



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 1999

Gordano Training

SUMMARY

Gordano Training specialises in offering well-planned, coherent and sensitive prevocational training in construction, retailing and business administration for young people who are struggling at the beginning of their careers. Its provision for these young people is exceptionally good. It also offers satisfactory training, with good trainee support, to other young people, in bricklaying, painting and decorating, business administration, and information technology. Its work in equal opportunities is good, but some of its procedures are not yet formalised. The organisation's management structures and quality assurance procedures are very new, and not yet fully developed, although it has done some interesting work, for example, in measuring the value added to trainees by the training programmes it offers.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Business administration	3
Foundation for work	1

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective implementation of open access policy
- ◆ sensitive matching of trainees to programme and work placements
- ◆ continuous improvement of training
- ◆ trainees' progression to further training and employment
- ◆ creative learning opportunities in Training Zone
- ◆ innovative commercial projects in construction
- ◆ opportunities for additional qualifications
- ◆ good staff development, especially in training skills

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no coherent quality assurance plan
- ◆ ineffective training plans
- ◆ little integration of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ employers' poor awareness of NVQs
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills
- ◆ poorly defined procedures
- ◆ underdeveloped organisational strategy for internal verification
- ◆ no evaluation of equal opportunities

INTRODUCTION

1. Gordano Training is a small private training provider, which covenants all its profits to its parent company, Brunel Training Group. Gordano Training has the same managing director as Brunel Training Group, but is autonomous. It started as a multi-sector training company in 1983 in North Somerset, then merged in 1989 with a construction training company and moved to central Bristol. It offers training for young people in administration, information technology, bricklaying, painting and decorating, retailing, distribution, customer service, and foundation for work. Its foundation for work programme, which offers Training Zone programmes for disadvantaged young people, was, until just before the inspection, supported by the European Social Fund (ESF) but was being reformed as a Learning Gateway in association with the local careers service. There were 113 trainees, and 13 members of staff involved in training, assessment or internal verification, as well as the training centre manager. There were only eight trainees in the retailing and customer service occupational area at the time of inspection, so this area was not inspected. Gordano Training has a contract with WESTEC, the local training and enterprise council, for modern apprenticeships, national traineeships, other youth training, and the Learning Gateway.

2. Gordano Training is positioned centrally, in an area of Bristol where there is a high level of residents from one of the city's two significant minority ethnic groups. Although the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is only 5 per cent in Bristol overall, it is 29 per cent in the ward where Gordano Training is based. Gordano Training is offering training in two of the occupational areas which seem to be most buoyant locally. The Bristol area has a high demand for administrative and information technology skills, because of the large number of financial service centres. There is a considerable amount of construction work going on in the city, with two large projects expected to provide jobs for the next four or five years. In August 1998, the local unemployment rate was slightly higher than the national average, at 6.1 per cent, compared with 5.8 per cent. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 29 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. However, Bristol has a large number of independent schools whose results are not included in the local average.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The organisation produced its second self-assessment report in the months before inspection. Unusually, staff found the second one more difficult to do than the first, because they had already identified and addressed the more obvious weaknesses. They found that it was necessary to start again, rather than just try to update and build on their first report. They had considerable help from the TEC, largely because they were involved with the TEC's pilot for self-assessment. However, they now feel that they have made the process their own, and it is integrated with their quality improvement arrangements. All staff were involved in the production of the report, and used the feedback from trainees which is collected regularly.

4. Four inspectors spent a total of 14 days based at Gordano Training's premises in St Paul's Bristol. They observed training sessions, assessments and reviews, and interviewed 36 trainees, 11 employers and supervisors, and 16 of Gordano Training's managers and members of staff, including all the training staff. They looked at portfolios, assessment and tracking records, trainees' files, and other documents. They awarded the training sessions which they observed three grades of 2 and two grades of 3.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

5. There are 32 trainees in construction, of whom four are modern apprentices in painting and decorating, two following NVQs at level 2, and two at level 3. There are four national trainees, two in bricklaying, and two in painting and decorating. Of the other trainees, two are working towards bricklaying NVQs, one at level 1, and the other at level 2. Five are doing general building at level 1. The remaining 17 are working for painting and decorating qualifications, seven at level 1, seven at level 2, and three at level 3. Half of the trainees have been identified as requiring additional support in literacy and numeracy. Training and assessment are carried out in the Dean Street centre and on various sites in and around the Bristol area. A team of trainee painters and decorators undertakes projects which include decorating a local school, a vicarage and local domestic property. All off-the-job training and theoretical knowledge is provided at the centre by experienced and occupationally qualified trainers. All staff involved in assessment have the appropriate qualifications. Nearly all the trainees are employed and attend the centre for training one week in every four, subject to the demands of their employers. Trainees based at the centre gain work experience on jobs carried out by the project team. This method of gaining working experience is of particular relevance to the trainees on the Training Zone option. It allows them to gain occupational skills and confidence under close supervision at the centre, before transferring to building

sites. Trainee numbers have decreased over the period 1997 to 1999 from 52 to 32. This has been offset by the increase in the number of trainees in the Training Zone programme, which currently total 30. The level of employment among trainees (94 per cent) is higher than would be expected for an area of high unemployment such as this part of Bristol. The achievement rate of 56 per cent is just above the national average. The average length of time trainees take to achieve the NVQ has lessened over the last year from 46 weeks to 33. The self-assessment report was candid and self-critical, although some of the weaknesses it identified were no longer significant by the time of the inspection. It identified the major strengths in the training. Inspectors awarded the same grade as was in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work-based training
- ◆ excellent use of commercial project work

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poorly structured portfolios
- ◆ poor awareness of NVQs by employers
- ◆ adverse effect of external workplace circumstances on some level 1 trainees' learning

6. The training offered to trainees on the programme includes a wide variety of real work to stimulate and maintain trainees' interest. Most of the skills needed for the NVQ can be met through this work, which includes general building, roof work, block work and painting and decorating. Trainers offer extra skills and qualifications which trainees will need at work, for example, in first-aid, and manual handling. Over the last year, commercial projects have been developed, to offer real work and also to create income for the training activity. The projects include working outside. Trainers supervise level 2 and 3 trainees, but the level 3 trainees supervise the level 1 trainees, so providing a safe environment for the development of their supervisory skills. Level 3 trainees also provide role models to motivate the less able or experienced trainees. Assessors visit trainees regularly in the workplace. They work well with employers to give appropriate support to individual trainees, taking into account the trainees' abilities and character. Shy, quieter trainees are found placements where there is not too much teamwork or customer contact required of them, until they have developed enough confidence to be able to cope with the usual banter of a building site. Employers are given accurate and appropriate information to enable them to understand trainees' behaviour, probable responses, and specific needs.

7. Trainees' portfolios are not well structured. Some have assessments, theory questions and answers, and job knowledge questions, all mixed up together. Others do not have some of these parts of the portfolios at all. New trainees on level 1 NVQs now have their portfolios ready assembled for them when they start, with

their standards and dividers already in place. Because of the lack of structure to the portfolios, it is difficult for trainees to know where they are on their programme. There is a monitoring chart on the office wall, but it is not easy for trainees to interpret and to work out how they are progressing individually. Employers are not in a position to help trainees understand their progress. Their own level of understanding of NVQs is low; they do not understand the unit structure, and so are unable to help trainees spot possible assessment opportunities as they arise naturally at work. A book to record work-based achievement is just being introduced to try and help employers monitor their trainees' progress, but it is only being used in two placements so far. Off-the-job training is provided every fourth week, but trainees sometimes cannot attend because of pressure from their employers to complete a job or other circumstances. If trainees at level 1 who have learning difficulties miss their training week, they sometimes find it hard to catch up, and they lose the support which their off-the-job training can give to their experience at work. If they haven't kept a work diary of their learning experiences at work, or if there is no site log, they find it very difficult to regain the momentum of their programme.

Business administration

Grade 3

8. There are 31 trainees in this occupational area. Of these, eight are administration modern apprentices, of whom five are working towards their NVQ at level 3, and the other three are working towards their level 2. There are 11 national trainees in business administration, and four in information technology. There are also other information technology trainees of whom two are working towards a level 3 NVQ, two are working towards a level 2, and one is working towards a level 1. Other young people on work-based learning programmes are working towards administration NVQs, four at level 2, and three at level 1. Most trainees come into the centre for a day or half-a-day each week, for group training sessions, to practise for their text or wordprocessing examinations, or to work through distance learning materials or question sheets from text books. Tutors are available for individual support. Twenty-four of the trainees are employed, and work experience placements have been found for three of the other seven. Most trainees work in small businesses in central Bristol or one of the nearby business parks. A few work for larger organisations. Tutors/assessors visit the trainees in their workplaces to carry out reviews and negotiate action plans. The commercial centre is separate from the rest of the training provider's premises, but trainees' files are kept in the main office across the road. Retention of trainees and achievement figures are good. There have been only small numbers of modern apprentices to date, but only two have left without completing their programme, both with good personal reasons for doing so. Of the trainees working towards an NVQ, nearly 70 per cent complete their qualification, with an average length of stay of less than 12 months. Figures for previous years are not reliable enough for trends to be identified. National trainees have not been on the programme long enough for many to have completed. The self-assessment report provides a useful description of the aims and practices of the business administration department. It did not recognise the significant weaknesses identified by inspectors, but mentioned others

which inspectors saw as symptoms rather than weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ supportive employers
- ◆ opportunities for extra qualifications
- ◆ good training resources
- ◆ rigorous and innovative assessment for information technology

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ standardised programmes for business administration
- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills integration
- ◆ little workplace assessment for business administration modern apprentices
- ◆ no occupationally experienced internal verifier for information technology

9. Employers and supervisors are enthusiastic about their trainees, and anxious to support their training. They take part in the review process, and provide witness testimony when asked to do so. Although their understanding of key skills is poor, they are supportive of the principles of key skills. All trainees are encouraged to work towards extra qualifications, with the exception of those few who are not released to attend the centre. They are coached for examinations in text and wordprocessing, and tutors spend a considerable amount of time marking their practice papers. Trainees generally perform well in these examinations and many portfolios include certificates of distinction. Trainees were building up to their examination period, and most of the off-the-job training time was taken up with wordprocessing practice to improve accuracy and proofreading abilities. Tutors offer planned and spontaneous group training sessions, as well as individual coaching to trainees in the centre. The commercial centre consists of a large, light and airy room, well equipped with up-to-date computers and software, and with plenty of space for trainees to work on their portfolios, either individually or in small groups. There are separate rooms for meetings or group work. There are sufficient copies of textbooks and other books and manuals for reference. New ideas are being tried out to improve the assessment of information technology, including the tape recording of technical discussions between the assessor and trainee in the workplace. Considerable effort has gone into ensuring that real work pressures apply to the two national trainees who are supplying a computer helpdesk service in-house, until jobs can be secured for them.

10. The training programmes for business administration are not individualised. The training plan which is issued to employers, showing the suggested breakdown of activities for the NVQ between the training centre and the workplace, is standardised, and is not referred to after the beginning of the programme. All trainees are encouraged to undertake similar activities or projects, rather than

concentrating on the requirements and opportunities of the individual workplaces. Trainees on level 1 and 2 NVQs all work through off-the-shelf 'task sheets' for each unit, whether or not these sheets can demonstrate trainees' skills and knowledge in the workplace. Trainees see these task sheets as the core of their portfolios, to be added to where possible from the workplace. The projects and activities which trainees are encouraged to undertake have not been planned to take into account key skills requirements, so obvious opportunities to integrate key skills are being missed. There is no planning to assess key skills in the workplace. Modern apprentices and national trainees are brought into the centre to communicate with each other, rather than being helped to find opportunities for their key skills to be developed and exhibited at work. Modern apprentices in administration are not generally observed in the workplace. Their assessors visit them to review their progress, but assessments are carried out on the portfolio contents when trainees are in the centre. There are no assessment plans. Level 3 modern apprentices go several months without any assessments taking place. One level 2 modern apprentice did not know if she had been assessed at all, although she thought that she had nearly completed her NVQ. Assessment records show very little unit or element achievement for level 3 trainees, in either their NVQ or their key skills. There is no internal verifier with occupational experience in information technology, and only one qualified information technology assessor.

Foundation for work

Grade 1

11. Gordano training is one of the five local training providers contracted by WESTEC to run Training Zone programmes. These are programme designed to help young, often disadvantaged and disaffected people to develop the specific skills they need before progressing to further training or employment. These programmes, partly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) until September 1999, are currently being developed under the new Learning Gateway scheme. Trainees aged between 16 and 17 are mostly referred through the careers services' Learning Partnership West, although the company also receives referrals from the probation service, social services department and schools. Some young people come to Gordano Training on personal recommendation. Trainees participate in sessions on life skills and work-related skills in preparation for work experience, mainstream training and employment. Some trainees receive individual literacy and numeracy support and many of them work towards wordpower or numberpower qualifications. Key skills training and assessment are being introduced to the programme. Three of the six Training Zone trainers, including the manager, have joined the team within the last three months and an additional trainer is due to start in the month after the inspection. Three trainers are part time. Trainees are encouraged to select an occupational area to specialise in as early as possible. They often take part in a range of weekly 'taster' courses to help them decide. Of the 42 trainees currently on the programme, 31 are undertaking initial training in painting and decorating, brickwork and general building. The other options available in-house are business administration or retailing. If trainees want other occupational areas they are offered relevant work experience and then transferred to another specialist provider once they are settled. Of the remaining 11 trainees, five are on placements

and six have not yet selected their occupational areas. The self-assessment report was open and helpful. Inspectors agreed with the strengths in the report, but not the weaknesses, as most of them had already been addressed by the time of the inspection. The grade awarded was higher than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ highly individualised training programmes
- ◆ creative learning opportunities
- ◆ effective co-ordination of the training process
- ◆ high level of trainee satisfaction
- ◆ excellent wordpower and numberpower portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unspecific targets in reviews
- ◆ inadequate training facilities

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees working towards wordpower are given a portfolio containing the blank proformas for the assessments, once they have already started to improve their literacy skills. They are encouraged to select materials and activities for assessment which relate to their occupational training and personal interests. Trainees learn how to take responsibility for their portfolios which are therefore highly individualised. The trainees are also developing skills in portfolio building in preparation for the NVQ assessments. They make their own decisions about what will go in their portfolios and on what they will be assessed.

12. Gordano Training has been working with other Training Zone providers to share good practice and identify common objectives. The provider has developed an assessment questionnaire to use in conjunction with WESTEC's initial assessment procedures and documents. The staff use this as an opportunity to establish mutual respect and trust between trainees and trainers. They discuss the trainees' past experiences at school and at home, focusing on achievements as well as the reasons for some of the difficulties and problems they have experienced. The information is used sensitively and effectively to identify training needs and negotiate goals. Where appropriate, the discussions include selecting possible occupational areas, work-placement opportunities and longer-term career aspirations. The trainers record their assessment of the trainees' personal and work-related skills to provide a benchmark from which to identify progress later in the programme. In their approach, the staff are careful to ensure that the training programmes take account of the trainees' individual needs and preferences. The life skills workshops are very well thought out, and incorporate varied and appropriate activities and imaginative training methods which encourage high levels of participation. Guest speakers from local organisations present workshops on an extensive range of topics such as drug or alcohol abuse, while opportunities for outdoor pursuits such as caving and orienteering are organised on a regular basis. Trainees complete a written evaluation at the end of each activity, as part of developing their reviewing and self-analysing skills.

13. The staff have a wide range of experience and expertise in working with young people from disadvantaged groups. They show a genuine interest in helping trainees to reach their full potential. Each member of the team has overall responsibility for different aspects of the training. Weekly meetings ensure that information is

disseminated and arrangements for training are well co-ordinated. Charts and tables are used effectively to monitor individual trainees' activities and record achievement, while notes on disciplinary actions and details on other sensitive issues are discussed and stored, as appropriate. Trainers from other occupational areas are also involved in this process. Company staff frequently work together to share their local knowledge and contacts and have recently been successful in increasing the work-placement opportunities available to Training Zone trainees. Employers are carefully selected to ensure that the experience they provide is supportive and demanding enough to meet the needs of the trainees and the overall purpose of work experience.

14. Trainees are positive about the progress they are making towards achieving their personal goals and they value the opportunities provided by the programme. They appreciate the individual attention and the high ratio of one member of staff to every six trainees. There is a wide range of additional learning opportunities to provide a route into employment or further vocational training. For example, a high number of trainees achieve a certificate in manual handling or first aid. Literacy and numeracy training is given in small groups or individual training sessions. A wide range of resources has been developed to enable the trainees to practise specific skills before being assessed for wordpower or numberpower. All basic skills training is presented in a way which is relevant to the trainees' occupational training or personal interests. The Basic Skills Agency assessments are appropriately used to identify trainees who would benefit from working towards wordpower or numberpower at entry level. Trainees who are above that level receive literacy and numeracy training as appropriate, but do not currently work towards a certificate. Key skills assessments are being developed.

15. WESTEC documentation is used to monitor and record progress reviews which take place every two to four weeks. Although the discussions are focused on recent achievements and forthcoming training, they do not identify specific measurable targets for trainees to achieve before the next review. Comments on the review sheets are mostly written in general terms, and trainees' recollection of their immediate learning goals is often unclear or unspecific. Resources are not sufficient to meet all the needs of the Training Zone programme. There are not enough rooms available, and this restricts the activities that can be carried out at any one time. There is often a lack of quiet work areas, which make it difficult to hold confidential discussions or provide individual support without interruption or distraction. Some trainees recognise the need to improve their information technology skills, either for employment or training purposes, or to help them work on literacy skills, and they have produced good documents or colourful posters. Although there is appropriate software available, however, the four computers are inadequate and slow, often making their use frustrating and unproductive for trainees.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

16. Gordano Training's equal opportunities policy embraces both company employees and trainees. The company manual contains guidelines for its implementation. It also includes a guidance document for trainees with learning difficulties and a section on the implications of current equal opportunities legislation. All staff have been given a copy of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The company's commitment to equal opportunities features on marketing materials and employers are asked to endorse these values to ensure that trainees are protected from discrimination in the workplace. Grievance and complaints procedures are explained to trainees at induction and a copy is given to those on mainstream training programmes. There is a member of staff with designated responsibility to promote equal opportunities and ensure the company's compliance with legislation. In November 1998, Gordano Training Ltd declared a commitment to work towards the Equality Foundation Training bronze award and has convened an equal opportunity focus group. There are plans to form a trainees' focus group to help develop this process. The self-assessment report did not offer critical judgements in this area. Although inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, they considered that some of them were not significant and some were similar. The one weakness in the report was not significant. They identified two additional major weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' good awareness of their rights and responsibilities
- ◆ effective implementation of open access policy
- ◆ increased number of minority ethnic trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no structured evaluation of equal opportunities strategy and policy
- ◆ lack of formal monitoring of employers' equal opportunities
- ◆ no access for those with restricted mobility

17. Trainees have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues. The company's policy is presented at induction but the written information in the information and induction packs given to trainees provides inadequate back up. The policy is not on display at either of the two training sites. Trainees are assessed two weeks after induction to check their overall understanding of the issues and to reinforce the main points that were raised. Equal opportunities are well promoted in training, especially on the Training Zone programme, which includes sessions on stereotyping and role-play activities. For example, in a session on stereotyping,

trainees are encouraged to reflect on their own attitudes and practices. The grievance procedures are also made explicit at induction. Complaints are dealt with appropriately and fairly, initially at departmental level. Trainees clearly understand that inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated. In 1998-99, several trainees were sacked from the programme for bullying, harassment or other similar offences.

18. Gordano Training's mission statement promotes a commitment to providing training opportunities within an equal opportunity environment. This is emphasised by the open access policy which guarantees all prospective trainees initial access to a training programme which is appropriate for their assessed learning needs, irrespective of background and past record. This approach is backed by the staff's sensitive and flexible provision of support to meet the individual needs of trainees. Some additional reference resources have been purchased to provide staff with information to help them support trainees' specific needs. Management invited parents to the company to make an informal presentation on Attention Deficit Disorder after the company realised that they were unsure how to respond appropriately to this type of disability.

19. Gordano Training constantly reviews the percentage of minority ethnic trainees on the programme compared with the percentage within the City of Bristol (5 per cent). Twelve per cent of trainees currently on the programme are of minority ethnic origin, compared with 5.6 per cent over the last two years. Recommendation by current trainees from minority ethnic groups is largely responsible for this increase. Managers are continuing to monitor this trend and have extended this monitoring to include the achievement of trainees. An increasing proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups is achieving their qualification. The company is aware that they are finding it difficult to arrange work-placement opportunities for minority ethnic trainees and people with disabilities, and the two business liaison officers are currently developing links with community organisations and companies for this purpose. Trainees conform to traditional gender stereotypes, that is, in business administration, most of the trainees are women and in construction, most are men.

POOR PRACTICE

On the back of all three doors in the female trainees' toilets were large posters of naked men. One poster had a calendar of men in a variety of poses representing months of the year. The images were inappropriate for what should be a safe environment. Gordano Training had not checked to ensure that any materials displayed were appropriate. The matter was quickly addressed.

20. There are no formal systems for the routine review of equal opportunities and procedures. The current policy is not dated and not all policy documents include references to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. Equal opportunities are not prominent on meeting agendas, although specific relevant issues are frequently discussed on an informal basis. However, there is no self-critical analysis to identify any gaps in the company's equal opportunities performance, and there are no action plans for promoting equal opportunities or internally set targets. The company does not know whether trainees feel that its practices are effective in providing them with equality of opportunity. Five members of staff have attended the training for assessment towards the Equality Foundation Award and the company is looking to this process to provide a framework for the evaluation of their equal opportunities practices.

21. The employers' agreement refers briefly to equal opportunities issues, but Gordano Training's commitment to equal opportunities is not clearly outlined to

employers. All staff have been given a copy of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. Employers' practices are not routinely monitored to ensure that trainees are being fairly treated and protected from harassment or discrimination. Both of the company's training sites are inaccessible to wheelchair users and there are no toilet facilities for people with disabilities. Trainees with restricted mobility would find it difficult to access all the training facilities at the main site, which are on three floors of a building without a lift.

Trainee support

Grade 2

22. Gordano Training has procedures for the recruitment and the initial assessment of trainees. If required, prevocational training is available through the Training Zone option. All trainees receive additional support and training in job-search skills. Where Gordano Training is unable to provide a suitable programme for applicants, they are referred to other appropriate training providers. An induction takes place in the centre. Trainees from different programmes receive an initial induction together which is followed by departmental sessions. An induction to the construction workshops and working sites is also included where appropriate. There is one member of staff who is responsible for the initial mentoring of trainees before they enter work placements. Trainees' progress is regularly reviewed and feedback is given to them. Inspectors broadly agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report, although it missed some weaknesses identified by inspectors. The grade was the same as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough initial assessment of basic skills
- ◆ thorough and informative induction
- ◆ trainees sensitively matched to programme and work placements
- ◆ high levels of support for individual trainees
- ◆ strong links with external agencies
- ◆ good progression of trainees to new NVQs and into employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal use of accreditation of trainees' prior learning
- ◆ ineffective training plans

23. All trainees are given the Basic Skills Agency assessments for literacy and numeracy. There are a number of appropriately trained staff to administer this process. In-depth interviews and a scoring of occupational interest and experience complement this assessment. This helps to match trainees to an appropriate

programme. The company ensures that any trainees with particular needs receive training at the appropriate level, and this includes taking into account learning styles, and the possibility of starting the trainee at NVQ level 1.

24. Trainees receive a thorough and a well-designed induction. The induction is separated into two parts. The first is a general induction to the company and the second relates to the programme they will follow. Induction extends over two weeks and the process is evaluated. Trainees find the induction informative and enjoyable.

25. Trainees are able to spend an extended time in the centre developing personal and social skills as well as occupational competence before entering a work placement. Staff carefully manage this process, and encourage trainees to take an active part in the decision making. The work placements are supportive and recognise the specific needs of individual trainees. This is a significant factor which contributes to the high number of trainees who progress through NVQ levels and into work.

26. The company recognises that some trainees require high levels of support and ensures that staff have the capacity and flexibility to provide it. Tuition is often provided on a one-to-one basis and trainees respond positively to the time and attention devoted to them. Many trainees have specific needs and receive appropriate support, and good liaison between departments ensures that trainees' needs are met. Staff are sensitive to the position of trainees and are resourceful in helping them to move forward and grow in self-esteem. Where trainees do encounter problems with which staff are not equipped to deal, they refer the trainees to appropriate agencies. Not all additional support provided for trainees is formally recorded and reviewed.

27. The company instituted 'trainee of the month' and 'trainee of the year' award schemes last year. These provide motivation for some trainees and inter-departmental rivalry. Trainees take pride in receiving a certificate which acknowledges their performance, and a prize of £10. Their success is also celebrated throughout the company and their certificates are displayed prominently in the centre.

28. For modern apprentices and national trainees there is only an informal initial assessment of their key skills. It is ineffective in identifying the trainees' current and potential ability to cope with different levels of key skills. Similarly, there is an informal approach in the use of accreditation of trainees' prior learning. Although the trainees' previous training and work experience is recognised, their programmes do not reflect this. Their achievements are not used in determining their training plans. Currently, no member of staff is qualified to act as an advisor in this area of work.

29. The trainees do not have training plans which identify how they will receive their NVQ training. The initial plans are superficial and do not record anything more than broad areas for development. They are not amended as a result of the regular

progress reviews and do not reflect developments at work. There is a lack of specific action-planning and target-setting.

Management of training

Grade 3

30. Gordano Training was acquired by its parent company in March 1998. Gordano Training has 20 staff. Most have permanent contracts and work full time. Staff are divided among three departments covering construction, business administration and the Training Zone. Two departments are located in one building while the business administration department occupies third floor office space across the road. The company has one placement officer who is responsible for finding work placements and undertaking initial health and safety checks. There are also two administrators. The heads of department report to the executive manager, who in turn works closely with the managing director of Gordano Training's parent company. The executive manager is responsible to two directors, one of whom is the managing director of the holding company. The executive manager meets monthly with the two directors. She also reports to the holding company's trustees and attends their quarterly meetings. Within Gordano Training, weekly departmental and fortnightly management meetings are held. So called weekly 'sun rise meetings' provide an open forum for staff to update their colleagues about their activities and to express their views on developments. There has been some turnover in staff over the last year. All new staff receive an induction and all have an appraisal twice a year. The self-assessment report was not particularly critical in this area. Strengths were over-stated, and one significant weakness was missed, although the grade awarded by inspectors is the same as the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open, collaborative management
- ◆ good communication across the company
- ◆ generous staff development programme focusing on training skills
- ◆ creative value-added system measuring trainees' achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ new systems not fully established
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills
- ◆ little integration of on-and off-the-job training
- ◆ poorly drafted staff contracts

31. Following the takeover of Gordano Training a number of systems and approaches have been introduced from the parent company. Many of these are comparatively new and have not yet been established as working practices within

Gordano Training. A very recent, clear, realistic and analytical business plan has been produced. It contains appropriate objectives, which staff know, understand and can begin to adopt within the corporate strategy. Although the business plan is well written, there has not been a single identifiable strategy for introducing changes and new systems. Many initiatives have just been or are about to be introduced. This process of change is now accelerating and has brought with it some real benefits to the company and, in particular, to the position of the staff. This is reflected in a sense of optimism and the strong feeling of teamwork that pervades the company.

32. Gordano Training has a clear management structure. Staff roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood. During the weekly early morning 'sun rise' meetings all of the staff are asked to contribute what they are engaged in and to comment on issues and matters that are affecting them. These meetings are chaired by a different person each week. Although there are no agendas for these meetings, minutes are taken and distributed. The minutes demonstrate an open approach to the management of the company with staff being able to raise their concerns, ask questions and identify issues as they arise. These meetings provide an open forum, which together with the departmental and management meetings, represent part of the implementation of a management philosophy which speaks of effective communication up, down and across the company. Both the executive manager and the managing director are highly visible within the company.

33. Over the last two years the company has implemented a coherent staff development programme. It is based upon individual staff training needs, identified through twice-yearly appraisals and related to the company's objectives. This has resulted in a strong programme based on staff achieving training qualifications. For example, all of the staff in the construction department have participated in a 'train the trainer' course and have achieved, or are working towards, a certificate in training adults. All of the business administration department staff are trained trainers. Many of the staff have certificates in education or appropriate training and development NVQ units, as well as those required for assessment purposes. One focus of the current staff development programme is training staff to develop and assess trainees' key skills. The process is, however, relatively new and some training has yet to start. This has resulted in the late introduction and only partial integration of key skills with the NVQ programmes for national trainees and modern apprentices. The explicit use of key skills for national trainees and modern apprentices in the construction sector is only a very recent requirement. However, in administration, the slow development of key skills has led to wasted opportunities to use naturally occurring evidence and to the duplication of effort.

34. The company has made some effort to try to integrate on-and off-the-job training but this has had little effect on the trainees' experience. In administration, employers indicate on a form which tasks trainees can complete in the workplace matched against the NVQ standards. These forms, however, are not used effectively in planning training or updated during their programme. There is a similar position in construction whereby staff talk to employers about NVQ requirements, but there is no co-ordination between the training received in the centre and that

provided on-the-job by employers. This results in wasted opportunities for learning and, ultimately, for assessment.

35. The company has used a creative added-value scoring system over the last three years to measure the attainment of trainees. This was based originally on the GCE 'A' level information system (ALIS) which establishes benchmarks of performance based upon individual's GCSE grades and achievement. This system has been adapted to measure individual trainees' performance upon their achievement of NVQs. All trainees' performance is measured in this way and average scores are arrived at for individual departments. The construction department, for example, provides the highest level of added value for trainees based upon their entry qualifications. This provides useful information and data relating to trainees' progress. But, these data are not used to measure the overall performance of the company and/or set targets. The system does not make use of additional factors, such as the time that is taken to achieve a qualification.

36. Targets are set for staff but this is based only on individual departments helping to set and meet the training and enterprise council's monthly profiles and contract requirements. The departments monitor individual trainees' progress, but there is no overall company system, based upon, for example, the achievement of individual units to provide more accurate data on how trainees are progressing and provide additional information for setting targets.

37. The takeover of Gordano Training has provided tangible benefits for staff in terms of conditions and pay. This has included the use of contracts of employment and staff being employed on a permanent, rather than casual, temporary or self-employed basis. However, the contract of employment which has been introduced for staff, is slight, and aspects of it do not meet accepted codes of practice. In particular, little attention has been paid to disciplinary or grievance procedures and health and safety issues. No reference is made, for example, to the detailed procedures that are laid down in the company's training manual, which covers all of these aspects.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

38. Gordano Training meets the majority of the requirements of the two awarding bodies with which it works. The executive manager is responsible for its quality assurance arrangements. The company has a training, or quality manual, which contains most of its policies and procedures. Only the procedures which relate directly to the contractual requirements of the training and enterprise council are internally audited. The company has undertaken bi-annual surveys of trainees and employers' views over the last three years. Last year, three members of staff attended external training sessions on the self-assessment process. Throughout this year the company has received support from the training and enterprise council in producing its new self-assessment report. The executive manager wrote the self-assessment report, after detailed discussions and identification of strengths and

weaknesses by staff in the three departments. The executive manager used the information to produce a draft report. This report was reviewed by staff and amended to ensure that it was accurate. The report's quality assurance section is reasonably accurate, although it did not identify the serious weakness of the lack of an overall plan for quality assurance. It identified strengths which were no more than normal practice, but the grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ feedback from trainees and employers used to improve training
- ◆ critical awareness in self-assessment report

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no coherent quality assurance plan
- ◆ some poorly defined procedures
- ◆ little use of statistical data

39. The company uses a variety of measures to evaluate its training. It uses the bi-annual questionnaires to seek the views of trainees and employers on the effectiveness of its work. These questionnaires are analysed and, as a result, improvements are proposed and implemented. A programme has started recently by which the executive manager observes staff training on the Training Zone programme, staff sometimes teach together and evaluate each other's performance. At the end of sessions, trainees provide feedback on how they thought the session went. There is, however, no overall plan to the company's quality assurance arrangements and at no point are they reviewed or evaluated. For example, the quality assurance manual does not have a list of contents or the nature of the policies and procedures it contains. There is a quality control systems statement but this is lodged in the middle of the substantial quality assurance manual. Reference is made to a number of planned events and control systems but without saying how they are related or how any control will be applied. Since being taken over, some of the company's systems have been revised and new measures introduced but this has not been undertaken in a systematic way. Some of the company's policies and procedures are well written and provide detailed instructions. This is particularly evident in the case of the trainees' induction and health and safety. The induction procedure indicates very clearly the information that should be given to trainees and the means and manner by which this should be done. Others, however, provide only a series of bullet points, which do not necessarily convey what is required. Some are out of date as they refer to members of staff who have left the company. In the case of internal verification, there is no overall strategy and the policy only contains abruptly expressed points. One point refers to registering candidates with only one awarding body. There is no reference to a sampling plan or meetings with an external verifier. The last point on the procedure merely states "sampling matrix". There is no strategy for ensuring

that new internal verifiers are trained. Staff regard some of the procedures as guidelines, which they can amend or adjust as they require. There is no policy to identify non-compliance with procedures or to ensure that they are reviewed and amended to suit the purpose for which they were designed. Staff receive abridged copies of the training manual and this is regarded as a form of staff handbook. Not all staff, however, especially those working part time, receive a copy of the handbook or have easy access to those procedures that impinge on their work.

40. The company produces and analyses statistical data on the performance of individual trainees and the work of its departments. This information is, however, not used directly to set targets for improvement. The performance measures used relate to meeting the periodic profiles set in the TEC contracts. The company has identified that there has been a steady improvement in its performance over the last three years in the retention and achievement of NVQs. But this is not linked to any specific measure, policy or strategy. Although the company records information on retention and there have been substantial improvements on this in one occupational area, no attention has been paid to the average length of time trainees spend on programme. The company focuses on an individual trainee's achievement rather than looking at trends and developments it can affect or manage.

41. The company has a number of mechanisms for sharing good practice, but these are largely informal and not all staff are involved in them. Although departments have adopted their own approaches to their operations, formal meetings do occasionally take place between the staff of the different departments. These happen more often between construction and Training Zone staff. Some of this work focuses on how to cope with individual trainees with specific needs. In the case of sharing NVQ-related expertise, one member of staff was asked through his appraisal to support work in another section.

42. Considerable time and energy has been devoted to making sure that the process of producing the self-assessment report provided an accurate statement about the strengths and weaknesses of the company. Staff went through the exercise again this year to assess their own strengths and weaknesses within departments, rather than just updating the self-assessment report from last year. They found this to be a valuable exercise and commented on how they were addressing the weaknesses they had identified in their new self-assessment report. The self-assessment report is regarded by staff as a working document and an important element in their quality assurance arrangements.