



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1999

# Orient Gold

## SUMMARY

Orient Gold offers outstanding training in the area of retailing and customer services. All trainees are visited in their workplace every two weeks. Training is well planned and delivered by Orient Gold's staff on a one-to-one basis in the trainees' workplace. This is supported by excellent distance-learning material which had been produced by the company and which is being constantly developed. The company's arrangements for equal opportunities and quality assurance are comprehensive and well communicated to staff, trainees and employers. The company systematically consults with employers and trainees on ways to improve its service. Trainees are very well supported by their employers and by Orient Gold's staff. There is an open style of management with data being regularly collected, evaluated and shared with all staff.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	1

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent training and assessment visits
- ◆ high standard of portfolio presentation
- ◆ excellent learning resource materials
- ◆ trainees regularly informed of their progress and ways to improve
- ◆ effective communication of equal opportunities arrangements to existing trainees and employers
- ◆ good on-the-job support for trainees
- ◆ effective deployment of staff
- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities to potential trainees
- ◆ trainees' basic and key skills not systematically assessed on entry
- ◆ no overall business plan
- ◆ self-assessment failed to identify a number of key strengths and weaknesses

## INTRODUCTION

1. Orient Gold is a privately owned limited company that was registered in December 1996. It commenced trading in the first quarter of the 1997-98 financial year. Orient Gold is a small company based in Ilkeston, Derbyshire. It offers training in retail and customer services over a wide geographical area. Some trainees are based as far apart as Devon and Cornwall and North Wales. Many of those trainees outside the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire areas are funded through private subcontract arrangements and are therefore not within the scope of this inspection. Much of the company's work is funded through contracts with Greater Nottingham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There are currently 56 young people in training. All trainees are working towards national vocational qualification (NVQs) in retail and customer services. There are 11 staff employed by Orient Gold who are directly engaged in the delivery of government-funded training.

2. Orient Gold operates from one site in Ilkeston, Derbyshire, which is on the border between Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. Most of the trainees are working in and around the City of Nottingham. Unemployment in the East Midlands region has fallen during the past year and, at 3.8 per cent, is lower than the national average of 4.3 per cent for June 1999. Economic activity is lower within the Greater Nottingham area. There are pockets of very high unemployment in the inner city areas, peripheral estates and former mining villages. The proportion of those from minority ethnic groups in the local population currently stands at 13 per cent.

3. There has been a shift away from unskilled and manual vacancies towards the professional and higher-level occupational areas. Over the past 12 months, there has been a 7 per cent increase in the number of employment vacancies advertised. Sixty-five per cent of young people leaving school within the region progress to further education, compared with the national figure of 70 per cent. Eleven per cent of school leavers enter work-based training for young people, and a further 8 per cent take up employment with linked training opportunities. Seven per cent of young people who leave school do not enter education, training or employment. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 37.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Orient Gold produced its first self-assessment report three months before inspection. All staff had the opportunity to comment on the first draft of the report which was compiled, in the main, by the company's contract development director.

5. A team of two inspectors spent six days at Orient Gold during May 1999. Inspectors examined company and awarding body documents. They interviewed seven members of staff, 11 trainees and four employers' representatives. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and the portfolios being compiled for NVQs. They observed nine assessments in the workplace.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Retailing & customer service

#### Grade 1

6. Orient Gold currently provides retailing and customer service training for a total of 56 trainees. Of these trainees, 32 are working towards retail NVQs and 24 are working towards NVQs in customer services. All trainees are following work-based training for young people programmes, including modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. All trainees are employed in local retail outlets, generally in and around the City of Nottingham. They are all assessed and trained in the workplace by Orient Gold's staff. In the 12-month period from April 1997 to 1998, 60 per cent of all trainees who left the programme fully completed all elements of their individual training plans.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-motivated and informed trainees
- ◆ frequent training and assessment visits
- ◆ close monitoring and rigorous recording of trainees' progress
- ◆ trainees demonstrate a high level of occupational competence
- ◆ high standard of portfolio presentation
- ◆ excellent work-books used to develop technical knowledge

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

7. Trainees are well motivated. At the start of their programme they are given clear information about the NVQ and how it is achieved. They are also informed that upon successful completion of the qualification they will receive a financial incentive of £50. Trainees receive an individual induction to their programme, which covers such topics as health and safety and equal opportunities. In support of the induction, they receive a detailed handbook. Training, assessment and progress review visits

take place every two weeks in the trainees' place of work, which exceeds the contractual requirements of the TEC. Additional visits can also be planned around the trainees' development needs, and the commercial priorities of the employers. Trainees' progress is closely monitored and rigorously recorded. Feedback is given to trainees to ensure that they are aware of how they are progressing and what they may need to do in order to improve. This is supported by the fact that all review and NVQ tracking documents are filed in the trainees' portfolios and personal files at the training centre. Trainees are encouraged to make use of evidence already collected for one unit across into other relevant units. This approach, which is facilitated by the training staff, helps to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. Any prior achievements that the trainees bring to the programme are appropriately recognised and accredited against the NVQ wherever possible.

8. Trainees demonstrate a high level of occupational competence. They are all working with employers who provide good on-the-job training opportunities and allow trainees to work unsupervised, where appropriate. Trainees take every opportunity to collect current, valid supporting evidence of this level of competence. Employers make time and resources available to trainees and Orient Gold's staff. The high standard of portfolio presentation shows creative use of photography, contain good-quality copies of resource materials and provides further evidence of the excellent motivation of the trainees. They take pride in their ownership of the portfolio and in the authenticity and currency of the evidence contained within it. Orient Gold's staff have developed excellent learning resources. They have been designed to develop technical knowledge and to support the one-to-one training sessions delivered by the company's trainers and assessors. Internal verification is effective and well planned to ensure that the internal verifier observes assessment being carried out in the workplace. Meetings between the internal verifier and assessors are regular, fully documented and provide an excellent opportunity to share best practice and provide constructive feedback to assessors.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

9. Orient Gold has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy and procedures, which comply with the TEC's contractual requirements and with current legislation. The policies and procedures cover staff and trainees. The company has an equal opportunities action plan which aims to further develop existing arrangements. One of Orient Gold's staff members is part of the TEC's equal opportunities working party.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective communication of equal opportunities policy to employers and trainees
- ◆ range of statistics collected and analysed to inform future action
- ◆ effective complaints procedure
- ◆ equal opportunities is standard agenda item at weekly team meetings

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities to potential trainees
- ◆ awareness by trainees and employers of equal opportunity issues not systematically evaluated

10. Equal opportunities issues are taken seriously at Orient Gold. Training staff take care to ensure that trainees and employers fully understand such issues during the trainees' induction and during the initial meeting with the employer before a trainee is taken onto the programme. It is during this time that employers and trainees are issued with their respective handbooks. Both contain a copy of the equal opportunities policy which clearly details how Orient Gold protects staff and trainees against discrimination. Employers are asked to sign an agreement which clearly states that they will work to the equal opportunities policy of Orient Gold. This agreement, however, is not regularly monitored in the same way that health and safety is. None of the questionnaires sent out to trainees or employers refer to equal opportunities. The company's approach to dealing with complaints is clearly documented. There are three complaints procedures; one is for general complaints, one is for complaints relating to discrimination or harassment and one relates to appeals against NVQ assessment and verification decisions. Trainees are all aware of the different procedures and, where they have been implemented, issues have always been taken seriously and dealt with swiftly by a senior manager.

11. The company collects statistics relating to trainees' minority ethnic background, gender and disability. These data are collected on a monthly basis, analysed and evaluated and presented to the weekly staff meeting. They are discussed under the standard agenda item of equal opportunities. Where managers and staff have identified particular under-represented groups, individual staff have been assigned to actively recruit trainees from these groups. One example of this is the recent targeting of the Asian small business community of Hyson Green in Nottingham, in order to recruit Asian trainees. Staff have visited the area and held discussions with several retail outlets. As a result of this direct marketing campaign, two Asian trainees have joined the programme. Marketing literature aimed at recruiting potential trainees and employers fails to mention that Orient Gold is an equal opportunities employer or training provider.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

12. Orient Gold's trainees are well motivated and regularly informed of their progress by the assessors, who visit more frequently than required by current TEC guidelines. All staff, trainees and employers work well together, resulting in a continuous supportive learning experience. Employers provide time for the training in the workplace, and have a good understanding of the NVQ process and the benefits of work-based training. Trainees are aware of their NVQ programmes and the careful planning, with their assessor, informs them of what work they need to complete for the relevant units. Trainees are generally aware of what progress has been achieved and which units remain outstanding to achieve their individual target date for completion of their NVQ. All aspects of trainee support are well

documented within the company's quality assurance system.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective use of accreditation of trainees' prior learning
- ◆ regular and frequent opportunities for trainees to discuss their progress
- ◆ effective review process
- ◆ good-quality on-the-job support for trainees
- ◆ all aspects of support for trainees fully documented and regularly reviewed

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ trainees' basic and key skills not systematically assessed on entry

13. There is a systematic approach to the accreditation of trainees' prior learning. This involves the use of a reference document containing the units, elements, performance criteria and range, of the prior achievement, for a comparison of the current NVQ. Trainees have regular and frequent opportunities to discuss their progress. This takes place at every visit, after the training, assessment or observation is completed. This effective and regular review process actively encourages feedback from trainees on their own progress. Employers are also encouraged to contribute to the review. Review records are contained in portfolios and also in trainees' personal files held at the training centre, along with a copy of the individual training plan.

14. Employers provide excellent support for trainees in the workplace. They all provide suitable access for observation and a quiet area for discussion and assessment of diverse and supplementary evidence, on a regular basis to coincide with the assessor visits. This can often be difficult to do in a retail environment, but the careful planning and advance communication by training staff helps to overcome any problems. All aspects of support for trainees are fully documented and regularly reviewed. They form part of the company's quality assurance system, and aspects relating to trainee support are extracted and given to trainees. They are kept in the front of trainees' portfolios for future reference. Employers are issued with a handbook which also details the company's support arrangements. Within the handbook is a training charter which makes clear to employers the level of commitment and support they must provide in order to work effectively with Orient Gold.

15. Trainees' basic and key skills are not systematically assessed on entry. The current initial assessment comprises a standard document that is completed by any one of the Orient Gold trainers, following an informal discussion with the trainee. This does not allow for a sufficiently objective assessment of an individual's basic or key skills ability. It therefore cannot be effectively used to inform the individual training plan of any additional learning or support needs the trainee may have. There are a number of trainees who are receiving additional support from Orient Gold. Where this is the case, it has only come to the attention of staff when the trainee has volunteered the information.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

16. Orient Gold is a small company managed by three directors. Much of the income generated by the company is through direct contracts with Greater Nottingham TEC, however, the company does work as a subcontracted provider of training for a number of organisations throughout the country. All of this work, together with the TEC contract, is managed from one site in Ilkeston. Staff induction is well planned and documented and it is during this process that staff are issued with the company's mission statement, core values and policy documents. Staff have access to a comprehensive set of procedures detailing the company's approach and standard for all training-related activities. Management information is regularly collected and communicated to all staff. It is company policy that all staff are office-based on each Friday. This is to ensure that all staff regularly attend meetings and training events.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective promotion of values and policies to all staff, employers and trainees
- ◆ staff understand their roles and are effectively deployed
- ◆ excellent internal and external communications
- ◆ accurate and current data used to inform management decisions
- ◆ innovative approach to staff development

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no overall business plan

17. All staff, and many employers, are fully aware of the company's mission statement to be the most successful and respected trainers and assessors in the United Kingdom. This statement is found within employers and trainees' handbooks, displayed in all rooms in the company's office and within the staff handbook. Information given to staff as part of their induction is comprehensive and includes all of the company's policies and core values. There is a training charter for employers and trainees which summarises all of the policies and core values in plain language. All of the training is planned and delivered on an individual trainee basis. Trainees do not attend the training centre for any off-the-job training. All training is delivered in the workplace, by a combination of Orient Gold's staff and workplace staff. These training sessions are planned at least two weeks in advance of the visit and confirmed to the employer and trainee in writing. Training staff ensure that the employer and trainee are aware that the sessions often take about two hours, during which time they should not be disturbed. All assessment is also undertaken on the job by Orient Gold's staff who all hold relevant training and assessment qualifications. They are effectively deployed in the workplace and their visits to trainees are determined by their individual needs.

18. Owing to the fact that training staff are generally working away from the office, achieving an effective communication link is a challenge for the company. Each



member of the training team has a mobile telephone which ensures that trainees and employers can make direct contact. The company communicates with its training staff via the telephone and internal memorandum. Every Friday, training staff work from the office base. In the morning they use the time to liaise with the administration team. The afternoon is dedicated to staff training. Within the framework of a standard meeting, which covers such topics as quality, health and safety and equal opportunities, most weeks there is time allocated for a training and development activity. Much of this activity is resourced internally, however, on occasion, external trainers are invited to deliver sessions. Training staff generally take turns to deliver sessions. This approach facilitates the sharing of good and best practice and draws upon the wider experiences of all colleagues.

19. Open communication and the regular sharing of information through the Friday training and development days helps to ensure that all staff know how and where the company is developing in the short term. There is, however, no overall business plan to facilitate the long-term aims and development activities of the company. The company has developed a simple spreadsheet-type computer programme to record and evaluate trainee-related management information. Information on individual trainee's performance is produced each month and presented to the Friday team meeting. Information is also extracted relating to a number of trainees who are the responsibility of individual trainers. Information relating to trainees' achievements, length of stay on the programme and destinations after leaving the programme are collected, evaluated and used to inform management decisions.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

20. Orient Gold has a quality assurance manual which has been written with input from all staff. It meets the requirements of the TEC and awarding bodies. The company does not currently use any subcontracted organisation to deliver any training or assessment. There is, however, a comprehensive procedure in place to select, contract with and review the quality of training delivered by future subcontractors should the current position change.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ standards and targets set and rigorously reviewed
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements help to ensure that training is consistently of a high quality
- ◆ effectiveness of training regularly reviewed
- ◆ comprehensive internal auditing arrangements

## WEAKNESSES

- ◆ self-assessment failed to identify a number of key strengths and weaknesses

### GOOD PRACTICE

*As an example of excellent document control, all of the paperwork required to start a new trainee is prepared by the administration team and handed to the training staff, with a checklist attached to the front. When it has been completed it is handed back to the administrator. The administrator checks that each document has been appropriately completed with sufficient detail. The administrator then passes the completed pack to a colleague for a second check. Both administrators sign and date the checklist once all of the documentation is complete.*

21. Orient Gold has developed a comprehensive quality assurance system. Part of the system is a detailed set of quality procedures and company standards. These are rigorously reviewed by the senior member of staff responsible for internal quality auditing. Every month, the internal auditor completes a 20 per cent random check of trainees' files. The results of these checks are recorded and fed back to the administration manager and shared at the team meeting. The company sets a number of different targets, both in relation to performance and quality. Each member of staff has an agreed number of trainees to support. Their achievement date, as agreed in the individual training plan, becomes a target that is reviewed each month by the member of staff and training manager. Other targets, which relate to quality and standard of service, are published and made available to trainees and employers. These include a commitment from Orient Gold to visit all trainees in their workplace every two weeks. This target is important to all staff at Orient Gold. It is regularly monitored by the administration team, who produce a weekly visit list for training staff.

22. The effectiveness of the training provided by Orient Gold is regularly reviewed, and the results of those reviews are clearly used to inform continuous improvement. The views of employers are systematically sought and the company is constantly seeking ways to improve its service to employers. There is generally a good response to questionnaires, which are evaluated individually and collectively. The views of trainees are systematically sought in a similar way. A more recent initiative is the introduction of training observations carried out by one of the company directors. Every six months, the director accompanies each member of the training team on visits to trainees. The training delivered is observed, as are other skills such as communication and administration. Following the observation, a report is prepared and detailed, constructive, feedback is given by the director. During these visits, the director also takes the opportunity to seek the views of both the trainee and employer on the quality of the training being delivered.

23. As a result of its approach to quality assurance, Orient Gold holds a great deal of evidence relating to the strengths and weaknesses of its training provision. Much of this evidence has been generated by third parties, such as trainees and employers, and much of it is very positive. The self-assessment report, however, failed to sufficiently utilise this evidence when forming judgements about the quality of training. Many aspects within the report stated that the company was meeting the requirements of *Raising the Standard* without having developed any particular strengths or weaknesses. In several areas, inspectors found many additional strengths and only a few weaknesses. They awarded higher grades than those given by Orient Gold in the self-assessment report in the occupational area of retailing and customer services, and in all of the generic areas.