



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

# Prospects Training

## SUMMARY

Prospects Training offers good training in construction in its own skills centre at Shoburyness where trainers make use of their extensive industrial experience to relate demonstrations to the workplace. Engineering training is good with excellent instruction and a wide range of learning opportunities at work. Business administration training benefits from committed trainers and assessors, although there are too few real work opportunities. Retailing and customer care training is satisfactory, trainees have a good understanding of their programmes and progress, but workplace staff are not sufficiently involved in the programme. Prospects makes an outstanding commitment to recruit trainees from disadvantaged backgrounds and then staff provide personal and specialist support to enable them to succeed. The management of training is good and benefits from a strong strategic lead and open involvement of staff in developing an effective operational plan. Clearly documented systems and procedures are used. Key skills are not integrated into the vocational aspects of the programmes. The trainee support service provides effective learning support in the occupational areas, and a team of specialists ensure the support that is available is appropriate. Guidance and counselling help many disaffected trainees change their attitude towards training and gain employment. Quality assurance makes extensive use of feedback from trainees to inform improvements.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good outreach activities
- ◆ high-quality instruction
- ◆ flexible training programmes
- ◆ wide range of trainees' needs met by training
- ◆ strong strategic lead and effective planning
- ◆ good learning support integrated into occupational areas

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ many employers lack knowledge of the NVQ system
- ◆ incomplete health and safety procedures
- ◆ poor retention on some programmes
- ◆ no integration of key skills

## INTRODUCTION

1. Prospects Training (Prospects) is the trading name of Sentra Training Ltd, a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The company was formed in 1969 by the Engineering Industry Training Board (EITB), in order to train engineering apprentices. In part as a response to the decline in demand for engineering apprentices, the company has expanded the range and volume of the training services it offers. Prospects' headquarters and multi-skills training centre are close to the town centre of Southend-on-Sea, and it also has a construction training centre in Shoeburyness, some five miles away.

2. Essex Training Enterprise Council (TEC) funds youth and adult training, including modern apprentices and national trainees, and the Employment Service funds New Deal training. Prospects has a total of 358 trainees. There are 134 construction trainees, 145 engineering trainees, 27 business administration trainees, and 52 in retail and customer services. Included in these totals are 25 New Deal clients who are integrated with the others. Companies in the southeast Essex area employ all the modern apprentices. The foundation stage of engineering training takes place at Prospects' own workshops in Southend and the construction foundation stage is at the training centre in Shoeburyness. Off-the-job training in business administration and retailing and customer service is provided at the training centre in Southend. Prospects also runs non-government-funded training and consultancy services from its offices in Southend.

3. Essex's employment is mainly in the service industries, followed by distribution, hotels, manufacturing, construction and agriculture. The area has high rates of unemployment at 6.9 per cent, compared to the national average of 4.5 per cent for 1998. There are some spots of particular economic and social deprivation with unemployment as high as 25 per cent. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 48.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. Some schools have 28 per cent of pupils achieving no GCSE grades at all. These poor educational standards are reflected in the 32 per cent of Prospects' trainees who are endorsed by the TEC as having moderate or severe learning difficulties. In this part of Essex, people from minority ethnic backgrounds make up 2.5 per cent of the population.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Prospects produced its first self-assessment report in May 1999. The director of operations and workshop managers attended three training workshops. An implementation group was established involving key staff from each area of the company, and including the chief executive and two directors. The opinions of staff and trainees were included in the assessment. The TEC reviewed the initial draft. The report gave inspectors an idea of the scope of training offered by Prospects. Many of the strengths in the report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice, and the grades were inaccurate in some areas. The report included a comprehensive and detailed action plan which was clearly presented. As number of true strengths and weaknesses had been identified, work on the action plan had begun and progress had occurred in these areas.

5. Six inspectors spent a total of 22 days with Prospects. They conducted 38 interviews with staff, including workplace supervisors, managers and trainers, and interviewed 63 trainees. They observed assessments, instruction in workshops, visited 16 employers and made six visits to three subcontracted colleges and providers. Inspectors reviewed trainees' files, management information and promotional material. Eight instruction sessions in construction and engineering were observed. The grades awarded for these sessions were all at grades 1 and 2.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Construction

#### Grade 2

6. Prospects has 134 construction trainees in Shoeburyness. Forty-one young people and 24 adults are on work-based training programmes, and 23 are on a bridging project, which provides trainees with access to a full NVQ programme. There are 20 modern apprentices, 11 national trainees, and 15 New Deal clients, with 11 on the full-time education and training option and four on the part-time employment programme. Trainees work towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in brickwork, and in wood and decorative occupations. Some assessment takes place in the workplace and trainees are visited frequently by an assessor. Trainers are experienced in the industry and are qualified occupationally and as assessors. Generic schemes of work are adapted to suit individual needs and to make the best use of the training centre's resources. The centre was opened in 1996, and the rate of those leaving reflects the number of those who achieved NVQs the following year. The number of NVQs achieved for every 100 trainees leaving programmes has risen from 25 per cent in 1996 to 64 per cent in 1998. Retention rates in 1998-99 were 59 per cent for adults and 68 per cent for young people. The trend for 1999 shows further improvement in the NVQ achievement rates. The company's self-assessment report contained little evaluation and failed to identify some significant strengths and a minor weakness.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality instruction
- ◆ good working relationships motivate trainees
- ◆ flexible training programmes meets trainees' needs
- ◆ good on-site training
- ◆ employers committed to training
- ◆ well-planned and -executed assessment

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ most employers lack knowledge of the NVQ process
- ◆ poor retention, especially for young people

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*For on-the-job training, two youth trainees are working on the Millennium Dome project and have training on-the-job operating a computer-aided design (CAD) facility to set up advanced routers. In this way they achieve high levels of joinery skill on hard woods, and see their work contribute to a famous structure.*

7. The quality of the training at the construction centre is excellent. Trainers make outstanding use of their industrial experience to relate practical demonstrations to the workplace. The training centre is heavily used and well equipped with appropriate tools and materials. There is enough space in most areas to carry out a wide range of realistic work activities and the space is efficiently used. At the beginning of the programme, trainees are initially assessed using a basic skills test. However, no assessment of their prior vocational skills or attainment is made, and initial assessment is not used to inform individual training plans. After the basic skills evaluation, some are referred to the construction centre's support trainer. This facility is popular among trainees and many who are not referred also ask for assistance. Trainees benefit from the regular use of live projects for training, which enhance the training facilities at the centre. They frequently work alongside trades people: one was making a cabinet for a shop, and another was laminating a set of fittings for another shop.

8. Staff are committed to their work and quickly establish effective working relationships with their trainees. The bridging project helps to introduce construction training to disaffected young people between the ages of 14 to 16. Some of these trainees are now in full-time training. Activities carried out during the project are accredited towards their NVQ achievement. Trainees work in a responsible manner and are encouraged to manage their own development from an early stage.

9. Training programmes are highly flexible and provide trainees with good opportunities for learning. Most trainees are well motivated and develop a positive approach to training. One element of the level 3 NVQ, which is often simulated by training providers, is the supervision of others in construction. Prospects trainees, however, achieve this by supervising less experienced trainees.

10. Assessment is well planned and trainees are fully aware of all aspects of the assessment process. Assessors have developed pre-assessment checklists and guidelines to allow easy progression. Trainees are assessed frequently and assessment is requested by the trainee when he or she is ready, enabling them to

progress at their own speed. They receive prompt and comprehensive feedback. A quarter of the assessment is carried out at work. Portfolios' are of good quality and they contain photographs of examples of trainees' work. A well-recorded and clear tracking system is used to record trainees' progress, which is regularly reviewed each month. The review is comprehensive and sets targets for achievement through action planning. Workplace training is planned and of high quality.

11. The NVQ achievement rates have been rising steadily and some trainees achieve more than one NVQ during their programme, but the rates of completion for all elements contained within the individual training plan are low. In 1998, 32 per cent of all youth trainees left without completing their programme, and the early leaver rate is higher for young people who are not on modern apprenticeships.

12. Employers are committed to providing good workplace training, but are generally unaware of the NVQ process. Workplace supervisors' lack of NVQ knowledge sometimes results in missed opportunities for trainees to gather work-based evidence. The link between the on- and off-the-job training elements is made through the trainees, whose knowledge of the NVQ process is good. Employers are not aware of what trainees do off-the-job.

## Engineering

## Grade 2

13. Prospects has 145 trainees and clients in engineering as shown in the table below:

PROGRAMME	YOUTH	ADULTS	NEW DEAL	TOTAL
modern apprentices	79			79
national trainees	16			16
other training	31	11		42
full time education and training programme			4	4
employment programme			4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>145</b>

All modern apprentices undertake full time foundation training in Prospects' training centre. Assessment and internal verification is operated by Prospects' qualified staff on site, during this phase of training. The vocational training for modern apprentices includes day-release, either in Prospects' own centre, or at one of five, subcontracted colleges of further education in the vicinity. On completion of the foundation training, all modern apprentices enter the workplace and start to work on their occupationally specific NVQ at level 3. Prospects' training and assessment staff conduct most of the workplace assessments and are assisted by employers' staff, where appropriate. Trainees continue with specialist further education on a day-release basis. National trainees follow a NVQ at level 2 and, on successful completion, are assisted by staff to find either a placement with an employer, or employment with an opportunity for transfer to the modern apprenticeship

programme. All other trainees follow a foundation programme with opportunities to transfer to either national traineeships or full apprenticeships, subject to sponsorship or employment. Assistance is also given to this category of trainee in their search for employment. Data drawn from the management information system does not give a clear picture of the success rates for the modern apprentices. Of those trainees joining between 1995 and 1996 and who could be reasonably expected to have completed, only 33 per cent have achieved their target qualification and the withdrawal rate has been high. Of the other trainees, approximately 70 per cent achieved their target qualification. The self-assessment report was weak on judgement and confusing in structure.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ highly effective off-the-job training
- ◆ high quality of portfolios
- ◆ good achievement for non apprentice trainees
- ◆ wide range of learning opportunities at work
- ◆ good synergy between elements of the training programme

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor retention of modern apprentice
- ◆ some poor machine equipment impacts on trainees' work

14. Off-the-job training and assessment are well planned and organised and are professionally taught by trainers with outstanding skills. The trainers use methods that are designed to develop skills and stretch the trainees at all ability levels. This helps trainees to progress well. Trainees demonstrate independence and an ability to work, after guidance, with minimal supervision. Trainees collect evidence for assessment as they work through given tasks. Trainers assess on a regular basis by observation and through measurement against identified performance standards. Trainees build their portfolios in the training centre and carry this through into the workplace. Portfolios are clear and well indexed with good coverage across all performance criteria and all ranges.

15. There is a broad range of learning opportunities in the work placement and employers' organisations. Trainees in some organisations use complex engineering resource-management techniques, which are well beyond the expected level of the qualification. Trainees in other placements are given access to computer-aided design (CAD) skills, which are not directly related to their specific duties, to enhance the training programme. Assessment is carried out on the job and without simulation.

16. Withdrawal rates from the programme fluctuate each year. In 1998-99, the rate for modern apprentices was 40 per cent. The region has higher than average

unemployment and the general decline in the engineering and manufacturing employment has reduced the demand for apprentices. This may have influenced these poor retention rates.

17. Mechanical equipment in the centre is fit for purpose but some is old and worn so that normal tolerances are exceeded. Performance below specification degrades the quality of work attainable by trainees on these machines. Trainees working on the poorer equipment are unable to produce high quality work.

## Business administration

## Grade 3

18. There are currently 27 trainees enrolled on programmes working towards NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. Four trainees are on programmes subcontracted to a small local training company. In addition, there are two New Deal clients. Trainees receive off-the-job training in designated training facilities at Prospects. Two experienced assessors with appropriate qualifications, staff the facility, and two new assessors are planned to join the team. Trainees work towards NVQs in business administration and information technology, at levels 1, 2 and 3, on a variety of flexible programmes. Currently, there are seven modern apprentices, seven national trainees, seven other youth trainees and six adult trainees. Employed trainees, or those with work placements, normally attend Prospects for day-release and the rest are offered full-time in-house training while seeking work. Trainees enrolled on modern apprenticeships or national traineeships also undertake key skills training and assessment, as part of their programme. Over the last three years an average of 71 per cent of all trainees have achieved an NVQ. The self-assessment report identified management of the subcontractor arrangement as a strength yet this aspect is a significant weakness with no formal arrangements for the management or monitoring of the subcontractor.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ committed trainers and assessors
- ◆ many excellent portfolios
- ◆ good off-the-job training resources

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak internal verification and assessment tracking
- ◆ few real work opportunities

19. Recently, two key members of staff unexpectedly resigned and this has caused short-term difficulties in providing cover. Staff are enthusiastic and offer good levels of support for their trainees. Trainees at level 1 and 2 benefit from the guidance and support of a peer group taking the level 3 qualification, who act as a



team of technical support advisors. This initiative offers opportunity for some trainees to progress to level 3 and ensures greater one-to-one guidance for the other trainees. Prospects has allocated a base room for these level 3 technicians, which offers them a realistic working environment.

20. Many NVQ portfolios are of excellent quality, some exceeding the national requirements. Trainees attending full time training at Prospects are encouraged to generate work-based evidence and contribute to the organisation by assisting employees with their computing work requirements.

21. Off-the-job training is effective and takes place in spacious and comfortable training rooms. The rooms are well equipped, air-conditioned and with up to date computers, printers and other business resources. The atmosphere in the training rooms is friendly and informal, but purposeful. All this contributes to build a good learning environment where trainees progress.

22. Internal verification is inadequate and the tracking of trainees' progress lacks detail. Verification sampling plans are not maintained and documents are untidy, incomplete and inaccurate. Staffing problems have contributed to this and the two external verifiers have acknowledged these inadequacies. In the small subcontracted provision which is not affected by the staff shortages trainees' achievement and internal verification records are good.

23. Trainers are aware of, and responsive to, trainees with identified learning support needs or difficult individual personal circumstances. These factors are considered when drawing up individual training plans. Off-the-job computer training is used as a protected environment for some long-term unemployed trainees wishing to retrain in technology. These trainees benefit and develop quickly and are often able to progress beyond their initial stated training goals. While this type of environment is a strength in the short term, there is insufficient emphasis later on for them to secure less sheltered work placements, especially when working towards level 3.

24. Because of the lack of sufficient work placements, there are many instances of young trainees attending off-the-job training full time, when they would benefit still further from training which combines experience of off-the-job training and a work placement.

## Retailing & customer care

## Grade 3

25. There are 52 trainees on retailing and customer service training programmes. Forty are modern apprentices and 12 are national trainees. Prospects subcontracts another training provider to deliver a proportion of the customer service programmes. There are 30 subcontracted modern apprentices. All the trainees are employed and all training is on the job, with assessment carried out at work. The

overall average NVQs per 100 leaver rate for 1997-98 and 1998-99 is 72 per cent. The self-assessment report did not accurately relate strengths to the retailing and customer service provision. The judgements in the report were over generous.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-qualified and -experienced assessors
- ◆ effective and regular visits to trainees
- ◆ good trainee understanding of their programmes, goals and progress

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ few additional resources available to fill gaps in training
- ◆ some inaccurate recording of assessments
- ◆ little involvement of workplace managers

26. Assessors are well qualified and have a broad range of experience within their occupational area. They make good use of on-the-job assessment opportunities to help trainees make the link between work and their training programmes. Assessors have an excellent rapport with a wide range of trainees. The assessor visits trainees weekly at work for assessment, portfolio-building and action-planning. This motivates trainees and provides them with regular and frequent information on their progress. Short-term targets are set which help trainees to maintain their pace of progression.

27. As most of the training is at work, the quality of the workplace greatly influences the trainees' learning experience. Trainees are heavily reliant on other sources at times when their normal workplace is unable to provide the resources or experience needed. Some employers' involvement is weak and they are frequently unavailable at the time of assessment. There are too few additional resources available such as open learning manuals or training sessions, to meet gaps in the trainees' knowledge. Assessors have recognised this shortfall and have produced some handouts, but these do not cover all aspects of the NVQ. Workplace managers have insufficient knowledge of the programme and qualifications being undertaken. They are not systematically involved in the trainee's reviews nor are they generally given copies of the trainees' programme or documents recording set targets, progress or achievements. Consequently, training and assessment opportunities are not maximised.

28. Some assessment evidence does not effectively record the depth and range of a trainee's competence. It is not cross-referenced to the NVQ standards. Some assessments include incomplete evidence, such as that for key skills, and this has not been identified by the internal verification system.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 2**

29. Trainees are recruited from all over southeast Essex, with a diverse mix of cultures, ethnic origins and educational backgrounds. Within this catchment zone are five areas of significant economic deprivation. Four per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic communities, which is above the regions' total minority ethnic community representation. Twenty per cent of the trainees are women. Four per cent have disabilities. Equal opportunities data are maintained and readily available. The policy meets the requirements of current legislation and staff have recently had a training session in equal opportunities. The self-assessment report on equal opportunities was largely accurate.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent outreach activities
- ◆ effective support for those with learning, social or physical disabilities
- ◆ staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to equal opportunities
- ◆ provision of highly successful programmes to meet needs of disadvantaged

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak awareness of equal opportunities among employers
- ◆ no structured use of monitoring information to inform planning

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*To reach disaffected potential trainees, once a week an advisor from the provider attends the Probation Office to offer help and advice on careers, training and employment.*

30. Prospects makes outstanding efforts to encourage disadvantaged people onto its programmes. Trainees with identified additional learning needs are well supported through a wide and effective network, which provides specialist and individual training where necessary. One example is a profoundly deaf trainee who has an interpreter available at all times. Prospects is heavily involved in local initiatives to address equal opportunities issues. It is, for example, involved in a project to provide specific training for the Muslim community.

31. Less than 3 per cent of the local population are members of minority ethnic communities and Prospects has 4 per cent minority ethnic representation. There are no barriers to potential new entrants. The selection of staff and trainees is free of bias. The ethos of equality of opportunity is firmly established in all aspects of provision and is positively reflected by the staff in their actions. Marketing materials promote positive images. Most recruitment materials place a clear emphasis on the commitment to equal opportunities, but a number of advertisements make no mention that the training on offer is open to all applicants. Positive steps have been made to recruit more women trainees, for example, there is a 'woman in property management' course. Trainees are aware of the complaints and grievance procedure. The disciplinary procedures make particular reference to discrimination.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*To assist disadvantaged young people aged between 14 and 16 who have been expelled or excluded from school, they are provided with practical training to develop their full potential, improve their self-esteem and gain an NVQ. This assists them with the transition from school to work. Seventy-five per cent of those attending have progressed to full-time employment or training.*

There are comprehensive and clear procedures for grievance, discipline and dismissal, together with appropriate appeals procedures and these are reviewed regularly. Any complaints are resolved quickly and none have related to discrimination. Work placements and employers are checked to ensure that they are committed to the provider's equal opportunity policy.

32. Equal opportunities issues are not evident in the content of the training programmes. Trainees do not remember coverage during induction. They do not have a full understanding of equal opportunities and there are no formal mechanisms to help them to understand and appreciate the issues. Equality of opportunity in the workplace is monitored informally by Prospects' staff when they carry out review visits to trainees, but there is no formal mechanism to do this or record the results.

33. Internal equal opportunity data are collected but not analysed to inform management decisions. Performance targets do not include equal opportunities aspects. The marketing plan makes no mention of equal opportunities, although there are some exceptional initiatives to recruit and train people from disadvantaged sections of the community. Equal opportunity is not a regular item on formal agendas, but is openly discussed by all levels of staff. Some work-placement providers display inappropriate posters, which convey stereotypical messages, but the provider strictly monitors the suitability of display material on its own premises.

**Trainee support****Grade 3**

34. There is a dedicated learning support business unit managed by the director of operations. This has specialist staff to provide help to all, including those with additional training needs. All trainees are interviewed prior to joining the programmes and all trainees receive an induction. Most trainees undertake initial assessment in the form of a basic skills test. Trainees are supported by relevant and frequent visits. One-to-one tuition in basic skills is available. The company celebrates the success of its trainees in a high profile annual awards ceremony. The self-assessment report for this section contained a number of strengths, which were no more than normal practice, and some factual inaccuracies.

**STRENGTHS**

- ◆ high level of support for trainees identified as needing additional support
- ◆ strong personal counselling to support disaffected trainees
- ◆ most trainees aided to find employment

**WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ initial assessment not systematically applied
- ◆ inadequate individual training plans
- ◆ incomplete health and safety procedures

35. Learning support arrangements are comprehensive, with specialist staff in occupational areas providing help on a regular basis. There is also a dedicated team of five permanent staff whose task is to help the disadvantaged trainees who need it. Thirty-two per cent of trainees are endorsed by the TEC as needing additional learning support. The good support given is effective in enabling trainees to progress and qualify. It is popular with trainees who are referred through the results of initial assessment, or by employers or by instructors. The support is tactfully delivered in a highly constructive manner and many freely seek assistance without embarrassment or stigma. An adult trainee, who for many years avoided help is now learning to read.

36. Trainers are skilled at giving personal counselling to support trainees as they settle in and progress. Despite their disaffection to start with, most become highly motivated to learn. Trainees are encouraged by annual achievement awards, held every year to celebrate trainees' achievements. If trainees indicate that they are going to leave, they are given a guidance interview. Those who leave are encouraged to give destination data.

37. A high proportion of the trainees are unemployed and receive good support towards finding a job. Suitable job vacancies are advertised on notice boards in the centres and specific trainees are directly approached to discuss the vacancies. Once a trainee decides to apply for a vacancy, help is offered in the preparation of a curriculum vitae and thorough advice given on interview techniques.

38. Initial assessment consists of the basic skills assessment test, followed by an interview for most trainees. This approach is not consistently applied to trainees in retailing and customer service who only receive an interview, and some trainees who need support may not be identified early this way. There is no aptitude test, except in some limited areas, where a practical test is given. Guidance on which programme to choose is available in the form of course data sheets, but no specific interview is given. The individual training plans are not used as working documents. They are all similar and not kept up to date. Achievements are not added often enough, amendments to the programme are not reflected in the plan, causing problems in the accuracy of the information held.

39. Health and safety is included in induction and NVQ units where appropriate, and training is carried out in an atmosphere where staff exercise care of their trainees informally. However, the work-placement checklist does not meet the requirements of the TEC's code of practice. Placements are not systematically risk banded. Risk assessments for placements and for the training centres are not carried out effectively. For example, high-risk activities are not properly identified and some decisions on the appropriate protective equipment lack judgement, with the potential to expose some trainees to risk. There is no standard procedure for monitoring site health and safety induction. There is no written guidance on what should be covered during the six-to-eight week health and safety reviews, and some are incomplete.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

40. The chief executive officer, who is also the sales director, has a director of operations and a financial director, who report to him. Each of the directors is line manager for a number of business units, including each individual training centre, learning support, and learning services. Most trainers are qualified assessors, or are working towards becoming qualified, and carry out assessment in the training centres or at work, relying on witness statements and occasional observation. Prospects has a detailed set of company procedures which are regularly reviewed, and these include personnel procedures and a staff handbook. Prospects consults its staff to develop an annual strategic plan. Annual appraisal of all staff is carried out by line managers. The process includes a personal development plan and the summation of these forms the overall training plan for the business. The self-assessment report's overall judgements were reasonably accurate.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong strategic lead identifies training needs of the community
- ◆ well established and thorough staff involvement in management planning
- ◆ good formal and informal communication with all interested parties
- ◆ good staff training and development

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no integration of key skills with vocational programme
- ◆ staff sometimes over committed
- ◆ some management data not readily available in a helpful format

41. The organisation is well informed at a strategic level of national training issues as well as understanding the requirements of the local community in terms of training. National training statistics are analysed producing meaningful data that gives an overview of trends. Consultants are then employed to independently survey the local trends for employment and training. This helps staff in each department develop their annual strategic plan. After amalgamation and checking to see that the needs of the local market are met, the overall draft plan is shared with major partners, the TEC, careers service and subcontractors for feedback. From this a detailed and comprehensive operational plan is written covering items including mission and aims, marketing, strategy, objectives, targets, finances, investments and people. This plan is then presented to all staff at a special away day and, through managers, it is ensured everyone has access to it. The management of trainees is good, with careful planning of off-the-job training across the range of occupational areas, and trainees benefit from the sound links Prospects has with placement providers.

42. There is an open atmosphere among staff and managers which encourages debate and enables staff to share good practice. Staff are well supported in achieving their tasks. The communications system, including a series of regular and minuted meetings, is effective in keeping people informed. This is enhanced by a newsletter, regular away days and numerous notice boards and memos. Communications with placement providers and other interested parties are also good. Prospects' plans are shared with major placement providers and workplace agreements are used.

43. The organisation makes a substantial commitment to funding and releasing staff for development courses. The staff appraisal system identifies their training needs. These are captured in an overall plan and many staff benefit from training. For example, those not yet qualified as assessors undertake the relevant training. Others take teaching practice courses. Many trainers take a 'quality trainer programme' to develop their approach to training. This is part of an initiative to improve retention across programmes.

44. Key skills are not integrated in any courses across the range of occupational areas. This delays some trainees in completing their programmes, although the problem is identified in tutorials. Opportunities for assessment of key skills arising naturally within the occupational work, are missed. The workload of instructors is monitored. Local issues such as roll-on/roll-off programmes on which trainees can start at any time, creates excessive peaks in workload for instructors, which causes delays for trainees when they try to obtain advice and guidance. Assessments in isolated cases can also be delayed, sometimes by weeks.

45. The management-information system is accurate, up to date, used to produce clear graphs of trends and highlight successes and problems. Data is circulated to staff and is used to influence decisions made on training. Some basic information such as lists of trainees by qualification and achievement data is not readily available in a format that can be easily interpreted.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 3

46. Details of the quality assurance processes are contained in a published quality-assurance manual, and quality assurance is a standing item on management and staff meeting agendas. The senior management team involves all members of staff in the process of self-assessment. Staff work together to develop the company's adherence to quality principles and are actively engaged in linking self-assessment to the existing quality assurance activity. Some quality assurance measures have been developed as a direct result of the self-assessment requirements. Self-assessment is still in its infancy and the action plans for individual occupational areas reflect this. There are instances of the action plan items in one occupational area being generally applied across all other areas. The organisation has moved towards addressing some of the weaknesses identified during self-assessment.



### STRENGTHS

- ◆ high commitment by staff to continuous improvement
- ◆ feedback and evaluation collected from all participants

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal subcontractor management arrangements
- ◆ self assessment process still in its infancy

47. The company procedures manual contains systems and procedures to promote the continuous improvement of the work of the organisation as a whole. Managers have implemented an initiative known as the 'quality trainer programme' to help trainers improve their skills.

48. There are systems and procedures to seek feedback from trainees, staff and employers. The surveys are conducted at regular intervals to capture trainees' feedback at various stages of the training process. The results are recorded, analysed and fed back to participants. The results are investigated and acted on. For example, a survey showed only 58 per cent of trainees rated their induction as good or better. As a result, the induction programme was revised and the trainees' handbook re-written. The next quarter's survey showed the good or better rating had risen to 73 per cent.

49. In retailing, customer service and business administration, Prospects subcontracts part of the training to a small organisation able to offer training, assessment and verification in these occupational areas. The training provided by the subcontractor is good and there are the usual assessment and verification practices in place. Prospects' staff meet with the subcontractor frequently and there is an open exchange of ideas, supporting continuous improvement. There are no formal mechanisms for controlling or assuring the quality of this arrangement. There is an over-reliance on the individuals concerned to assure the quality of their own processes. In addition, there are several subcontracted arrangements with local colleges for some components of the modern apprenticeship in engineering. While these arrangements are satisfactory, there are no formal contracts and they are not subject to quality assurance controls by Prospects.

50. Prospects has embraced the self-assessment process wholeheartedly. The systems and procedures are still in their infancy, but there is commitment to the whole process throughout the organisation. Prospects was not sufficiently self-critical in its first self-assessment report. At present, self-assessment does not clearly show the differences between normal practice and identifiable strengths. Individual occupational areas are not required to produce action plans to address their weaknesses. The report was somewhat confused, contained few of the identifiable strengths and weaknesses of each section and many of the self-assessment grades were too generous.