues. Trainees are highly motivated and keen to progress, resulting in good achievement rates. Many trainees have achieved two or three NVQs. Some trainees have also gained promotions and additional responsibility as a result of NVQ achievement.

24. Employers see the NVQs as a valuable asset to their business and use the training as a means of motivating their staff to work towards achievement targets. Employers have a good understanding of the assessment process, and are willing to allow assessors to carry out assessments at unsociable times to fit in with the needs of their trainees. Feedback from employers on trainees' progress is given verbally. Employers are not involved in quarterly reviews, and rely on Howarth Hancorn highlighting problems when attending meetings between employers, Howarth Hancorn staff and trainees. The company discusses any serious problems with employers and trainees as and when they occur, and acts as a valuable link between trainees and employers.

25. In customer service, Howarth Hancorn is dependent on the training materials used and courses run by the employers. It has difficulty in arranging key skills training sessions, due to trainees working to different timetables. However, it is currently developing open-learning materials and key skills projects for trainees who cannot provide evidence for their portfolios through their normal job. In sport and recreation, a series of workshops are being set up to teach theoretical knowledge.

26. Initial assessment has recently been introduced, and is now used with all new trainees. It is too early to evaluate its effectiveness.

### Management of training

### Grade 3

27. Howarth Hancorn is a young company, established in April 1996. The two partners take responsibility for both the strategic development of the company and the day-to-day operation. In their previous employment, the partners gained experience in management and training, and are qualified assessors and internal verifiers in the occupational areas covered by the company. The company has taken substantial steps to develop a niche in the county to deliver training and qualifications to the sport and leisure industry. To this end, two experienced and qualified training managers have been recruited in the last eighteen months to support this area of the business. A recently recruited administration assistant completes the complement of full-time staff within the company; there are also two part-time members of staff, and a number of freelance work-based assessors who are used when required. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ managers have established excellent working relationships with employers
- ◆ NVQ targets are set and understood by staff
- ◆ active involvement of managers in both on- and off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ staff recruitment to date does not reflect equality of opportunity
- ◆ inadequate staff development

28. The partners have established a set of values based on the requirements of the employers they serve; these are communicated to all employees and are well understood. All staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and the partners take particular responsibility for ensuring that this remains the case, with all staff reporting directly to them. Howarth Hancorn operates from a single office, which makes for regular informal communication; nevertheless, there is a regular monthly

meeting which all staff attend. The company has agreements with subcontractors, which specify the level of service to be delivered by Howarth Hancorn, and also what is expected of the employer in relation to NVQ support for trainees.

29. One of the partners visits the CCTE monthly for performance review meetings. These discussions are centred on contracted provision and are mainly based around NVQ achievement. The main issues and concerns arising from these meetings are then discussed with all staff at the company's monthly staff meetings. These are regular meetings, with performance, health and safety, internal verification and equal opportunities as standard agenda items. Plans produced following these meetings detail who needs to do what to achieve monthly and annual targets; details are then distributed to all staff and progress towards achieving them is monitored by the partners.

30. Training and assessment are arranged and sometimes delivered by the partners. They take responsibility for all aspects of both on- and off-the-job training, and, in many cases, actually deliver it too. The partners plan the off-the-job training in consultation with employers by running workshop sessions on employers' premises; however, these sessions are not structured with no clear objectives or outcomes specified for each event.

31. The company has grown substantially over a short time, in financial terms, as well as in the number of staff. As requirements for more staff have arisen, Howarth Hancorn has recruited people who share the organisation's aims and values; those who are enthusiastic about delivering good-quality training, using their experience and qualifications. However, some staff have been recruited as a result of personal contacts with the partners, and specific individuals have been head-hunted.

32. The partners are working with an advisor from the CCTE, who is helping them to appraise the company; one of the outcomes has been a business plan. This is a three-year plan which identifies a set of strategic objectives towards which the company is working. Staff development takes place and is formally recorded on individual development plans for all staff, except the partners, who share one plan, and part-time staff who, as yet, do not have one at all. However, these development plans are not based on a systematic appraisal of individual needs, and the link with the company's strategic objectives is not evident. As part of the company's plan to achieve the Investors in People Standard, an appraisal system is being introduced, to be in place and operational by June 1999.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

33. Howarth Hancorn has developed an ongoing self-assessment process, using *Raising the Standard* as a tool to enable it to plan, measure and evaluate performance. The self-assessment report highlighted some strengths and weaknesses which were agreed on by inspectors, and who found additional strengths and weaknesses. There has been significant progress made against the action plan, and the grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong commitment to training throughout the company
- ◆ data collected and used to measure performance
- ◆ effective use of target-setting

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some procedures incomplete and not implemented
- ◆ procedures not audited and lack rigour
- ◆ unsystematic evaluation of training

34. When the partners set up the company in 1996, it was with a view to offering good-quality training to the sport and recreation industry, supported by individual guidance and support for trainees. This is still central to all aspects of the work carried out by the company. The partners spend a great deal of time communicating this message to staff, employers, trainees and external agencies.

35. The partners effectively monitor the company's performance against a range of key performance indicators. These indicators are discussed with the CCTE on a monthly basis, and staff take appropriate action to ensure that trainees are progressing towards their qualification goals, and that the company is on track to achieve its contractual targets. All relevant staff (trainers and assessors) have contributed to the proposal and planning of the next financial year's targets; a detailed spreadsheet has been developed to incorporate details by each occupational area and trainee. Internal verification procedures are discussed at annual business-planning and target-setting meetings; internal verification includes observation of assessment in the workplace, unit completion and portfolio completion. The internal verification strategy has not been developed to allow for increased sampling of new assessors, trainees with special training needs, or trainees experiencing problems with certain NVQ units.

36. The company is still in the process of recording some of its procedures in a written format. This has only become necessary because of the growth of the company in the last year. Staff have regular informal discussions on a daily basis, but formal staff meetings take place monthly and result in action points and, where necessary, action plans. These are also key meetings, involving all staff, on the development and establishment of policies, processes and procedures. Some of these procedures have not been fully tried and tested; therefore, their effectiveness in contributing to good-quality training has not been measured.

37. The company has recently introduced an induction checklist which trainees complete in partnership with assessors at the end of the induction period, to check their level of understanding of the information they have been given. The company has also introduced interim and exit questionnaires; however, these have not yet been fully analysed or used to evaluate the training programme as a whole. These systems



have yet to be established and developed as part of the continuous improvement process.