



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT

MAY 1999

Way to Work

SUMMARY

Way to Work provides good training in childcare in workplaces which provide an extensive range of learning opportunities within a supportive environment. Administration training is good, though marred by a low achievement rate which is mainly the result of trainees stopping training when they leave their first place of employment. Equality of opportunity is not given sufficient prominence, but trainees are treated fairly and any complaints are dealt with effectively. Trainees with disabilities are given appropriate, and in some cases excellent, support. All trainees are frequently assessed and reviewed at work. All training and assessment is subcontracted and these suppliers are tightly and effectively managed. There are excellent working relationships between Way to Work and all the other people involved in training, notably trainees, workplace supervisors and the staff of the subcontracted agencies. Quality assurance systems have been used to assure the quality of these subcontracted agencies, and have not focused on some other aspects such as assuring the quality of workplaces.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Health, care & public services	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ work placements provide a full range of learning and assessment opportunities
- ◆ frequent assessments ensure good progress
- ◆ well-managed links between trainers, employers and trainees
- ◆ specific time set aside away from work for training activities
- ◆ detailed understanding by trainees of their qualifications
- ◆ excellent training to meet the needs of trainees with learning difficulties
- ◆ careful vetting and tight control of subcontractors
- ◆ open and regular debate among staff

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ high number of trainee administrators leave without achieving a qualification
- ◆ equal opportunities' practices not systematically reviewed or promoted
- ◆ data evaluation does not lead to action-planning for improvement
- ◆ quality assurance systems not systematically reviewed

INTRODUCTION

1. Way to Work is a business unit within the corporate services department of the London Borough of Richmond. The manager leads a team of two other full-time staff and three part-time staff and currently reports to the head of the personnel department. Restructuring within the local authority means the manager will report to the head of the education department from July 1999. Ultimate responsibility for quality of provision lies with the elected councillors of the London Borough of Richmond. Way to Work manages vocational work-based training for young employees. It organises training for 130 people through its contracts with two training and enterprise councils (TECs), West London TEC and North West London TEC. It also organises the training of two young people whose employment costs are subsidised by the New Deal. Way to Work manages the training and assessment through two main suppliers of specialist training in administration and childcare. Other subcontractors train and assess small numbers of trainees in horticulture, warehousing, and supplementary training in literacy. There are 132 trainees in all these programmes.

2. Way to Work is based in local authority premises in Twickenham in west London. Twickenham is in the London Borough of Richmond, which is an affluent borough. There are good public transport facilities enabling residents to take advantage of the employment opportunities in the West End and the City as well locally. Approximately 50 per cent of residents work outside the borough. The local rate of unemployment is 1.8 per cent, which is much lower than the London average. For the past five years school leavers from local state-funded schools have consistently achieved higher grade general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) than the national average. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 51 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. Girls outperform boys in all three core subjects of English, maths and science. The difference is particularly significant in English, as two-thirds of girls gain C or above, compared to only half the boys. At the last census in 1991, only 5.5 per cent of the 161,000 residents were from minority ethnic groups. The local authority analysed the census figures in detail and extrapolated the results to estimate that in 1998, 10.3 per cent of local 15 to 19 year olds were from minority ethnic groups.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The manager of Way to Work took responsibility for writing the self-assessment report prior to inspection. Support was given by West London TEC and North West London TEC to complete this process, and all the staff were involved in the preparation of the report.

4. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at the provider's premises. They interviewed 36 trainees, all six staff and seven trainers and assessors from the subcontracted training organisations. They visited 26 workplaces, including four within the council. At each of these workplaces, they interviewed at least one of the employees who managed or supervised the trainees. They examined a wide range of documents, including trainees' portfolios and files, organisational policies and procedures, records of staff and management meetings, and contracts with the TECs regarding the provision of training. They observed trainees being interviewed, being advised on employment opportunities, being assessed and reviewed in the workplace while carrying out their normal duties, during off-the-job sessions in childcare and basic skills and during individual literacy tuition. Inspectors also examined data on retention, achievement and progression of trainees, and equal opportunities data, including records of gender, disability and ethnicity.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

5. Way to Work interviews all potential trainees and discusses appropriate qualifications to meet their needs. It then organises interviews with employers with a view to finding suitable employment and the opportunity to work towards vocational qualifications. Way to Work has contracts with a large number of employers with between one and six trainees in each location. Once the trainee is successfully employed and has completed a three-week trial period, Way to Work arranges for the training and assessment programme to be delivered by the administration subcontractor. This supplier then has the responsibility for delivering the programme which includes a three-weekly assessment visit and a quarterly progress review. There is an annual quality audit of this subcontracted work. Trainees and employers' views are gathered through a written questionnaire every eight weeks.

6. There are a total of 83 trainees, comprising 28 modern apprentices, 21 national trainees and 34 on other training programmes, including one on New Deal. This includes three accountancy trainees. Fifty-two per cent of young people who started in 1996-97 and 48 per cent of those who started in 1997-98 left without gaining a qualification. The self-assessment report did not accurately identify all the company's strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some and identified additional ones. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced work placements
- ◆ good teamwork by all involved in training
- ◆ good integration of key skills at NVQ level 2
- ◆ trainees guaranteed six hours of dedicated training each week

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of continuous internal verification of portfolios
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ high number of trainees leave without achieving a qualification

7. The workplaces offer good-quality resources. There is a written agreement with each employer to ensure that the trainees are allowed six hours a week away from their job to concentrate on training-related activities. There is good flexibility in how this time is used to suit individual trainees' particular learning needs. For example, some may attend off-the-job skills training; others may remain in the workplace, developing their portfolios. Way to Work's systems include rigorous checks to ensure that employers abide by this commitment.

8. Subcontracted assessors meet with the trainees at work every three weeks for assessment and action-planning. Action-planning is detailed and has target dates, and gives the trainees a good understanding of their progress and what they need to do to achieve their qualifications. The workplace supervisors are involved on each occasion, which ensures they are aware of the trainees' learning objectives. Their involvement also assists good working relationships and communication between employers, assessors and trainees.

9. The subcontractors arrange appropriate off-the-job training in keyboarding skills and computer applications. These generally take place at their own premises, which have appropriate facilities. Additional training is arranged according to individual circumstances. Key skills have been well integrated at NVQ level 2, with good use of workplace evidence. Progress is being made to integrate key skills into the training programme at level 3, but this is not so well developed.

10. There is a weakness in the assessment and verification procedures of the subcontractor which has been picked up in external verifier reports. Evidence in trainees' portfolios is verified only upon completion of the portfolio, rather than being a continuous process. This delays trainees' progress in cases where the verifier has cause for concern over the content or relevance of evidence in the portfolios. In addition, despite regular opportunities, direct assessment in the form of observation is only a very small part of the overall assessment process, resulting in trainees having to produce an unduly large quantity of paper-based evidence. Trainees' portfolios are generally good, but lack sufficient records of observation.

11. There is an above-average proportion of early leavers within an award which nationally has a very high success rate. Way to Work has not carried out a systematic evaluation as to the cause. When trainees part company with their

employers, their training programme usually stops.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

12. Way to Work has 43 trainees in care. There are 15 modern apprentices on early years care and education at level 3 and 23 trainees at level 2. Five trainees are modern apprentices in care. All childcare trainees are employed in day nurseries. Workplace assessment is subcontracted. Peripatetic assessors visit trainees every three weeks, with assessments taking place every three to six weeks. Assessors have relevant training and qualifications. Off-the-job training takes place on one day each month. Numbers on programmes fluctuate but have increased from 24 in 1998-99 to 43 in the current year. Eighty-seven per cent of trainees completed their programmes in 1996-97 and 37 per cent achieved in 1997-98, with 26 per cent still on the programme. The self-assessment grade was confirmed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent workplace assessments ensure good progress
- ◆ good on-the-job assessment and review planning
- ◆ well-planned verification leads to systematic improvement in assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent support for knowledge development
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills assessment

13. Assessors meet trainees in the workplace every three weeks for direct observation of practice or to plan the next assessment. These frequent meetings help trainees to be aware of their achievements and to make significant progress towards gaining their awards. Trainees decide which units to work on and they plan assessments effectively with assessors. Trainees clearly understand the ways in which they can be assessed against the performance criteria and the range. Detailed guidelines help trainees to decide on appropriate examples of evidence for each element. Assessors ask them to identify new skills, workplace responsibilities and competencies and this enables the trainees to develop professionally.

14. Their progress is regularly reported to employers and all parties take part in reviews. Employers are pleased to be involved in this aspect of training. Their awareness of their trainees' targets means that they can contribute to their progress. The timing of assessments is flexible to allow staff to respond to individual trainees' needs. Increasing the frequency of assessments enables trainees to complete quickly while those who need to take longer because of personal reasons are also well supported. Thorough, detailed verbal feedback is given immediately after assessments and trainees are able to reflect on their performance as a result.

15. There is a high level of contact with and support for employers by assessors and Way to Work's staff. They respond quickly to requests for information and advice

which could affect the effectiveness of training. The consistency of assessments is closely monitored by internal verifiers sampling some trainees' evidence each month. Internal verification documents are good and comments to assessors lead to an increased awareness of appropriate NVQ assessment and practices. There are good opportunities for demonstrating competence at work. Physical resources for off-the-job training are excellent. Attendance at off-the-job training is effectively monitored. Some trainees who would benefit from off-the-job training are not released from their workplaces to attend sessions. They are offered suitable alternative training days.

16. Theory learnt off the job is not always linked to the requirements of the NVQ. Some workplaces do not have an appropriate selection of books, videos and other training materials to help trainees to collect the information they need to complete their award. Employers are asked to give trainees on level 2 programmes up to six hours each week for independent study, but some employers do not strictly keep to this agreement. Trainees are being credited with gaining NVQ level 3 but are not achieving the modern apprenticeship award because the key skills of information technology and number are not assessed. The assessment and recording of evidence for some other key skills in the workplace are delayed.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

17. Way to Work is part of the London Borough of Richmond-Upon-Thames local authority, which has a detailed equal opportunities policy. Way to Work does not have a separate policy or statement for equal opportunities issues. The three-way contractual agreement between the trainees, employers and Way to Work states that all three parties must abide by the borough's equal opportunities policy. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses to those in the self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ fast and effective response to individual trainees' issues
- ◆ employers are advised on good practice in interview and selection

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees and employers not aware of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ equal opportunities not always promoted
- ◆ equal opportunities' practices and procedures not systematically monitored or reviewed

GOOD PRACTICE

A trainee reported that her employer was harassing her. When challenged by the provider, the employer denied the accusations. Way to Work's manager

18. Way to Work deals with complaints or issues with regard to equality of opportunity sympathetically, quickly and effectively. Trainees are aware of the grievance procedure, and feel comfortable enough to contact the training provider in

the event of a grievance, confident that the problem will be addressed.

19. All trainees are employed at the start of their training programme, so employers exercise considerable influence over who is selected for the training programme. All prospective employers are given clear, concise and well-written guidance on interviewing techniques. This advice includes specific awareness on avoiding gender and disability stereotyping. This is one of the few occasions where the provider promotes equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities is mentioned to trainees and employers at initial contact. A three-line paragraph is contained on the second page of a two-page agreement and insufficient attention is paid to ensure that either trainees or employers are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities with regard to equal opportunity legislation. Way to Work does not provide either employers or trainees with a separate policy statement, setting out their rights and responsibilities, or with a summary of the borough's policy. Promotional literature contains no comprehensive reference to equal opportunities.

20. Way to Work has not addressed equal opportunities as an issue in its own right. Equality of opportunity has not been an agenda item at staff meetings. There has been no staff awareness training for some years. Although individual complaints are investigated and action taken, there is not a complaints log used to record every complaint and therefore no systematic evaluation. There is no monitoring of applicants, successful and non-successful interviewees, or of leavers, to whether there are any equal opportunities issues which need to be tackled. Despite this, the proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is, at 13 per cent, slightly higher than the 10 per cent proportion in the locality. Over 6 per cent of trainees have a disability which represents a higher proportion than other providers in the area. Furthermore, trainees are encouraged to take up non-traditional gender roles: 5 per cent of the trainee childcare workers are men, as are 31 per cent of the trainee administrators.

Trainee support

Grade 2

21. Trainees are referred to Way to Work by the careers service, personal contacts or from employers. Trainees who are not already employed have an initial interview to assess their employment aspirations, and to match them to a possible job. Trainees are offered a choice of vacancies and an interview is arranged for them. Those who gain employment start the training programme three weeks later. Trainees are assigned an assessor within these first three weeks. Induction to the NVQ process is carried out in the workplace. Within the first 12 weeks, assessors identify trainees who have additional needs and who require extra support during the training programme. Trainees are visited in the workplace every three weeks. The self-assessment report noted all strengths but no weaknesses. Inspectors identified both strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good employment and training advice given to potential trainees

- ◆ frequent and regular reviews
- ◆ good pastoral counselling and advice in a range of individual situations
- ◆ trainees well supported during disciplinary issues
- ◆ excellent training to meet the needs of trainees with learning difficulties
- ◆ close monitoring to protect and enhance trainees' conditions of employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic assessment of trainees' skills and needs on entry
- ◆ delayed workplace inductions

22. Trainees are recruited mainly through the careers service. A few are already in employment when they approach the provider. Staff also attend careers events at local schools to generate interest in their training programmes. Staff interview potential trainees individually and provide helpful and accurate advice to prepare them for employment. Trainees are carefully prepared for job interviews. For trainees who are unsuccessful in gaining employment, staff organise further meetings to discuss other training and job prospects. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace every three weeks and this enables them to make good progress. There is an excellent system for reviewing trainees' progress. Accurate records are kept and realistic targets are set which help trainees make further improvement. Trainees know how to contact staff outside office hours. Managers have an extensive knowledge of professionals and volunteers who can offer additional support to trainees who have learning difficulties or health problems. Assessors and staff advise trainees well so that they progress to further training or to new employment. If an employer contacts the provider to complain about a trainee's attendance or punctuality, the provider advises the employer about disciplinary interviews, and often attends to ensure that the process is open and fair and trainees continue to feel supported. Detailed and accurate records are kept of each stage of the process. Additional basic skills classes for trainees give very good-quality teaching and learning and are effective in developing trainees' literacy.

23. Trainees' basic skills are not thoroughly and systematically assessed on entry to the programmes. Identification of individual needs is therefore sometimes delayed, with the result that some trainees do not receive the additional support and specialist help they need from the start of their training. Way to Work tells the trainees about their rights and responsibilities after they have attended the workplace for three weeks. This is because the first three weeks of employment is viewed as a trial period, and the potential trainees do not register with the training provider until this trial has been successfully completed. This delay exposes trainees to potential risk, in the event of an employer failing to provide an adequate health and safety induction, or to inform them of other aspects of their rights and responsibilities.

Management of training

Grade 2

24. Way to Work is subject to the local authority's personnel policies, including staff recruitment. It has three full- and three part-time members of staff. The full-

time staff are the manager, the recruitment co-ordinator and a modern apprentice who carries out the duties of administrator. The training co-ordinator and the customer care co-ordinator work on a part-time basis, as does the member of staff responsible for marketing and publicity. The manager's request for an additional part-time member of staff has been accepted, but the new post has not yet been filled. Way To Work does not deliver any training themselves, nor do they have training facilities. They subcontract all training and assessment provision to external training providers, two of which train and assess 90 per cent of the trainees. One of these provides training and assessment in business administration, the other in care. The other six training suppliers include local colleges which either deliver extra help for trainees with learning disabilities or training in other occupational areas. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by the provider, although additional strengths and weaknesses were identified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ reflective management style
- ◆ managers establish excellent working relationships with all those involved in training
- ◆ well-documented and frequently reviewed procedures
- ◆ clearly defined staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ accurate and extensive management data
- ◆ monthly team meetings encourage open debate of current issues

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow and rigid staff recruitment procedures
- ◆ staff training systems not rigorously adhered to

25. The aims and objectives of the organisation are well defined and are fully understood and supported by staff. The management structure of the organisation is clearly documented and staff resources are effectively deployed. The manager and all the staff share the same office. This encourages immediate communication of issues occurring on a daily basis. Managers and support staff work well as a team and subcontracted training is tightly monitored and controlled.

26. Trainees and workplace supervisors complete a feedback questionnaire every eight weeks. The assessors carry out assessment reviews every three weeks and pastoral reviews every three months, and provide a short written report on each trainee each month. This system is designed to allow Way to Work's staff to have accurate and up-to-date data regarding the progress of each trainee. It also helps to ensure that managers and staff identify and respond to trainees' needs rapidly and effectively. The system is effective and rigorously enforced. In addition, staff keep accurate and detailed information regarding each trainee's progression and achievements. The response from the customer care officer to the issues raised, coupled with the regular reviews, helps to develop and reinforce the excellent working relationships with everyone involved in training. This in turn helps ensure that workplace supervisors provide the trainees with a broad range of learning

opportunities and carry out their role fully and thoroughly. Off-the-job training is well managed to suit the support needs of trainees, and the occupational needs of administration trainees. However, it is less well managed for trainees in care, who sometimes have difficulty getting away from the workplace to attend off-the-job training sessions.

27. The organisational values, policies, strategies and targets are understood and supported by all staff. Management procedures ensure that subcontracted training assessors are also familiar with these policies. Way To Work operates under the council's personnel policies and procedures. These procedures are comprehensive, and encompass all the council's employees. Way To Work's supplementary policies and procedures are well written, logical, and appropriate. Some staff reviews have not taken place when planned. Some identified staff training needs, in particular health and safety and equal opportunities awareness training, have not been met.

28. Staff roles are clearly defined and set out in a comprehensive document, which is reviewed monthly at a staff meeting. The relaxed, reflective management style encourages good, open debate of current issues in an informal setting within the office and also during structured monthly team meetings. Owing to this open discussion, the team identified, over nine months ago, the need for an additional part-time member of staff, to conduct supplementary reviews of trainees in the workplace. This vacancy has still not been filled, due to delays in the local authority's recruitment process. Redundancies elsewhere within the council have led to protracted implementation of the council's redeployment processes. Way To Work's managers have taken all possible steps within the constraints of the recruitment procedures to accelerate the process.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

29. In order to assure the quality of its training, Way to Work is required to work closely with employers and subcontractors. Subcontractors' staff visit trainees in the workplace every three weeks to assess the skills, knowledge and competence the trainees have acquired over the preceding three weeks, to set them learning targets for the forthcoming three weeks, and to inform Way to Work's staff of any problems. These visits are critical elements in the quality of training, and in the trainees' successful learning. Most of Way to Work's quality assurance systems are designed to check that the visits take place as planned, that they are effective, and that any reported problems are addressed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ careful and systematic vetting of subcontractors
- ◆ tight control over frequency of assessment visits
- ◆ extensive and detailed contract with subcontractors
- ◆ system of trainee feedback questionnaires leads to individual improvements
- ◆ use of external consultants to check the quality of subcontractors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ data evaluation does not lead to action-planning for improvement
- ◆ quality assurance systems do not encompass all aspects of training
- ◆ quality assurance systems not systematically reviewed
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of health and safety in the workplace

30. Way to Work conducts extensive research before recruiting subcontractors for training or assessment. It checks them carefully for their occupational understanding, for their competence in assessing work-based learning and for their quality assurance systems with regard to that assessment process. Way to Work imposes high standards on its subcontractors, which are written into their contracts, and rigorously enforced. It has terminated contracts with those which failed to meet their contractual standards, and is prepared to search over a wide geographical area if local training providers are not up to the standards it specifies. It has developed an extensive and detailed contract with its subcontractors, and the manager ensures that any non-compliance is immediately identified and addressed. Regular and frequent meetings between the manager and subcontractors reinforce compliance. These meetings also serve to identify aspects for improvement, which are developed and introduced immediately, and formally specified in the subsequent year's contract.

31. As a further check on the quality of its subcontractors, Way to Work commissioned a consultant to conduct three pieces of independent research to evaluate their effectiveness. The findings are used to develop action plans with the subcontractors.

32. Way to Work checks that the training and assessing staff visit each trainee every three weeks. If a visit fails to take place, staff and management are informed through the trainee and employer feedback system. Managers address this quickly with the training supplier to ensure that it is remedied. The regular and frequent checks of trainees' progress, and the system of written feedback from trainees, assessors and workplace supervisors, lead to issues affecting trainees' progress being addressed rapidly. The provider has identified that, although assessment visits are frequent and effective, pastoral support would be further enhanced by more direct face-to-face communication between trainees and Way to Work's staff, and has implemented action to address this.

33. In care, arrangements for internal verification are good. Although the arrangements in business administration meet the awarding body requirements, internal verification is not carried out continuously throughout the development of portfolios, but is left until the end of the programme.

34. The provider's self-assessment report did not identify the gaps in its quality assurance arrangements. The arrangements focus on ensuring that subcontractors comply with their contracts. These arrangements work well and lead to improvements on an individual basis. However, quality assurance arrangements do not encompass equality of opportunity, and do not effectively assure the health and safety of employers' premises or trainees' awareness of their rights and responsibilities with regard to their health and safety. Health and safety vetting takes

place when a trainee is employed. However, where the staff have identified improvements to be made to meet legislative or contractual requirements, there is no systematic follow-up to ensure that the necessary action has been taken. Workplaces are not regularly monitored for health and safety.

35. Although extensive and accurate data are kept, these are not used to inform management decision making or to develop action plans. Data regarding trainees' achievement have not, until recently, been sorted by occupational area. This means that Way to Work was unaware of the achievement rate of the trainee administrators or the trainee childcare workers. This lack of awareness meant that it was unable to address the causes of the low achievement or to develop action to improve future provision.

36. Although self-assessment is developing well within Way to Work's working practices, and will form part of the quality assurance arrangements, there is currently no systematic review of these arrangements either to evaluate their effectiveness, or to assess whether they adequately encompass all aspects of training.