



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1999

GTR
Limited

SUMMARY

GTR (Graduate Training and Recruitment) Limited offers good training in management and professional and in foundation for work. Communication among staff, trainees and employers is good and the company does good work in promoting equality of opportunity. At the time of the first inspection, leisure, sport & travel training and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Prevocational trainees in leisure, sport and travel made good progress, whereas trainees on the NVQ programme in this occupational area did not have a planned assessment process or targets for trainees' completion of awards. The quality assurance procedures failed to ensure consistent standards across the company's work. GTR was re-inspected nine months after the original report was published. One of the key weaknesses relating to assessment and verification in leisure, sport & travel has now been addressed. The company has employed new assessors who have a greater knowledge and understanding of NVQ requirements. The assessment process is now better planned and there is systematic internal verification. The quality of trainees' portfolios has improved. The quality assurance system has now been developed and is fully understood and is used by all staff. However, systems for monitoring and evaluating quality assurance procedures are still underdeveloped. A wide range of data is now collected and used to inform decision making.

As a result of the reinspection of GTR, the original published report text for those areas which have been reinspected has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	2
Leisure, sport & travel	4
Foundation for work	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	2
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Leisure, sport & travel	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good working relationships among trainers, trainees and employers
- ◆ good facilities and resources
- ◆ well-motivated and -qualified staff
- ◆ good training sessions

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped systems for monitoring and evaluating quality assurance

INTRODUCTION

1. GTR (Graduate Training and Recruitment) Limited, a Liverpool-based company, was formed in 1992. It sought to address local and national labour-market information, relating to the many graduates leaving university or college without jobs. Initially, the company offered a learning package to graduates from any discipline, helping them to develop their personal skills in preparing for employment. The company responded to statistics which showed that self-employment locally accounted for only 8 per cent of the economically active population, compared with a regional average of 11.7 per cent and a national average of 13 per cent, by offering a flexible programme for those wishing to start their own business.

2. The company offers training in personal development (foundation for work), business start-up (management and professional) and sport and recreation. At the time of reinspection, there were 157 trainees, which is 60 fewer than there were at the time of the first inspection. The trainees are funded by the training and enterprise council (TEC) for programmes in work-based training for adults and young people, by the Employment Service for New Deal and through the European Social Fund (ESF). Most of GTR's work is supported through a contract with Merseyside TEC.

3. At the time of the first inspection the company employed 20 full- and 12 part-time staff. It has since been restructured and now employs 15 full- and six part-time staff. The company has just been re-accredited with the Investors in People Standard. Its offices and training accommodation are on one site in Liverpool and it contracts with a wide range of employers for on-the-job training. Merseyside has a working population of 532,500, with a higher-than-average unemployment rate of 11.43 per cent. The participation rate for those aged 16 staying on in full-time education is approximately 66 per cent. Minority ethnic groups form 2.5 per cent of the working population. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 30.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. GTR completed its first self-assessment report after consulting its staff in May 1998, three months before inspection. The report was comprehensive and gave a detailed account of its strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the company's findings in equal opportunities and trainee support. They identified strengths in management and professional services and foundation for work which had not been recorded in the self-assessment report. In quality assurance and leisure, sport & travel, inspectors identified more weaknesses than were found through self-assessment. An action plan, which followed inspection, was used to address the weaknesses identified through self-assessment and inspection. Prior to the reinspection a second, partial, self-assessment report was produced which addressed the two areas being re-inspected. This gave a clear description of the work completed by the company to address the weaknesses.

5. During the first inspection a team of five inspectors spent a total of 19 days at GTR in August 1998. They examined management files, trainees' portfolios and assessment records. Inspectors interviewed nine employers, 48 trainees and members of GTR's staff. They also visited 10 employers and observed eight training sessions. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors for a total of six days in August 1999. They interviewed five trainees at their work placements, 12 members of GTR's staff and observed one assessment and one training session. Inspectors examined documents relating to trainees, including portfolios and assessment records, quality assurance documents and the management-information system.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Management & professional

Grade 2

6. The company's business start-up programme was developed in response to the low level of self-employment on Merseyside, in comparison with that for the rest of the northwest region and the country as a whole. The programme aims to help trainees to start their own businesses. All trainees attend initial awareness-raising sessions and then follow one of two routes. The new entrepreneurs' challenge offers individual counselling and training in basic business skills, leading towards the production of a business plan. Once the plan is complete, it is sent to an assessor and, if approved, leads to the award of a grant towards the cost of establishing a new business. The progress of each business is monitored at three-monthly intervals by a business counsellor, for eighteen months. The business start-up programme, on the other hand, comprises a series of workshops which offers the possibility of an NVQ level 3 in owner management business planning. Training takes place at GTR every week. There are 158 trainees on the present programme. During the 1997-98 contract year, 1,111 trainees started on these

programmes, of whom 102 achieved an owner management award, 288 had business plans approved and 675 achieved positive outcomes.

7. Although the self-assessment report was broadly accurate, inspectors found evidence to support a higher grade than that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training is planned and delivered effectively
- ◆ staff are experts in their field
- ◆ there are productive working relationships between trainers and trainees
- ◆ trainees understand, influence and agree on their training programmes
- ◆ good accommodation and equipment
- ◆ satisfactory achievement of the programme's aims

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' progress and achievement are inadequately monitored and recorded
- ◆ trainers, assessors and business counsellors do not work as a team

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees have access to practising business counsellors who are experienced in helping them to write their business plans. The trainees also have access to GTR's resources for up to two years after completion of training.

8. Inspectors observed some effective sessions of training. Attention and participation among trainees were encouraged by appropriate questions. Resources were of a high standard, and learning plans were clear.

9. Trainees may take additional studies to enhance occupational skills. Learning is based on practical experience, with well-informed guidance offered by trainers and business counsellors. Trainees have access to all company resources for up to two years after completion of the programme.

Leisure, sport & travel

Grade 3

10. GTR has 92 trainees following sport and recreation programmes at NVQ levels 1, 2 and 3. Fifty-seven are national trainees, three are modern apprentices, 14 are New Deal clients and 18 are on work-based training for adults programmes. All the New Deal clients are on the full-time training and education option. All the modern apprentices and 52 of the national trainees have employed status. Trainees with employed status receive all their NVQ training in the workplace. Those trainees who are not employed receive NVQ training at GTR's premises and are released for work experience in blocks of 10 weeks, in local sports and fitness centres. Trainees have the opportunity to obtain additional industry-specific qualifications such as first aid certificates, pool lifeguard awards and exercise to music certificates.

11. In the past eight months, the provider has had 113 trainees on the programme. Sixteen have completed one NVQ and left the programme. Twenty-seven are

currently undertaking a second NVQ and the remaining 70 are working towards their first NVQ, which is an improvement on the first inspection.

12. The first inspection identified the following main weaknesses:

- ◆ low levels of achievement
- ◆ lack of detailed specification for NVQ training
- ◆ unplanned NVQ assessment process
- ◆ incomplete portfolios submitted for verification
- ◆ external verifiers action plans not consistently implemented
- ◆ lack of co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training

13. GTR's action plan has ensured that some of the weaknesses have been remedied and training in this area has risen to a satisfactory standard. However, inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by GTR.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ frequent and effective support given to trainees
- ◆ well-recorded reviews and progress monitoring

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some informal and unsystematic initial assessments
- ◆ poor understanding of the training programmes by trainees, employers and assessors
- ◆ lack of co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ key skills not integrated into occupational training

14. All trainees are positive about their experience in the workplace and the relevance of their NVQ qualification. The work placements are appropriate and of good quality. They include a range of fitness and health clubs and sports centres. This allows trainees to collect a wide range of naturally occurring evidence for their NVQ. New staff have now been appointed to take responsibility for assessment. They are well qualified and have a good range of industry-related experience. Trainees are visited regularly and frequently by assessors, usually twice a month, but often weekly. Assessors can easily be contacted by telephone and they respond quickly to trainees. Assessors give trainees clear guidance on sources of evidence and portfolio construction.

15. The main improvements to sport and recreation training since the last inspection has been the development of the assessment and verification process. Assessment is now planned and internal verification is carried out on an ongoing basis. The feedback and guidance from internal verifiers is clear and detailed, and all portfolios submitted for verification are now complete. The external verifiers'

most recent reports indicate a substantial improvement in the quality of assessment and in trainees' portfolios. Action points from the external verifier have been successfully addressed.

16. Trainees' reviews and progress monitoring visits are well recorded, with clear targets identified and agreed on, which addresses the lack of detailed specification for NVQs identified at the first inspection. Progress towards these targets is regularly monitored and adjustments made where appropriate. Trainees' progress towards the NVQ is recorded centrally and is regularly updated.

17. Initial assessment of employed trainees does not include any diagnostic testing of their basic skills. The responsibility for identifying any additional learning needs lies with the assessors who do not have specialist expertise in assessing additional learning needs. Although some trainees with additional learning needs have been identified, the process is not formal or comprehensive. However, trainees based at GTR's premises do complete a basic skills test, and those with additional learning needs are given extra support from the outset of their training.

18. There is still a lack of co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training. Assessors, trainees and employers are unsure about the different training programmes. Most trainees do not know which programme they are on. This prevents them from fully understanding the requirements of the programme and how they are progressing. The approach to training is fragmented into individual qualifications. There are no qualified workplace assessors. Trainees rely on being assessed by GTR's assessors or on witness testimonies from supervisors. Some witness testimonies are inappropriate because supervisors' judgements about the trainees' competence are based on their own standards of performance. Some supervisors have insufficient knowledge of the NVQ requirements. The lack of work-based assessors prevents trainees from taking full advantage of naturally occurring assessment opportunities. GTR's assessors have responsibility for assessing up to 30 trainees.

19. Some trainees and assessors have insufficient knowledge and understanding of key skills. Opportunities for key skills assessment in the workplace are not clearly identified. Some trainees are familiar with the key skills requirements of their programme and have made progress towards achieving the required level. However, there is no consistent approach to teaching and assessing key skills and they are not integrated into vocational assessment.

Foundation for work

Grade 2

20. This programme is aimed at unemployed graduates, but has recently been extended to include other high achievers.

21. The programme comprises three main elements. Trainees at the centre follow an eight-week taught course which aims to develop managerial and interpersonal skills. Studies include interview skills, time management, customer care, assertiveness and making effective presentations. The second element of the programme, delivered at the centre, teaches individuals to develop their own letter-writing and job-application skills. They have the support of two mentors, one from

the company's training team and one from its job-placement team. Staff from these two teams meet regularly to review progress and negotiate targets for further learning. A job-placement scheme is the third element of the programme. GTR has an extensive database of employers willing to accept trainees for up to six months' work experience. The company recruits an average of 15 trainees each month, so that, at any one time, there are two groups of trainees training at the company's centre.

22. The company's self-assessment report gave an informative and largely accurate description of the programmes. Most of the judgements made in the report were confirmed by the inspection. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good teaching and learning
- ◆ appraisal system for trainees in work placement
- ◆ wide range of work placements
- ◆ good resources
- ◆ seventy-one per cent of trainees obtained employment in the past three years

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal lines of communication between trainees on work placement and training staff
- ◆ inadequate use of data

23. The training team of three permanent members of staff is suitably qualified and experienced to deliver training at this level. Information technology support is supplied by a qualified member of staff. The placement team has one vacancy. Members of the teams act as both mentors to trainees on the programme and contact points with employers offering placements. In addition to the instruction given, trainees are encouraged to use all the resources at the centre. These include two computer suites, access to the Internet; fax, copying and postal facilities; a library of newspapers, periodicals and books. Those trainees who are on work placement or who are looking for jobs also have access to these facilities.

24. In the past three years, the percentage of trainees who found employment, of those who started, was 71.

25. Members of the training team and placement team work well together. To encourage trainees to work independently, the company does not visit trainees while they are on work placement, unless requested to do so.

26. The system in place for reviewing trainees' progress at the halfway stage of their work placement is effective. Trainees appraise their own progress with their placement tutor and employer. This arrangement gives them a foretaste of the type

of appraisal scheme which trainees can expect to meet when they take up employment. Trainees following the taught modules are not offered the opportunity to gain any formal qualifications. However, they can choose to register for NVQs in information technology, customer service and business administration. Teaching and learning activities are well planned and presented using an appropriate range of techniques. Trainees are enthusiastic about their work.

27. Although a large amount of information is collected from trainees in the form of course evaluation sheets, training needs analysis and programme questionnaires, it is not used systematically by the training team to monitor and improve the quality of the programme.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

28. GTR has an equal opportunities policy statement which is prominently displayed around the building. It is also contained in the staff handbook and is distributed to trainees during induction. Equal opportunities issues are addressed in both the company's business plan and its quality development plan and feature as a standing item on staff meeting agendas. The company takes an active part in careers service open-days. People with disabilities and those from minority ethnic groups are well represented across trainees. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate, although several of the strengths related to processes which have been introduced recently and whose impact cannot be assessed. Some additional strengths were identified during inspection, and inspectors confirmed the grade proposed in the self-assessment report.

29. Staff are aware of the company's equal opportunities policy and code of conduct. Responsibility for implementation and review of the policy is clear. All members of staff have received disability-awareness training. Some have attended training courses in deaf awareness, and one is learning to sign. Cultural awareness training has already been planned for all staff. There has been little staff training in the legal aspects of equal opportunities, although information is readily available. Data on the characteristics of trainees starting the company's programmes are collected and monitored quarterly. Information about the same people's achievement rates is not collected systematically or evaluated. Women are significantly under-represented in all the programmes – particularly so in leisure, sport & travel. However, they are more successful than the trainee population as a whole in achieving employment or self-employment through the programme.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide-ranging involvement in local groups promoting equality of opportunity
- ◆ extensive staff training on disability issues
- ◆ good support for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ equality of opportunity is effectively promoted

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little evaluation of achievement levels among differing groups of trainees
- ◆ women are under-represented in all programmes

30. GTR's premises are easily accessible by those with disabilities. The company ensures that appropriate support is provided to help those with additional learning needs to participate effectively in training. Advertisements are placed in journals aimed at graduates with disabilities, and positive images of them are shown. Home visits are arranged for trainees with mobility or travelling difficulties. Signing and talk-type facilities are equally available for those with hearing difficulties. Trainers encourage all trainees, and ensure that they treat each other with respect. There are instances where staff intervention ensured that trainees with disabilities integrated quickly with other trainees. They have subsequently overcome the problems of dealing with customers in a new business.

31. Close and constructive links have been made with several organisations which are representative of the diverse group of trainees with which GTR works. Involvement with local racial equality networks and a minority ethnic business support organisation helps to ensure that the needs of trainees from these groups are understood and met. Helpful contacts have also been made with Sefton Action For Employment and the Shaw Trust, both of which work with people with disabilities. The company also undertakes self-assessment against the 'racial equality means business' standard, and has built on this approach to include disability and gender issues. These activities have led to improvements in recruitment procedures and the retention and success rates of trainees.

Trainee support**Grade 2**

32. Trainees on all programmes receive initial guidance and support which is related to specific programmes and targeted at trainees' needs. For example, applicants for the management and professional services and foundation for work programmes are invited to an open-day, where the scope and range of the studies are explained. They take part in assessment activities which help them to identify their training and development needs. On entry, all trainees take part in an induction programme which includes information about programmes, assessment arrangements, availability of resources, completing essential documentation and company policies and procedures, for example equal opportunities and health and safety. Trainees are assigned to members of staff whose job it is to support them through their chosen programmes. Leisure, sport & travel trainees are allocated to both an assessor and a workplace supervisor. Management and professional

services trainees have access to a trained business counsellor. Trainees in foundation for work have two mentors: one from the training team and one from the placement team. The self-assessment report was an accurate reflection of the company's systems and practices in trainee support. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of support for trainees
- ◆ effective advice and guidance
- ◆ flexibility of opening times to enable trainees to gain access to resources
- ◆ trainees are encouraged to set up self-help groups
- ◆ open-days help trainees to make informed choices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of full programme of assessment and review
- ◆ mismatch of placement opportunities to occupational areas

33. Trainees receive a high level of support from both the company and its work-placement employers. The encouragement offered to business start-up trainees, to set up self-help groups, plays an effective part in helping them to succeed.

34. All trainees have an initial interview with a trainer from the company. If additional learning support needs are identified, action will be recommended and written into the individual's learning plan. The company has no specialist literacy or numeracy experts. If these are required, it will send the trainee externally for additional training. The initial interview is a mixture of assessment and careers guidance, and prospective trainees are referred to other providers if GTR does not have the correct programme to offer. The company keeps detailed interview notes. No accreditation of prior learning and achievement is offered.

35. There is a lack of full programme assessment and review, one reason for this is that approximately 30 per cent of trainees are on the programme for less than four weeks. Nonetheless, 70 per cent attend for four weeks or more and this remains a weakness. The company's proposal, to develop a more comprehensive exit guidance process for those who leave the programme early, should go a long way to addressing this.

36. The company works hard to obtain work placements for all trainees. Some of the placements are not in areas which are necessarily relevant to the occupational area of the trainee.

Management of training

Grade 2

37. GTR has a management and staffing structure, which is clear and understood by all. The company employs 20 full-time staff and 12 part-time consultants and assessors. All staff have detailed job descriptions. Staff are effectively deployed. The company has a staff appraisal scheme. Staff development is linked to both personal and organisational objectives.

38. The training provided by the company is well managed. Staff understand both their own and their colleagues' roles and responsibilities. There is a regular cycle of meetings, involving all staff groups. Meetings have standard agenda items, including equal opportunities and health and safety. Two senior managers attend the assessor meetings to ensure that both operational and strategic matters are discussed. All meetings result in clear action points. Inspectors identified more strengths than appeared in the self-assessment report and awarded a higher grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective staff appraisal linked to professional development
- ◆ measurable targets set for staff teams
- ◆ regular management meetings result in clear action points
- ◆ strong administrative support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective and inflexible management information systems

39. GTR has a strategic plan which outlines the policy intentions of the company for the next five years. The company also has a business plan which gives details of the development of its occupational programmes, staff development requirements and resourcing for the current year. Both plans identify staff responsibility and the resources needed to achieve the company's goals. The contents of both plans are effectively communicated to staff at staff meetings.

40. There are documented procedures for the recruitment of staff, induction, appraisal and staff development.

41. Most new staff attend induction sessions. However, this does not extend to new staff who have previous experience with the company, eg graduate trainees who begin working for the company. The appraisal system is linked to professional development of staff and takes into account the personal development needs of staff. Staff have targets for trainee recruitment. One team leader sets weekly work targets for individual members of the team.

42. There are mechanisms in place on some occupational areas for reviewing, and subsequently developing, training. These are not applied systematically across all areas, and good practice is not shared. The company has a management

information system in place, but it is inflexible and it is difficult to extract information in the format requested.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

43. GTR has made many changes to its quality assurance arrangements since the first inspection in August 1998. The operations manager has responsibility for quality assurance and the procedures have been reviewed and revised. Quality assurance procedures are now standardised across all areas of the company's work. They are fully understood and used by all members of staff.

44. The main weaknesses identified during the first inspection were:

- ◆ incomplete and excessively informal quality procedures
- ◆ wide variety in quality of training across programmes
- ◆ inconsistent monitoring of subcontractors

45. Actions have been taken to address all the weaknesses. An additional strength was identified during reinspection and another has changed from being a development plan into a set of procedures. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive set of quality assurance procedures
- ◆ good internal verification system
- ◆ feedback sought from all customer groups acted on
- ◆ clear management responsibility for quality assurance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete processes for monitoring and evaluating quality assurance
- ◆ self-assessment process not integrated into quality assurance procedures

46. The operations manager now has clear responsibility for quality assurance, following restructuring during the past year. A quality assurance group has been set up and is attended by senior members of the management team and representatives from the various departments. The group meets regularly and the minutes are circulated to all staff groups in the company. A comprehensive set of procedures has been drawn up and they form the basis of a quality assurance system. They are regularly reviewed and updated by the operations manager. Staff have been made aware of the procedures at staff meetings and are familiar with their use and purpose. Copies of files containing all the procedures are readily available for staff to consult. Systems for internal verification and recording trainees' progress have been improved. Records are kept of each visit to a trainee and detail the purpose of the visit, progress towards achieving the NVQ and any

action to be taken. The forms are read, discussed and then signed by the trainees, assessor and the workplace supervisor, ensuring that all parties have up-to-date information. Other relevant information, such as when trainees complete a unit, is transferred from the form and entered on to a computerised tracking system which details the progress of each trainee towards achieving the NVQ. There is a thorough approach to assessment and verification. When two units have been completed the internal verifier is notified. All portfolios are verified and there are now no more incomplete portfolios submitted for verification. Regular, minuted meetings are held between the internal verifiers and assessors. There is a high degree of standardisation in the approach to assessment, despite the fact that all the assessors are part-time members of staff. Verbal and written feedback is given to each assessor.

47. Questionnaires are used to gather feedback from all of the company's customer groups. The results are collated and acted upon. For example, following feedback from one group of trainees on a business start-up course, the structure and the length of the course were altered.

48. The quality assurance procedures address all areas of GTR's work, however, the company has not yet finished recording the processes by which they will monitor and evaluate the system.

49. In response to the first inspection GTR drew up an action plan to address its weaknesses. This was clearly laid out and gave realistic milestones and target dates, as well as indicating who was responsible for each action. It has been used as a working document and updated when necessary. Prior to the reinspection, the operations manager and key members of staff wrote a partial self-assessment report which only addressed the two areas being reinspected, and consisted of an explanation of how the action plan was implemented.