



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1999

The Harington Scheme

SUMMARY

The Harington Scheme provides good, effective horticultural skills training and appropriate preparation for work for people with moderate to severe learning and physical disabilities. Methods of training are well suited to the client group and ensure good retention and achievement. Support for trainees is outstandingly well managed and enables them to learn new capabilities and develop social skills. The management of the Scheme is such that both staff and trainees are fully involved in decision making. The Scheme operates as an equal opportunities employer and training provider and staff and trainees have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues. While there is an adequate range of policies to assure quality, these have often been devised in response to circumstances rather than in anticipation of events.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	1
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ excellent on-the-job training resources
- ◆ good support for trainees
- ◆ training customised to trainees' needs
- ◆ open management style and effective teamwork
- ◆ equal opportunities data used effectively in recruitment process

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ narrow range of vocational training options
- ◆ weak links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ reactive quality assurance strategy

INTRODUCTION

1. The Harington Scheme (the Scheme) was established in 1980 to meet the needs of young people with additional learning needs. The Scheme first contracted with the North London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) in 1990. The training and administrative centre is based in Highgate in north London. The Scheme also uses the adjacent premises of the Harington Gardeners, a subsidiary horticultural contracting division of the scheme, for training and for progression into sheltered employment. Plant production occurs at the gardens of a nearby convent at Mill Hill, and a new training unit is being developed in Finsbury Park. The Scheme has a board of 10 directors and 10 staff, eight full- and two part-time, who are assisted by 10 volunteers. There are 30 trainees.

2. The TEC area has a population of approximately 800,000 people of whom 500,000 are of working age. The unemployment figures for the London Borough of Haringey show that 5,600 young people are unemployed – 73 per cent are men, 27 per cent are women and of the overall figure 25 per cent have no qualifications. Unemployment among 16-24 year olds is 8.2 per cent, and among 25-64 year olds it is 6.9 per cent. Forty-four per cent of unemployed residents are lower skilled or unskilled. The rate of unemployment among minority ethnic residents is in excess of double that of white residents. The minority ethnic population of Haringey Borough is 18 per cent.

3. The most prominent local industries and areas of employment are retail and commerce, the public sector, administration and healthcare. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 44 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The national training and education targets (NTETs) state that this percentage should be 50 per cent by 2002. An estimated 49.7 per cent of adults have attained two or more GCE A levels.

4. The Harington Scheme enters local horticultural society competitions and regularly wins prizes. At the Scheme's training centre, there is a well-stocked nursery with produce on sale to the public.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The self-assessment report was originally produced in February 1999, with a revision issued in April. All board members and staff were consulted during its production. Although the report provided a thorough analysis of training, strengths and weaknesses were not efficiently drawn out for all areas of training.

6. Two inspectors spent a total of six days based at the Harington Scheme. They interviewed 20 trainees and three New Deal clients. Six interviews were conducted with off-the-job training and management staff. Inspectors visited five workplaces and met with nine supervisors and employers. Five trainees' files and 11 portfolios were reviewed. Other documents seen included TEC contracts, external verifier's reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, business plans, minutes of meetings, staff development records, marketing materials and monitoring data. One training session was observed and awarded a grade 2.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for work

Grade 2

7. The Harington Scheme has contracts to deliver work-based training for young people and for adults, and New Deal voluntary sector training. Of the 30 trainees, 20 are on work-based training for young people, five on work-based training for adults, and five are New Deal clients. Trainees can take more than one programme. The Scheme is accredited by an awarding body to deliver horticultural skills, amenity horticulture, wordpower and numberpower, all at NVQ level 1 or below. The Scheme also provides training in key skills which are mapped to the amenity horticulture NVQ. Much of the on-the-job training occurs with the Harington Gardeners, a subsidiary limited company of the Harington Scheme charity, based in adjacent premises and which undertakes horticultural contract work in the locality. The self-assessment report contained a great number of strengths, many of which were narrative describing standard practice, while others could not be confirmed at inspection. The seven weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report are largely correct, but most of them belong in generic areas. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent on-the-job resources
- ◆ training customised to trainees' needs
- ◆ good retention rates
- ◆ good achievement rates
- ◆ effective literacy and numeracy training and assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ vocational content not always appropriate to trainees' employment ambitions
- ◆ poor links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ missed opportunities to match literacy and numeracy to vocational training

8. The Scheme is well equipped with good-quality tools, and trainees have access to a wide range of locations to develop horticultural skills, both at the main site and through contract work with Harington Gardeners. Trainees are able to join the gardeners for short periods of work experience to give a wider range of opportunities to develop skills and complete their qualifications. Horticultural tasks include mowing, weeding, planting and general tidying of sites. At the end of the two-year training programme, many trainees are offered sheltered employment as assistant gardeners for up to one year with Harington Gardeners.

9. There is a range of other work placements, most of which are used to develop interpersonal and life skills and to give experience of a working environment. A major supermarket provides opportunities for customer service tasks, including collecting baskets and trolleys, and packing goods at the checkouts. Trainees work at a city farm, assisting with feeding animals, and doing general tidying and some basic horticultural tasks. Some trainees work in administrative support at a charitable trust which works to help children with mobility difficulties to live a more independent life. Another workplace is a furniture-recycling project which helps families on low incomes by distributing renovated furniture and domestic electrical goods. Work-placement experience includes stripping and cleaning electrical equipment and simple re-assembly.

10. Each trainee has an individual training plan which is reviewed and updated regularly to take account of changing needs and circumstances. Where appropriate, additional training is arranged. One trainee attends pottery classes at a local college to improve dexterity; floristry training is also available. During 1997-98, the majority of trainees completed their agreed programmes. There were only three early leavers from the youth programme in the previous year and during the current year none from the adult prevocational programme and one from New Deal.

11. Assessment of wordpower and numberpower portfolios is regular and thorough. Dedicated assessment sessions are timetabled, and most assessment tasks are completed by trainees without assistance from the tutor/assessor. Detailed assessment records are kept including assessment plans, observation sheets, record sheets, witness reports and assessors' feedback notes. Trainees' final work is supported by drafts and rough work to show development. Trainees are taught in a pleasant and well-resourced classroom, which is also used for teaching the theoretical aspects of horticulture.

12. All trainees undertake training in amenity horticulture. No other vocational training or qualifications are offered. A number of trainees do not wish to continue work in this vocational area after their training period ends. Except for Harington Gardeners, there are few work-experience placements in this vocational area and there are limited opportunities to transfer skills learnt at the Scheme into other

workplaces. Although wordpower and numberpower portfolios contain some worksheets related to horticulture, most of the activities are based around life skills or social interests. Wordpower and numberpower qualifications are normally completed before trainees go on work placement and opportunities to use real work-related evidence are missed.

13. Except for New Deal clients, who have not been with the Scheme for long, progression into sheltered employment is excellent, with 100 per cent of trainees finding workplaces.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

14. The Scheme operates an equal opportunities policy for staff and trainees which is annually reviewed and meets TEC requirements. Recruitment of trainees is monitored for gender, ethnicity and disability, and action plans are produced to address issues of under-representation. Trainees are made aware of their rights and responsibilities at induction. An equal opportunities committee, with trainees represented, meets regularly. The self-assessment report cited one strength, which was actually an amalgam of several strengths and standard practice, and no weaknesses. The inspectors found additional strengths and one weakness. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that shown in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees involved in various committees
- ◆ effective use of equal opportunities data in recruitment process
- ◆ positive use of female role models

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ limited access for people with mobility problems

15. Trainees are represented on equal opportunities, health and safety, and training council committees and at directors' meetings, and they are invited to bring forward issues for discussion. Employers are also invited to join the equal opportunities committee, and two have done so. The outcomes of meetings are communicated to all trainees, and minutes of training council meetings are taped to enable wider access and understanding. An equal opportunities action plan is produced by the management annually and is based on results of the committees' discussions and monitoring of data. In the past year, the number of trainees from minority ethnic groups has risen from 26 per cent to 56 per cent. This has been achieved by developing strong links with community groups and associations. Monitoring of data has led to an awareness of the poor representation of women. Consequently, the

proportion of female trainees at the Scheme has risen from 4.6 per cent to 16 per cent. However, the number of men still far outweighs the number of women. Action is being taken to address this imbalance through liaison with local women's associations. In order to encourage the participation and retention of women, new female trainees joining the scheme are linked with an established female trainee for peer support.

16. The Scheme monitors the equal opportunities policies of the employers it uses, and offers its own policy to employers without such arrangements. It also has a comprehensive, written complaints and grievance procedure. This has been produced as a simple flow chart for ease of use, as well as being in a formal structure. There is a complaints book, but this is rarely used as trainees prefer to raise any concerns with staff in person.

17. The grounds at the Scheme allow some access for those using wheelchairs. However, there are steep slopes which limit full involvement of trainees with mobility difficulties. Access to some buildings is through narrow doors and over shallow steps. At the subsidiary company, Harington Gardeners, there is a steep flight of stairs which restricts access to the building for trainees with mobility difficulties. None of the provider's vehicles are adapted for those using wheelchairs.

18. In general, there is an open access policy to recruit people from all sectors of the community, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity and disability, the only constraint being that the Scheme specialises in support for people with moderate to severe learning and physical disabilities. Once they have joined the Scheme, trainees are treated fairly and without discrimination.

Trainee support

Grade 1

19. Staff at the Scheme are trained to give appropriate counselling and advice to trainees. The Scheme employs an employment officer who gives support and advice on opportunities for employment and progression. There is a range of promotional literature available so that potential trainees, parents, referral agencies and employers can gain accurate and up-to-date information about the Scheme. All support procedures are reviewed annually. The self-assessment report cited one strength and one weakness which the inspectors were able to confirm. The inspectors found further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade higher than that shown in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective mentoring arrangements
- ◆ high level of support for trainees from volunteers
- ◆ thorough basic skills assessment
- ◆ excellent exit and aftercare strategies
- ◆ clear understanding by trainees of induction issues

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unplanned programme tasters
- ◆ no formal written policy for accreditation of prior learning

20. Trainees are allocated a key worker from the start of their programme, who is a member of staff who takes a special interest in their development and welfare. Key workers are also responsible for co-ordinating formal reviews of progress every two months. The key worker liaises with all those involved in the trainee's learning programme. Reviews are detailed and consider developments in the vocational area, literacy and numeracy, life skills and any work experience that has been undertaken. A specialist worker visits trainees on work experience and monitors progress, often on a weekly basis. A network of volunteers support full-time staff and give particular trainees close daily support. This is particularly advantageous for trainees with severe learning difficulties or with limited communication skills. Volunteers work efficiently with the full-time staff. The basic skills agency test is used as a basis to assess levels of literacy and numeracy, however, the test is not always appropriate to this client group and certain aspects, such as reading, have been adapted to give more accurate information on trainees' levels of competence. Self-assessment of personal effectiveness and life skills is occasionally undertaken where appropriate. Following assessment, a detailed summary of individual trainee's development needs is prepared and trainees' progress towards agreed goals is monitored after approximately eight training sessions.

21. A specialist worker provides job-search training, exit support and career guidance. All trainees attend training sessions to prepare them for employment and to help them choose a career path prior to leaving the Scheme. Contact is maintained with trainees after they have left the Scheme. It is common for the Scheme to keep in touch with trainees for several years and for trainees to benefit from continuing help and guidance. Liaison between the Scheme and specialist employment agencies and trusts ensures that support continues into employment where necessary. There is good recall by trainees of their induction programme. Issues such as health and safety and rights and responsibilities are regularly re-enforced through snapshot surveys and review activities.

22. There are established written procedures for accreditation of prior learning, achievements and experience, but no formal written policy. The procedures include seeking references from schools or any other training organisations, keeping National Records of Achievement up to date and drawing out any undocumented achievements at the initial interview. This information is used to shape individual training plans. In the self-assessment report, the Scheme acknowledges occasional difficulties in getting references from schools and colleges, and consequently trainees' National Records of Achievement may not always fully reflect trainees' abilities or accomplishments.

23. Although 'taster' sessions are offered to trainees before they join the Scheme, there is no structure to these. Trainees attend the scheme and observe what is happening at that time, but do not always get a full picture of what is available to

them. The Harington Scheme is one of three regional finalists nominated for the *1999 Remploy Leading the Way Awards* for the South East, which is a national award recognising excellence in support given to people with learning difficulties enabling them to obtain employment.

Management of training

Grade 2

24. The management structure of the Harington Scheme has three layers: senior management, junior management and training and assessment staff. Management decisions are informed by a board of directors and a training committee which has representation from external bodies such as the careers service, employers and trainees. The Scheme achieved Investors in People accreditation in May 1999. The Scheme has well-established links with a range of employers used as placements. There is an adequate computer-based management-information system which is used for monitoring progress and attendance on a weekly basis.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular and focused meetings
- ◆ open and inclusive management style
- ◆ effective training and deployment of staff to deal with trainees' diverse needs
- ◆ good use of management-information data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ over-stretched on-the-job staff
- ◆ no formal induction for agency staff

25. The style and methods of management are such that the opinions of all staff and trainees are sought and used to develop and modify policies. All staff and trainees are kept regularly informed of issues that may affect them or the Scheme. All of the staff have clear roles and responsibilities, and although the current staff structure is relatively new and untested, it is clear that everyone involved in the training co-operates and works as a team.

26. There is a comprehensive programme of meetings, each concerned with different aspects of training, such as dealing with trainees' progression and health and safety. Executive meetings are held every two months and full board meetings every three months. The agendas of all these meetings demonstrate focus and purpose, as do the minutes.

27. Staff at the primary workplace, who must balance successful commercial operations with providing a good-quality learning environment for several trainees, are occasionally unable to meet the trainees' needs, and recruitment of more staff is being considered.

28. There are clear and fair policies and procedures for the recruitment, induction, appraisal and development of all staff. Staff development is undertaken on a weekly basis, and is very much focused on meeting the needs of a very diverse group of trainees. Recent sessions have included such topics as equal opportunities, Makaton sign language, assessor awards, counselling skills, health and safety and computing. As a consequence of this regular training and development, and of the rigorous recruitment procedures, all the staff are very well qualified.

29. The management of volunteers is much the same as for other staff; volunteers are given induction and training and they are subject to the same rules as other staff. Similarly, all directors participate in in-service training. The Scheme makes occasional use of paid agency staff who are not always inducted to the Scheme. However, the Scheme acknowledges this in its self-assessment report and is taking steps to ensure that induction is given to all employees.

30. Information, data and statistics arising from meetings, surveys and reviews, and relating to such matters as recruitment from minority ethnic groups, and achievement, attendance and retention, are effectively analysed and used to inform policies and procedures.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

31. The Scheme conducts satisfaction surveys among all customer groups every six months. These groups include trainees, past trainees, parents and guardians, schools and colleges, network organisations and employers. Similar surveys are carried out among staff every six months.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear, comprehensive and well-understood policies
- ◆ exceptional history of good TEC and other audits
- ◆ systematic and thorough reviews and surveys of all aspects of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate mechanism for comparison with other providers
- ◆ underdeveloped self-assessment process
- ◆ reactive quality assurance strategy

32. There are comprehensive written policies dealing with almost every aspect of the Scheme's activities, including recruitment, staff appraisal and development, and health and safety. These policies are reviewed at least annually with the involvement of all staff and a representative group of trainees. All of the staff contributed to the self-assessment process and their remarks and suggestions were taken into account for use in action-planning. The self-assessment report initially provided by the

Scheme was incomplete and, although it did analyse the organisation in some detail, it did not describe the activities or draw out the strengths and weaknesses. A later supplement to the report did indicate a narrow range of strengths and weaknesses, but these did not encompass every aspect of the Scheme's activity.

33. The annual NLTEC financial audits, six-monthly external verifier reports, six-monthly TEC health and safety inspections, quarterly TEC contract reports and annual quality audits, carried out for the TEC by consultants, are all positive and complimentary, and demonstrate a commitment by the Scheme to achieving quality and to continual improvement.

34. The Scheme has an impressively well-organised approach to reviewing each aspect of training. Existing policies and procedures are subject to routine review, and operational or management innovations are given timely and detailed consideration to discern their effectiveness or otherwise. This systematic process usually results in appropriate action being taken.

35. The Harington Scheme does not have fully developed external measuring systems and so cannot easily gauge how well, or otherwise, it is doing in comparison to similar providers, both locally and nationally. The chief weakness in quality assurance at the Scheme is that most policies and procedures are developed as needs arise, rather than in anticipation of events. Policies for important core activities such as health and safety, equal opportunities and staff development have been prioritised and completed, but policies for managing staff leave or for accrediting trainees' prior learning have yet to be written.