



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1998

REINSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

Norfolk Training Services Limited

SUMMARY

At the time of its first inspection, Norfolk Training Services Limited provided satisfactory training in construction, engineering, business administration and information technology, retailing & customer service and prevocational training. Transportation training was good. Key skills were not integrated into any aspect of occupational training, but were assessed at the end of the trainees' programmes. However, the company's promotion of equal opportunities, trainee support and management of training were unsatisfactory. The company has made considerable improvements to its promotion of equal opportunity, developing a strategy and widely distributing a comprehensive policy to trainees and staff. There is now a greater understanding of equal opportunities throughout the company. Significant improvements have been made in trainee support, which is now good. Trainees' recruitment has improved immensely and both practical and pastoral support are fully recorded. All trainees are initially assessed and additional support identified is provided promptly. Management of training is now satisfactory. The company has recently restructured and there are considerable improvements in the overall management of the government-funded training programmes.

As a result of the reinspection of Norfolk Training Services Limited, the original published report text for those areas which have been reinspected has been replaced by new text which makes references to the original inspection findings.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
Construction	3
Engineering	3
Transportation	2
Business Administration	3
Business administration (IT)	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Foundation for work	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	3
REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ♦ high quality of work placements
- ♦ good off-the-job training in construction, engineering and business administration
- ♦ additional qualifications offered to trainees in business administration and transportation



- ◆ through and effective initial assessment
- ◆ good pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ effective management of training programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not integrated into occupational training
- ◆ procedures not fully implemented for monitoring equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ little involvement by some employers in trainees' progress reviews

INTRODUCTION

1. Norfolk Training Services Limited (NTS) was formed in 1969 to meet the training requirements of the transport industry. In 1974, NTS became a limited company with four directors and now employs 89 staff. NTS has steadily expanded its training provision since 1977, offering training in business administration and information technology, retailing and customer service, construction, engineering and transportation. The training for young people and adults, which NTS provides through its contract with Norfolk and Waveney Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), forms less than 40 per cent of its business. The remaining 60 per cent comes from commercial training.

2. The company operates from three training centres, two of which are in Norwich, with the third in King's Lynn. Most trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3, through modern apprenticeships and adult training contracts. Trainees are referred by Norfolk careers service for foundation training. Foundation trainees work towards wordpower and numberpower, key skills units or the vocational access certificate. There are currently 482 trainees, which is 98 more than there were at the time of the first inspection.

3. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in 1997 was 45 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Norfolk was 47.7 per cent compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The proportion of those aged 16 staying on in full-time education is 67.7 per cent. Of those leaving full-time education in 1997, 13 per cent entered full-time employment, 6.2 per cent entered training and 5.9 per cent were unemployed. There is considerable variation in unemployment figures around the county. In some areas, youth unemployment is as high as 7.9 per cent, compared with the national average in September 1999 of 4.1 per cent. Those starting jobs work primarily in administration, factories, motor trades, construction, retail and agriculture. The occupational sectors offered by NTS reflect the current employment trends in the region. In Norfolk, the proportion of young people identifying themselves as being from minority ethnic groups is low, at 1.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. NTS produced its first self-assessment report for the original inspection in May 1998. Staff from the company attended a training course on self-assessment, and the information gained was disseminated to other staff through an awareness session. Managers, work-placement officers and trainers were all involved in the company's self-assessment process. Heads of division and the managing director were responsible for producing the report itself. The process of self-assessment highlighted areas for improvement, and the company has already implemented an action-plan. The report failed to identify the key weaknesses and equal opportunities, trainee support and management of training were over graded. After the original inspection the company submitted an action plan to address the weaknesses identified by the inspection. The action plan was implemented and prior to the reinspection the company provided an update on its implementation and the progress made.

5. During the first inspection a team of nine inspectors spent a total of 33 days at NTS during August 1998. All the major occupational areas offered by the company were inspected. Inspectors examined trainees' portfolios and personal files, the company's records and awarding bodies' documents. They visited all three training centres, met staff and interviewed 104 trainees and 35 workplace supervisors. Inspectors also observed off-the-job training sessions.

6. Three inspectors spent a total of nine days carrying out the reinspection of NTS in September 1999. They interviewed 34 trainees working towards business administration, motor vehicle and foundation for work qualifications. They examined trainees' files and company documents. They interviewed 15 staff, 13 workplace supervisors and managers and visited 16 workplaces.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		1				1
Engineering		1				1
Transportation	1					1
Business Administration		1	2			3
Foundation for work			3	1		4
Total	1	3	5	1	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction (woodwork)

Grade 3

7. NTS has 27 trainees in furniture-making and boat-building. Of these, 11 trainees are studying for NVQ level 2 and 16 for NVQ level 3. All trainees are on modern apprenticeship programmes. Trainees are employed in the local boat-building and furniture-making industry. Most training takes place in the workplace and is supported by off-the-job training at NTS's training centre in Norwich. Off-the-job training includes training in the theoretical and practical aspects of woodcraft. Some trainees have completed an intensive 12-week training course at the centre and achieved an NVQ level 2 qualification. Other trainees attend the training centre on a day-release basis or for specific training. Some of the strengths identified in the company's self-assessment report are normal contractual practice. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed in the company's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ frequent visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ trainers have extensive experience in the industry
- ◆ strong support from employers for the training programmes
- ◆ trainees' work is of a high occupational standard

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills are not integrated into occupational area
- ◆ key skills development is not continuous
- ◆ assessment procedures vary among assessors
- ◆ trainees' individual training plans are not regularly updated

8. At the training centre, trainers make good use of their expertise and extensive knowledge of the craft industry to identify the appropriate training programmes for trainees. Off-the-job training sessions are well structured and effectively integrate theory with practice. Trainees follow individual training programmes, which are tailored to meet the needs of both the trainees and employers. Good working relationships among trainers, trainees and employers help to ensure that training programmes are comprehensive and that trainees are well supported. Trainers visit trainees at work once a week. Visits are used effectively to provide trainee support, review progress and carry out assessments. This regular monitoring of progress

maintains the trainees' motivation and commitment to their training. The work produced by trainees in their portfolios is of a high occupational standard.

9. Assessors demonstrate different approaches to the assessment of trainees' work. Most trainees are required to complete comprehensive job records. However, other assessors complete most of the documents on the trainees' behalf. For these trainees, there are limited opportunities for the development of written communications skills, which are necessary to achieve the modern apprenticeship qualification. Key skills are not assessed as part of the occupational training programme. Key skills assessment is carried out once the trainees have achieved their occupational NVQ. As a result, opportunities are missed to record workplace activities as key skills evidence. Trainees are not aware of what key skills are. Some trainees are not aware of their achievement target dates. Individual training plans are not updated and do not state short- or long-term goals or target dates for completion.

Engineering

Grade 3

10. NTS has 166 trainees in engineering, studying for NVQs levels 1 to 3, and through modern apprenticeship programmes. The catchment area is predominately rural, and engineering trainees work mainly in motor-vehicle repair, maintenance and associated trades. A few work in marine engineering and boat-building associated with the holiday industry. All trainees are employed or are in work placements. Level 2 foundation trainees spend one week a month at the training centre; other trainees typically attend one day a fortnight. At the centre, trainees receive training in the theoretical and practical aspects of engineering. In some areas, staffing difficulties have resulted in erratic visits to trainees in the workplace, but this situation is now improving. The self-assessment report identified some of the strengths and weaknesses in engineering. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of on- and off-the-job learning opportunities
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ effective quarterly review process
- ◆ trainees are set challenging targets

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ training is not well planned or documented
- ◆ lack of continuous formal assessment
- ◆ key skills not integrated with other aspects of training
- ◆ trainees' reviews not used to update individual training plans

GOOD PRACTICE

An assessor found the wording of the NVQ standards unhelpful to trainees in motor vehicle, for example 'restore cleanliness' and 'augment systems'. The assessor has developed clearly written learning and assessment materials, including on-the-job task sheets and knowledge and development worksheets.

11. Trainers have a good understanding of the NVQ requirements, and full use is made of realistic opportunities in the workplace to train and assess them. Trainees whose work experience does not give them the opportunity to complete some aspect of their training return to NTS and attend additional workshops. This process is not well planned or effectively documented, but trainers are now beginning to produce formal training programmes and session plans. Trainees are assessed throughout their training, but practice varies among assessors. For some trainees, personal work records are completed continuously, but, for others, they are not formally recorded until the end of the programme. Trainees benefit from good work opportunities, although employers are not uniformly involved with trainees' learning programmes. The working relationship among trainers, trainees and employers is good. Trainee support is particularly good in the training centre. Trainers work closely with trainees and employers to ensure that work placements are suitable. Where problems do arise, trainers act promptly and quickly find alternative placements.

12. Some trainers carry out effective quarterly progress reviews with trainees. Trainers and trainees discuss past reviews, current practice and performance, setting challenging targets. Trainees respond well to these opportunities and are highly motivated. However, the results of the reviews are not used to update trainees' individual training plans. Key skills are not assessed as an integrated part of the NVQ qualification, but are developed and assessed at the end of the training programme. This results in on- and off-the-job assessment opportunities being missed.

Transportation

Grade 2

13. NTS has 24 trainees in transportation. Of these, four are working towards NVQ level 2 in road haulage and distributive operations. Four trainees are on modern apprenticeship programmes, two specialising in the 'young drivers' scheme, and two in storing and organising. Adult trainees take a variety of training, including large goods vehicle (LGV), passenger-carrying vehicle (PCV), forklift truck (FLT) and the carriage of dangerous goods (ADR). Trainees on NVQ programmes and modern apprentices are all in work placements or are employed. Training meets the awarding bodies' requirements and those of the department of transport. Trainers work as a team and demonstrate good practice in health and safety. All NVQ assessment is carried out in the workplace by qualified and experienced staff. Adult trainees are placed with local employers for an average of 16 weeks. This is often longer in the case of LGV training and shorter for trainees undertaking FLT instruction. In all cases, off-the-job training and examinations or tests are planned for the end of the training period. Some of the strengths identified in the company's self-assessment report were judged by inspectors to be normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths, and the grade awarded is higher than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ additional transport qualifications available to all trainees
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ high standard of off-the-job training for adult trainees
- ◆ effective reviews of trainees carried out every four weeks
- ◆ productive working relationship among staff, employers and trainees
- ◆ well-qualified and occupationally experienced staff
- ◆ trainees' portfolio work is of a high standard

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not integrated into occupational training programme
- ◆ unstructured training on youth schemes
- ◆ no assessment planning

14. NTS offers a range of training programmes which meets the needs of the local transportation industry. The range is available to both youth and adult trainees, outside of their current NVQ programme. These additional qualifications are offered to trainees to meet specific workplace requirements or to enhance future career progression. No charge is made to trainees for this instruction, even though some additional training programmes are both intensive and costly. Action-planning is used to consult and advise trainees on their progress. Comprehensive and demanding targets are agreed on with trainees at regular four-week intervals. Trainees demonstrate a high level of occupational competence, are punctual, attentive and work independently once guidance is given. Employers provide a high level of support for trainees throughout their training. Work placements offer a professional environment, with up-to-date resources to support them. For adult trainees, NTS arranges medical examinations and provisional LGV and PCV licences. Trainees are given extensive off-the-job instruction in both the theoretical and practical aspects of transportation. Off-the-job instruction is of a particularly high standard, with a high achievement rate in externally set transport examinations and tests. Staff are well qualified and highly experienced.

15. Key skills are not integrated into the modern apprenticeship programme, but are seen as an addition to occupational training. Valuable assessment opportunities are missed throughout the training programme. There is no off-the-job training for trainees on NVQ programmes. NTS relies wholly on the training provided by the employer to meet trainees' needs. Although formal training plans and review action-plans are in place, there are no written assessment plans, and some trainees on NVQ programmes are unaware of their targets and assessment dates.

Business administration

Grade 3

16. NTS has 57 trainees in business administration, working towards NVQ levels 2 and 3. Of these, 27 are on youth training programmes and 30 are modern apprentices. Where appropriate, trainees are also offered NVQs at level 2 in information technology. Trainees are secured placements in a variety of local businesses, including estate agencies, transportation companies, hotels and car hire firms. Trainees are assessed in the workplace and attend off-the-job workshops and portfolio-building sessions at NTS's training centres. There are 10 staff members involved in training, assessment and internal verification of the business administration programme. All are occupationally competent, and their qualifications are up to date. There are also three placement officers. Of the 95 leavers in business administration in 1997-98, 58 per cent achieved an NVQ. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ information technology options made available to trainees
- ◆ high-quality work placements with good resources
- ◆ highly supportive workplace supervisors and trainers
- ◆ effective off-the-job portfolio-building sessions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills not integrated into occupational training
- ◆ some trainees not visited at work regularly
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ infrequent monitoring and review of trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

During portfolio workshops, trainers manage the sessions skillfully, encouraging discussion and debate among trainees. This results in trainees reflecting on their own experiences and enabling them to identify their own work-based evidence. Sessions are of benefit to all trainees.

17. Work-placement officers have developed effective working relationships with employers, securing good work placements for trainees. Employers and workplace supervisors demonstrate a high level of commitment to, and support for, trainees. Of particular note are the resources to which trainees are exposed and of which they are given experience, such as advanced mail-handling and call systems and digital imaging software. However, employers are not formally informed about trainees' current training and assessment. As a result, additional opportunities for learning and assessment at work are lost. During off-the-job portfolio-workshop sessions, trainers instigate discussion and encourage trainees to share their experiences with others in the group. The range of evidence, which can be used to demonstrate competence, is fully explained to trainees.

18. Key skills are not assessed as part of the training programme. Key skills assessment is carried out at the end of the programme when trainees have collected all their evidence for the NVQ. As a result, opportunities to assess key

skills, at the same time as trainees are producing evidence for the occupational NVQ, are missed. Some trainees are not monitored or reviewed at work regularly. Assessment visits are infrequent; for those trainees not attending off-the-job portfolio-building workshops, contact is limited. This results in some trainees' progress towards their qualification being slow.

Business administration (information technology)

Grade 3

19. NTS has 28 trainees studying for NVQs in information technology at levels 2 and 3, of whom seven are on modern apprenticeship programmes and 25 are in work placements. A few youth trainees and all modern apprentices are employed. Ten trainees are studying for a second NVQ in administration, while one is studying for accounts. Trainees attend a weekly computer workshop at NTS's training centre. Trainers have recently begun to visit trainees in the workplace. The computer department has one full-time trainer who has been in post since April 1998. Last year, 45 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ in information technology. The company's self-assessment report did not accurately identify all the strengths in this area, although inspectors confirmed the weaknesses. Many of the strengths identified were judged by inspectors to be normal practice. The grade awarded by the inspectors is the same as proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees make good progress towards their qualification
- ◆ off-the-job training is effectively planned and delivered
- ◆ trainees produce good-quality work
- ◆ good individual support for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of work-based assessment
- ◆ trainees' off-the-job training is not linked to their work
- ◆ work supervisors are not involved in trainees' learning

20. Trainees work steadily through a series of structured exercises which introduces them to all aspects of computing at the required level. Trainers make good use of the weekly computer workshop to maintain trainees' motivation and commitment to the qualification. Trainers recognise the differing needs of trainees and plan learning and assessment opportunities effectively. Trainees are able to describe their current progress and how their work relates to the qualification's requirements. Trainees are conscientious, and the work which they produce is detailed and of a high standard.

21. Over 75 per cent of assessments are carried out in the computer centre. Although trainees build sound knowledge about computing, there are little or no judgements based on their competence in the work environment. Assessment activities are standardised and lack creative learning opportunities. Action has recently been taken to improve the frequency of review visits and to increase the use of work-related evidence for assessment. Many trainees work in placements where there are limited opportunities for them to practise all those skills which they have learned. Employers and workplace supervisors are not always informed about the requirements of NVQs or about how trainees are progressing. Recent improvements have been made to computer equipment and room layout, making the centre more welcoming.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

22. NTS has 23 trainees in retail, two in customer service and eight in distribution and warehouse. Most trainees are on youth schemes, with two trainees on NVQ level 1, 18 working towards level 2 and two working towards level 3. There is only one adult trainee currently on a programme. The trainees are divided among three of the company's four divisions and the Norwich and King's Lynn centres. Four different awarding bodies are used for these qualifications. The position has also been complicated by the recent acquisition of another training company, which is accredited by a different awarding body and has different assessment procedures. All of the staff have appropriate industrial experience and necessary qualifications. Trainees' monitoring officers are also their assessors. There are marked differences in the divisions' assessment practices. In one division, responsible for the new provision, there have been serious problems over the quality and monitoring of assessments. These issues are now being addressed. Some strengths proposed in the company's self-assessment report were judged by inspectors to be normal practice. The grade awarded is the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed health and safety training
- ◆ trainees' work demonstrates a range of assessment evidence
- ◆ good-quality work placements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ standard of assessment practice varies among divisions
- ◆ trainees are not set clear targets with timescales
- ◆ key skills are not integrated into the modern apprenticeship programme

GOOD PRACTICE

An NVQ level 1 trainee working in a warehouse was carrying out his own risk assessments in the workplace, and was well informed on current legislation and good practice in the workplace.

23. The separate roles of the monitoring officer and assessor are not clearly demarcated. Review and assessment paperwork is used for both purposes. Trainees receive regular monthly visits, but are not set clear goals and targets. Only erratic and sometimes confused notes are made of their progress during review meetings. In two divisions, trainees' portfolios are well presented and are verified at regular intervals. Assessors' detailed notes are kept, and questions and answers are recorded. Trainees' portfolios contain a wealth of different types of evidence which confirms their competence. In the third division, the assessment regime is less rigorous. Assessments are recorded using a tick-box system, and feedback to trainees is largely verbal. Although this is being addressed, there are still instances of it occurring. In this division, the use of evidence is restricted, and little thought is given to the types of evidence which can be used.

24. Key skills are not assessed as part of the trainees' learning programme. Valuable opportunities to assess key skills in the workplace are missed. Workplace supervisors identify how trainees, in establishing stock control systems, can use a computer, rather than rely on manual checks.

Foundation for work

Grade 3

25. Provision for prevocational training is within craft and business administration. Training is available to unemployed adults referred by the employment service and young people from the careers service. Young trainees who may not know what career path to take, or need extra support before following an NVQ, are placed on the 'next step' programme. The training on offer is in numberpower and wordpower, key skills units, vocational access certificate and units of NVQ qualifications at levels 1 and 2. There are 29 trainees on next step and prevocational training at the Norwich site and 20 trainees at the King's Lynn site. Trainers are qualified assessors, with the exception of two who are working towards their D32 and D33 assessor's award. Trainers are well qualified in their occupational area and many have already completed training in key skills. The self-assessment report is written as though the King's Lynn site represents all the prevocational training. Inspectors judged some of the strengths in the self-assessment report to be normal practice. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that proposed in the company's self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees are reviewed and assessed regularly to monitor progress
- ◆ work placements are sensitive to individual needs
- ◆ trainees make significant progress towards fulfilling their goals

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees lack information and feedback on their training programme
- ◆ some assessments are not recorded
- ◆ some adult trainees have little work-based training

26. Those trainees identified at initial assessment phase as requiring help with basic skills are given additional screening to highlight the amount of help which they are likely to require. This screening is used to help to plan their learning programme. The experience and qualifications of some trainees on the youth programmes inform their training plans. Trainees are well supported in their training, to ensure that they meet their targets in a way which is sensitive to trainees' differing needs. This extends to the choice of placement and the regular contacts made while on placement. Good use is made of learning materials to integrate development of basic skills with trainees' interests and vocational choice.

27. Trainees are regularly assessed and can clearly see the progress which they are making. However, when trainees achieve NVQ units, it is sometimes not recorded until the end of the programme. Review records are often superficial, and the intermediate goals and methods of achieving them are not clearly identified. Trainees lack information and sometimes consultation about their programme of training. Adult craft trainees have little time for work-based training and this affects their motivation to continue training.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

28. Since the first inspection NTS has issued a written equal opportunities policy and developed a strategy to improve staff, trainees and employers' understanding of equality issues. The company has clearly focused on implementing its action plan. An equal opportunities officer has been appointed and all staff have attended staff development on equality of opportunity. Two members of staff have also attended specific sessions on awareness of hearing impairment. New marketing materials are currently being developed which reflect the diversity of training offered and encourage applicants from across the community. All trainees attend an induction which includes equality of opportunity. A questionnaire is used to reinforce and check trainees' understanding of equality of opportunity. Only one area of the Norwich site is still inaccessible to trainees in wheelchairs. The company is in the process of developing ramp access.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no equal opportunities policy
- ◆ no guidance for trainees on equal opportunities

- ◆ stereotyped gender roles on promotional marketing materials
- ◆ facilities inaccessible to wheelchair users
- ◆ placement providers not monitored for equal opportunities
- ◆ no staff training on equal opportunities

29. Considerable improvements have been made since the first inspection. The company has taken effective action to increase understanding of equality of opportunity on the part of staff and trainees.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective implementation of equal opportunities strategy
- ◆ staff trained in equality issues

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ procedures not fully implemented for monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ no targeting of under-represented groups

30. The company has successfully introduced a comprehensive policy and strategy to ensure that all staff and trainees are fully aware of the company's commitment to equality of opportunity. The policy is clearly displayed in the training centres and is widely distributed to trainees and staff. The company's equal opportunities strategy details how the company will market itself, and how equality of opportunity will be promoted through the induction programme and agreements with sponsoring companies. The strategy also includes the role and responsibilities of the equal opportunities officer. The company monitors applications, starters, leavers, and trainees' achievements. All trainees, no matter what additional needs they may have, are expected to achieve learning goals. Any gap in the achievement of leavers with disabilities to those without disabilities are monitored and any difference investigated. Currently, 3 per cent of trainees on youth programmes and 28 per cent of adult trainees have learning difficulties and disabilities.

31. The company has raised staff awareness of equality issues by providing staff development. Development has included special sessions on awareness of hearing impairment and dealing with trainees with specific learning difficulties. This knowledge and understanding of the issues is passed on to trainees through the revamped induction programme. Staff are now confident to discuss equality of opportunity and tackle trainees' misconceptions. Discussions are targeted at a particular client group and cover issues such as harassment at work and bullying. Trainees complete a range of questionnaires at regular intervals during their training to monitor equality issues. These questionnaires provide useful feedback on how the trainee is being treated in the workplace. Trainees have a clear understanding of whom they should contact if discriminated against.

32. Although the company records data on trainees' ethnicity and gender, it does not use these data to determine trends in recruitment. There is no targeting of under-represented groups. Not all employers are currently being monitored for equality of opportunity. Letters have been sent to all employers informing them that staff from NTS will be monitoring equality of opportunity in the workplace but this has yet to be fully implemented. Although staff visit work placements regularly there has been little focus on discussing equality issues with employers. Many of the employers used by NTS are small family businesses and some do not have an equal opportunities policy and lack awareness of the issues.

Trainee support

Grade 2

33. Over the last year, NTS's managers and staff have spent considerable time and energy creating a formal and effective framework for the support of trainees. Trainees now experience a good level of support throughout their training at NTS. New staff have been recruited based on their expertise in the recruitment and initial assessment of trainees. Some staff have undertaken additional training including training in the use of assessment tests. A small knowledgeable team has been appointed to interview all prospective trainees. The support provided for trainees is now fully recorded. A new post of trainee support officer has been created. The post holder is responsible for assuring the quality of all progress reviews.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor initial assessment
- ◆ induction is dull and does not meet trainees' needs
- ◆ many aspects of trainees support not recorded
- ◆ no sharing of good practice across divisions

34. NTS has successfully met the objectives of its action plan. Many of the new initiatives are already having a positive impact.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective liaison with referral agencies and schools
- ◆ effective use of accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment system
- ◆ clear match of placements and programmes to individual trainees' needs
- ◆ good pastoral and practical support for trainees
- ◆ frequency of reviews tailored to meet trainees' needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little involvement of some workplace supervisors in trainees' reviews
- ◆ some trainees not aware of target completion dates

35. NTS has two highly experienced members of staff, one based at King's Lynn and the other in Norwich, who interview most of the trainees. This ensures consistency in recruitment and a very good level of communication and understanding has been built up with staff from the different agencies which refer trainees to the company. Staff from these agencies liaise directly with NTS's recruitment officers ensuring any particular needs trainees may have are identified and addressed promptly. One training officer visits careers offices across Norfolk and into Suffolk to interview applicants. This enables trainees to attend interviews locally. Interviews are also arranged at very short notice. This arrangement removes the pressure on some trainees to cope with difficult transport arrangements in rural areas.

36. NTS has established good links with some schools and supports career education programmes. School pupils are able to try work experience, linked to training, with NTS. Some pupils who are underachieving or experience problems are now in their second year with NTS. Under this scheme pupils either attend NTS for two days each week or a work placement. Staff work well with disaffected young people and are highly successful in motivating them. All trainees are given the opportunity to discuss their prior experience and achievement at the start of their training programme. The possible use of existing evidence is explored formally and recorded during the initial interview by a recruitment officer qualified in accrediting prior learning. Details are fully recorded for use by assessors once trainees have started their training.

37. All trainees undergo a two-day comprehensive induction. A key element of the induction is the testing of trainees' basic and occupational skills. Although the local training and enterprise council prescribes the use of national tests, the provider has moved beyond simply complying with this requirement. A member of staff has been appointed and trained to initially assess trainees. Trainees receive both verbal and written feedback on their performance. Any additional support identified by the test is arranged immediately. The testing of basic skills is complemented by a pilot scheme to determine the aptitude of trainees for particular occupations. Trainees on national apprenticeship and modern apprenticeship schemes also undertake an initial key skill assessment.

38. NTS spends considerable time in matching the needs and aspirations of trainees to particular work placements. In the case of adult trainees with particular learning difficulties or disabilities, this is part of a crucial process in ensuring the success of the training programme. For one trainee this was to pass a driving test so that company deliveries could be made. Another youth trainee is a member of a motor

cycle race team. A motor cycle dealership was persuaded to keep an offer of a work placement until the end of the racing season.

39. The reorganisation of roles and responsibilities of staff has resulted in individual members of staff being responsible for specific trainees. This initiative has resulted in clear improvements in trainees' appreciation of whom they should contact in the event of a problem. Staff have a good understanding of trainees' individual needs. Individual initiatives are developed which promote self-esteem and confidence before trainees undertake work placements or enter employment. Staff at NTS have a positive and practical approach to supporting trainees, but are also concerned to record any help provided so that the effect of the support can be assessed and monitored.

40. Trainees' progress reviews are carried out at intervals which reflect the different programmes trainees are on and the level of support they need. The frequency of the visits varies between one week and three months, based upon the considered approach to individual trainees' needs. NTS clearly focuses resources upon those who most need help. Trainees' achievements have improved considerably since the implementation of this support mechanism.

41. Many workplace supervisors have only a passive role in the review of trainees' progress. Some do not become directly involved in the process and are merely asked to confirm the comments of NTS's staff. Some reviewers interview trainees separately from workplace supervisors and there is no dialogue between all three parties. NTS is taking steps to address this issue: new forms have been introduced to ensure the participation of workplace supervisors in the review process. A newly appointed trainee support officer has already produced an action plan to monitor and ensure the effective use and consistency of the review process across the whole of the company. Although trainees do receive interim action plans and understand their short term goals, they are not aware of how long it will take to complete their training programme or the critical points in working towards their qualification

Management of training

Grade 3

42. NTS has recently made significant changes to the company's organisational structure. The management of the company's commercial interests, which include vehicle driver supply and training divisions, is now completely separate from the routine management of government-funded training programmes. There are now two principle sections within the NVQ department based in Norwich, each with its own senior manager. One section is responsible for recruitment, initial assessment and placement of trainees, the other controls the training and assessment process. A centre manager manages King's Lynn. Lines of communication are well defined and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The business plan is current and clearly identifies the company's objectives. There is a staff induction, appraisal

and development programme encompassing all personnel, including part-time employees. NTS has been recognised as an Investor in People since 1998. Many new initiatives have been developed since the first inspection. Managers have been cautious in their approach to change, and new systems have been subject to pilot phases before being formally adopted. Procedures are still changing and being evaluated.

At the first inspection, the following weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poor record-keeping
- ◆ staff not effectively deployed
- ◆ variable staff induction procedures
- ◆ variable communication among divisions

43. The new company structure has enabled managers to deal with the weaknesses previously identified. Managers have a good understanding of what needs to be achieved. Not all the new initiatives are established yet but there have been measurable improvements as a result of the changes which have been implemented. At reinspection inspectors identified that the management of training had improved to a satisfactory standard.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective management of the training programmes
- ◆ appropriate targets widely understood and closely monitored

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of management guidelines for staff

44. Managers have successfully steered the organisation through a period of major change since the first inspection. The old divisional structure has been dismantled. Specific managers now have direct responsibility for the government-funded training programmes. Lines of communication across the company are now clearer and more effective, with essential information now passed swiftly to the right people. All members of staff understand their role in the organisation. Management and staff away-days have helped to generate a good team spirit, which has carried NTS through some difficult months. Managers are now well informed by extensive and relevant data. Key statistics are regularly analysed to identify trends and monitor performance. Managers have recognised where problems have arisen and taken steps to remedy the situation. For example, a strategy to improve the company's recruitment has led to an increase in trainees joining the programmes. Where there used to be a delay in interviewing trainees and giving them a start date, the company has now employed a recruitment officer who interviews trainees

promptly and confirms a place on the training programme at the time of interview. Early leavers are also monitored closely. Retention levels and achievement rates have both improved over the last year.

45. Targets within the NVQ department are discussed and agreed on between section managers. In turn, managers set targets for their assessment teams in each occupational area. The emphasis has been changed from individual to team targets. Staff recognise their responsibilities as a member of a team and are enthusiastic about contributing to targets. Progress towards targets is discussed at monthly staff meetings and one senior manager co-ordinates achievement and monitors the company's overall progress.

46. The new company structure was run on a pilot basis before being officially adopted. During this time new systems were developed and tested. However, there are few policies or guidelines to ensure current practice is understood by all staff and consistently maintained. Those which were in place, are now out of date and do not reflect the company's current operation. Each manager has been allocated the responsibility for developing certain aspects of policy. There is still a significant amount of progress to be made before current practice is reflected in staff guidelines.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

47. NTS meets the requirements of the ISO 9002 quality standard and is an Investor in People. The company has a comprehensive quality manual and a designated quality manager. The manual is reviewed every year, although some procedures have not been changed since 1994. Achievement data are produced monthly and distributed to heads of division. These data record the number of new starters, leavers and NVQ outcomes. This forms the basis of the divisional and senior management meetings. However, data are not used cumulatively to identify year-on-year trends. Internal verification procedures are implemented across all occupational areas. The company seeks formal feedback on the quality of its training through the use of trainees' questionnaires on leaving the scheme. The self-assessment report identified the main strengths and weaknesses, and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ targets set at divisional and programme level for trainees' achievement
- ◆ trainees' views used to inform the development of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate system of tracking those trainees who leave the programme
- ◆ the quality of training varies across divisions
- ◆ quality assurance systems have not identified variable training quality

48. Each programme area is profiled to achieve set targets linked to TEC profiles. Divisional teams meet each month and monitor performance against targets. When trainees leave the programme, they are systematically sent a questionnaire which asks for feedback on the quality of training, but are not asked why they left the programme. The company does not follow up or collate information on trainees' destinations. Since April 1998, trainees' views have been sought on the quality of training, while still on the programme. Evaluation of the training programmes includes the feedback from trainees and has led to changes in the delivery of training. The standard of tracking trainees' progress on different courses is variable. Poor practice in the monitoring of trainees, such as not visiting trainees on a regular basis, has not been identified by quality assurance procedures.

49. In 1997-98, trainees' achievement of modern apprenticeships was good, at 82 NVQs per 100 leavers. Although job outcomes on the work-based training for adults programme was below the TEC average, the company's overall performance compared well with that of other providers in the area. The number of trainees achieving NVQs on the youth programme was poor. However, action has been taken to improve trainees' achievement.