



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1999

Paignton Sec Info Tech Training Centre

SUMMARY

Paignton Sec Info Tech Training Centre offers a large selection of administrative and secretarial training courses, with traditional exam-based assessment as well as national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The courses are appropriate to the needs of the trainees and local employers. The training is good, except for the application of number key skill, which has not yet been fully developed. This means that no modern apprentices have yet been able to complete their qualification. Trainee support is arranged to suit individual needs, and is comprehensive. The management of training, arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity, and quality assurance, are adequate and appropriate for the needs of a small organisation.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ good initial assessment and induction
- ◆ comprehensive advice and guidance
- ◆ confident, able and well-motivated trainees
- ◆ additional qualifications available to trainees
- ◆ strong links with external agencies
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ good internal communications
- ◆ well-resourced information technology training rooms

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no completion of modern apprenticeship framework
- ◆ key skills not fully developed
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ weak internal verification
- ◆ trainees' records not fully updated
- ◆ no promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ incomplete surveys

INTRODUCTION

1. Paignton Sec Info Tech Training Centre (originally Paignton Secretarial College) was founded in 1964 as a private secretarial college. It almost did not start at all – the minimum number of applications for training required by the bank before it would give funding arrived on the very last day of the deadline, following a prayer meeting with the principal's congregation. The motto 'Ebenezer' – 'hitherto hath the Lord helped us' – still features on the college's logo. The college has been offering government-funded training, as well as private training, from its early days. It is now run by two of the daughters of the original principal, with two full-time members of staff, and another member of the family providing extra cover, as required. There are two further part-time members of staff. The provider offers a traditional secretarial and administrative training programme, with access to short courses and single-subject qualifications, as well as NVQs. The college had 21 New Deal trainees and 49 training and enterprise council (TEC)-funded trainees at the time of inspection. Three trainees were doing customer service training, and were not included in the inspection, which concentrated on the business administration occupational area. The college also has 12 private clients, many of whom access funding for their training through the TEC's pilot scheme for Individual Learning Accounts. Its contract for modern apprentices and work-based learning programmes for young people and adults, is with PROSPER, the TEC for Devon and Cornwall. It takes referrals from the Employment Service (Job Centre), and direct from employers. Some trainees apply directly to the college, but most are referred. There have been no recent referrals from the careers service.

2. Paignton forms part of the Torbay conurbation, centred on Torquay. Most local employment is in the service industries, and the largest employment opportunities are in tourism and care. Paignton is traditionally a fishing town,. There is some light industry. Ninety per cent of the workforce are employed in small- or medium-sized enterprises. Communications are reasonably good, with dual carriageway access to Plymouth and Exeter. The local unemployment rate of 6.7 per cent is higher than the national average of 5.2 per cent. Outside the tourist season the figure is higher still. Seasonal unemployment is made more serious by the influx of many families and single young people who are attracted to the area because of the holiday industry, but who have little or no understanding of the insecurity of employment, or of the traditionally low salaries found in the area. Newcomers into Torbay form a distinct group of those eligible for government-funded training, as many have skills not required by local businesses, unknown employer references or no formal qualifications. A further problem is created by the large proportion of retired people in the area, creating large numbers of jobs in care, which traditionally uses part-time and unqualified staff, and pays low or very low wages. Very few people from minority ethnic groups live in Devon, and the proportion for the whole of Devon and Cornwall is less than 1 per cent. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was low at 20 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The local average for the Torbay council area is slightly higher than the national



figure at 47 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Paignton Sec Info Tech Training produced its first self-assessment report for inspection, with support from the TEC. No training events were available from the TEC. The college found the process disproportionately time-consuming for a small organisation, although the process of reflecting on the weaknesses, and planning to address them, was useful. The structure of the occupational area report is based on the draft framework which predated *Raising the Standard*.

4. Two inspectors spent eight days at the college in May 1999. They observed training, assessment, and reviews. They interviewed, or observed interviews with, 20 trainees, eight employers or workplace supervisors, two New Deal Personal Advisers, the college principal, and all members of staff except the gardener.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

5. There are 70 trainees following work-based training programmes. Fourteen are modern apprentices in administration, and 17 other young people are working towards NVQs at level 2, 3 or 4 on a work-based learning programme. Fourteen of these, and all the modern apprentices, are employed. The other youth trainees are in work placements. There are no national trainees. Sixteen trainees are on a New Deal full-time education or training programme, and five further New Deal trainees are undertaking training while on a subsidised employment programme. There are 18 adult trainees on work-based learning programmes, of whom five are receiving extra support to prepare them for employment. Trainees follow programmes leading to NVQs in business administration, information technology or accountancy. There is only one level 4 trainee in administration, and no trainees at level 1. In addition, there is a wide range of related short courses, leading to examination-based qualifications. There are no trainees with identified special learning needs. Achievement and retention levels are satisfactory for youth trainees, with 60 per cent of leavers achieving an NVQ, and 67 per cent completing their individual training plan. Some trainees achieve several NVQs during their time on the programme. Achievement rates for adult trainees are high at 48 per cent, and just under half are successful in finding a job. New Deal trainees have not been on the programme long enough for achievement figures to be meaningful, but some have obtained employment and been able to switch to work-based learning or a modern apprenticeship to complete their qualification. Every trainee spends a minimum of four weeks on work placement. Trainees undertake an intensive training programme at the training centre while they wait for a suitable work placement. Most training and assessment takes place in the centre, using work-based evidence. Occasionally, tutors visit trainees in their work placements to provide individual coaching. Trainees are expected to attend the training centre for training, and portfolio-

building sessions. They attend either for day release, or for evening sessions. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report did not identify all of the relevant strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ confident, able and highly motivated trainees
- ◆ additional qualifications available for all trainees
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ experienced and well-qualified staff
- ◆ well-resourced information technology training rooms

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no modern apprenticeship achievement
- ◆ key skills not fully developed
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous assessment procedures

GOOD PRACTICE

Adult and New Deal trainees are offered the communication key skill as an extra, free-standing qualification to run alongside their NVQ in business administration or information technology. Some adult trainees choose to take the key skills qualification even if they are not working towards an NVQ.

6. Trainees show a serious commitment to their career development. Many have chosen the college for its traditional approach to training in administrative skills, and are glad of the opportunity to work for extra exam-based qualifications, which they undertake to enhance their career prospects. There are some excellent work placements, offering stimulating opportunities for trainees to develop their skills, collect evidence for their portfolios, and progress in their careers. The trainers/assessors are experienced in their occupational areas, and familiar with the requirements of the qualifications they offer. They are all qualified trainers as well as assessors, although there is no-one qualified to accredit trainees' prior learning. The training rooms are well equipped, with computers running a range of software, much of which is more up-to-date than that used by local employers.

7. Despite the fact that some modern apprentices have been on the programme since 1995, none have yet completed the framework and received their certificates. Low wages paid by local employers make it difficult for some modern apprentices to remain on the programme, as they need to spend their evenings doing evening work to supplement their income. This then makes it difficult for them to attend evening classes. Some employers are reluctant to let modern apprentices continue to attend for day release when they have completed their NVQ level 3. Key skills have not been integrated into the NVQ until recently, and the difficulties associated with teaching application of number at level 3 have not yet been overcome. Progress with developing the other key skills has been good, and key skills in communication at level 2 is routinely offered as an extra qualification to trainees who are not required to take it as part of a national traineeship or modern apprenticeship framework. There is little workplace-based assessment, as there are no work-based assessors,

and the trainers/assessors rarely assess in the workplace. There is little variety in methods of assessment and virtually no assessment by observation. However, portfolios show high-quality work-based evidence, and supervisors are regularly asked to provide witness statements. Many supervisors are well informed about the requirements of NVQs, and are anxious to support their trainees by suggesting appropriate opportunities for gathering evidence, but opportunities to assess by direct observation are missed. There is little use of questioning as an assessment tool, and oral questions and answers are not sufficiently challenging and are not recorded.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

8. The college has an equal opportunities policy, which is reviewed at least annually, as well as procedures for implementing the policy. There is a general awareness in the college of the importance of equal opportunities. Trainee numbers are closely monitored for ethnic origin, gender, and disability. Twenty-five per cent of youth trainees and 40 per cent of adults on the programme are men. There are no trainees of minority ethnic origin on the programme, although one is French. Two trainees from Malawi have recently been enrolled. Minority ethnic groups account for less than 1 per cent of the local population. On most programmes, there is a roughly equal gender mix, although on the youth programmes, there are more young women than men. Recently, more young men have been joining the programme. The provider has a contract to support some trainees with learning difficulties, but currently, there are none on the programme. There are more people with disabilities on the programme than are contractually required by the TEC. New members of staff are coached in the importance of equal opportunities, but there have not been any recent structured training events for staff. The handbook, which is given to all trainees, includes the equal opportunities statement and details of the complaints procedure. The self-assessment report identified three strengths, and two weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and one of the weaknesses, and identified a further weakness. They awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ change of company name to attract more male trainees
- ◆ frequent discussion of rights and responsibilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no ongoing promotion of equal opportunities

- ◆ no wheelchair access to the training centre

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee was showing signs of distress when she arrived at the centre each morning. After careful questioning, it became apparent that she was being bullied on her train journey in to the centre each day. She was counselled and offered strategies for dealing with the problem. She went on to complete her qualification.

9. In an attempt to recruit more young men, the college changed its name and identity from 'Secretarial College' to update its image. Since this recent change in title, more men have arrived to join the youth programme, although there has not yet been any research to identify if the name change has been the cause in the upturn in numbers. The college leads by example in its respect for individuals, with careful use of language, sensitivity to individuals' needs, and an awareness of the potential for discrimination. Trainees are conscious of their own and others' rights and responsibilities while they are in the training centre. Discussions on equal opportunities issues take place between groups and with individuals in response to specific issues.

10. There is no active promotion of equal opportunities outside the training centre. Trainees are not reminded of equal opportunities issues in the workplace, and do not connect concerns with bullying or harassment in the workplace, with equal opportunities awareness. The college does not promote its own commitment to equality of opportunity to employers, and does no more than the contractual minimum to ensure that employers of modern apprentices have an equal opportunities policy. The training centre has restricted access for wheelchairs. It would be impossible for a wheelchair user to get into the classrooms even though they are on the ground floor, and the toilets are on the first floor. The planned extension to the centre includes full facilities for wheelchair access.

Trainee support

Grade 2

11. Paignton Sec Info Tech Training has a long history of training in the locality. Potential trainees have a one-to-one interview with the principal. They are then invited to attend two assessment sessions. Following the assessment sessions, the principal discusses the results with trainees who are then offered a place on one of the schemes operated by the company. The company has a commitment to providing a service to employers as well as trainees. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. However, they found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive advice and guidance for potential trainees
- ◆ good initial assessment used to inform individual training plan
- ◆ thorough and effective induction process
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ daily updated opportunities for employment

- ◆ regular feedback on progression
- ◆ personal counselling for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no assessment of key skills on entry
- ◆ support for trainees not fully recorded
- ◆ some irregularity in reviews
- ◆ individual training plans not used as working documents

GOOD PRACTICE

One modern apprentice summarised the support she had been given saying: "They've given me the support and confidence to go from sleeping on floors to having my own mortgage."

12. Potential trainees attend the training centre for an interview with the principal. They receive realistic and comprehensive advice on the implications of the various programmes. They undergo two assessment sessions which last a total of six hours. The assessments are an appropriate way of identifying trainees' training needs and are used to develop individual learning plans. However, key skills are not assessed when trainees join a training programme. While initial training plans are comprehensive, there is little evidence to suggest that they are used as a working document throughout the trainees' learning programme. The induction process is friendly and comprehensive. There are many examples of trainees benefiting from good practical advice to solve personal problems during their training programme. For example, one trainee was lent money to purchase a pair of shoes prior to attending a job interview. The college has very good working relationships with people from other agencies. It also has an excellent and up-to-date knowledge of the local employment scene, which is passed on to trainees. There is an up to date job vacancy board situated in the centre, which trainees use. Trainees attend the training centre for a minimum of one period per week. Training takes place during the daytime or during evening classes. The trainees decide which would be the best time for them to attend. Trainees receive advice on their progress during the training sessions. One member of staff is qualified and another is working towards qualification, as counsellors. They are able to offer specialised and skilled support to trainees encountering personal difficulties which are jeopardising their progress with their qualification.

GOOD PRACTICE

Individual Learning Accounts are being piloted by the local TEC. This means that people in employment can access the training they want, at affordable prices. Most of the college's private clients are being supported through this scheme. The arrangements are flexible, and clients can choose, not only their qualification, but also where and when they receive their training.

13. Trainees receive a 12-weekly review in the workplace which involves the trainer, workplace supervisor and the trainee. The reviews satisfy TEC contract requirements, although there has been slippage in the timing of some reviews. Supervisors and trainees are not always present together at the review meeting. Review forms are not completed and signed at the time of the review. As well as the quarterly process, there is a monthly self-assessment review system. The tutor fills in a section of the review sheet, and sends it to the trainee and workplace supervisor for comment and return. This document is then read by the tutor and any points raised are responded to. There are no records to show what action, if any, has been taken. The advice and guidance given is not always recorded.

Management of training

Grade 3

14. Paignton Sec Info Tec Training is a small, privately owned company, with four full-time and two part-time members of staff. This includes the two owners who manage the company and also act as trainers and assessors. The company's values, policies and procedures are fully understood by all staff. The company achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1997. The management structure is well documented with staff and resources used effectively. There are weekly team meetings to discuss trainees' progress and other current topics. Brief notes are taken at these meetings, and some action points are recorded. One member of staff deals with all aspects of administration. The remaining members handle training, assessment and verification issues, including liaison with employers. Inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded was the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good internal communication
- ◆ clear management and staffing structures
- ◆ strong links with external agencies
- ◆ simple but effective management-information system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some staff training not structured
- ◆ some employers unclear about modern apprenticeship requirements
- ◆ some incomplete health and safety checks
- ◆ trainees' records not fully updated

GOOD PRACTICE

The college has secured an agreement with the Employment Service, under which they fax details of job vacancies to the provider as soon as they arrive. Employers also supply details of forthcoming job opportunities. All this information is displayed prominently on the noticeboard for trainees to use.

15. Communication between all staff members and managers is excellent. All staff are based at the training centre, and even support staff are involved to a greater or lesser extent in the training. Issues arising from trainees' reviews are recorded on internal memos. Other matters are dealt with quickly and informally. Staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities within the organisation. Job descriptions exist but some require updating. There are excellent working relationships with other local agencies such as the Employment Service, and local employers are well known. Problems are solved quickly and with the minimum of fuss. Management information is accurate and readily available. Trainees' achievement data are accessible, accurate, and used to inform decisions. Simple, paper-based methods are used to record the data, but they are effective.

16. The appraisal system is used to identify staff training needs, and although some identified needs have not been met for several years, other staff members have taken up some extensive personal training programmes in order to acquire new skills. Although the college's values and policies are clearly understood by staff and

trainees, some employers are unclear about the requirements of the modern apprenticeship programme, and some trainees experience difficulties in satisfying all of the needs of the NVQ in their job roles. Health and safety checks generally take place, however, the process of updating the checks when an employer moves premises is sometimes delayed. Trainees' records contain considerable, detailed information, but they are not always complete because of key information not being written down, and because of backlogs in filing. Staff turnover is low, therefore when a new member of staff is required, the company tends to select the person as a result of the manager's previous knowledge of the individual. Consequently, there are few opportunities for the company to demonstrate its awareness of compliance with legislation on equality of opportunity issues relating to staff recruitment.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

17. The college has a quality assurance manual, which is regularly updated, and which includes procedures for the college's main activities. Most of the quality assurance processes are informal and not written, because of the small number of college staff. The college meets the requirements of its contracts with the TEC and the Employment Service. It has been a preferred supplier for PROSPER for six months. It complies with the requirements of its awarding bodies. Trainees who stay in the area are monitored informally after completion of their NVQ. Trainees are helped to complete their qualification, even after they have officially left the programme. In the quality assurance section, the provider lists three strengths which were thought to be no more than normal practice, and two weaknesses, one of which was judged by inspectors to be insignificant. The self-assessment grade is the same as the inspection grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented, detailed procedures
- ◆ appropriate and regular monitoring of quality of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak internal verification system
- ◆ incomplete surveys

18. There are detailed procedures to support organisational policies. The procedures are clearly described, and updated annually. Trainees' achievement data are monitored regularly, and training is informally reviewed. Each trainer/assessor is observed in the classroom. The observer assesses the quality of training, and feeds back to the trainer. Information from trainees' self-review sheets contributes to the informal, unrecorded evaluation of training. Members of the training and assessing team meet weekly to discuss issues relating to quality of training and individual

trainees.

19. The internal verification process lacks rigour, and is not used to develop the quality of the assessment procedures, or to standardise assessment processes. One unit from each portfolio is sampled for internal verification, but only on completion of the portfolio. There are no records of the internal verifier's comments. Each of the assessors is also qualified to act as an internal verifier, and so the internal verifier role is shared between all the assessors. There is no record of any observation of the assessment processes by the internal verifier. Trainees have been surveyed by questionnaire twice a year, and the findings analysed. The first survey did not include any youth trainees. Employers have not been surveyed, and their views are not sought except through the trainees' review process.

20. The self-assessment process has formalised some of the ongoing quality assurance activities. The report includes little description of the provision, but the strengths and weaknesses are openly evaluated, and the report's judgements and findings were largely supported by the inspection. Supporting evidence is clearly signposted and documented.