



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

Bridge Training Resources

SUMMARY

Bridge Training Resources provides satisfactory foundation training for young people and adults with disabilities or ongoing difficulties which preclude them from accessing employment or mainstream training. Training programmes are highly individualised. Trainers use a good variety of suitable learning materials and trainees make particularly good progress in basic skills. However, there is insufficient emphasis on helping trainees to gain work experience. The organisation successfully demonstrates its commitment to equal opportunities through its specialised work with people with diverse needs. However, the equal opportunities policy is not sufficiently promoted. Staff provide an appropriate range of additional training and personal support. Managers adopt a hands-on approach, but some aspects of the training programmes are insufficiently co-ordinated. Quality assurance arrangements, including self-assessment, are inadequate.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good progress towards individual goals
- ◆ good recruitment of trainees with diverse needs
- ◆ staff highly responsive to trainees' individual needs
- ◆ full involvement of management in training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work placements available
- ◆ no strategies to implement equal opportunities policy
- ◆ inadequate staff development
- ◆ inadequate use of management information systems
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment

INTRODUCTION

1. Bridge Training Resources, located in central Gloucester, is a registered charity. It was established in 1989 to help those with additional support needs to maximise their long-term employment potential. The organisation has contracts with the training and enterprise council (TEC) Link Group to provide youth training to trainees who have been endorsed by the careers service as requiring additional support. Basic employability training is offered to adults in Gloucestershire who encounter barriers to employment, have disabilities or learning difficulties. In November 1999, the organisation started to offer the life skills option of the Learning Gateway. In addition, Bridge Training Resources receives funding through the European Social Fund (ESF) to provide support, guidance and prevocational training to young people aged 16 to 25. There are currently 22 youth and 40 adult trainees. Bridge Training Resources provides training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in business administration and information technology. Trainees on youth and adult training programmes work towards externally accredited qualifications in basic skills and foundation vocational skills such as wordpower, numberpower and vocational access certificates. Bridge Training Resources employs 13 members of staff who are accountable to a board of trustees.

2. Gloucestershire is a rural county. The unemployment rate stands at 3 per cent compared with the national average of 3.9 per cent. Engineering is an important industry for employment in the county. At its peak, this sector employed 20 per cent of the population, but the number of jobs has decreased in recent years. The tourism and the catering industries provide increasing employment opportunities. New jobs are predicted in business administration, finance and insurance. Call centres are a developing business in Gloucestershire and distribution centres in Evesham and Swindon also attract Gloucestershire residents. There are a number of rural pockets of social deprivation, including Stroud, Dursley and the Forest of Dean. Gloucestershire also has some inner city problems in Gloucester and Cheltenham. The main emerging skills shortage for Gloucestershire is in information technology skills. Almost 2 per cent of the population of Gloucester are from minority ethnic groups. Seventy-three per cent of 16 year olds progress to further education in schools and colleges, compared with the national average of 69 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 56.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Bridge Training Resources first had training in self-assessment in 1997. The self-assessment process was carried out against the framework outlined in *Raising The Standard* in 1998, using the guidelines supplied by the TEC. The organisation's first self-assessment report was published in November 1999. An action plan to address identified weaknesses was not published until March 2000. Feedback from trainees and external agencies was used to identify strengths and weaknesses, although not all staff were involved. However, all staff have received a copy of the self-assessment report and the resulting action plan. The report provided detailed information on the background to the company, but failed to identify some of the significant weaknesses.

4. Four inspectors spent a total of 12 days at Bridge Training Resources in May 2000. They interviewed 30 trainees. Twenty-nine interviews were conducted with Bridge Training Resources' staff and two with members of external agencies. Inspectors visited three workplaces and held three interviews with managers or supervisory staff. Inspectors observed and graded six training sessions and one review. Twenty-four trainees' files and 18 portfolios were examined. Other documents reviewed included contracts with the TEC, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance and operating manuals, minutes of meetings, staff development records, learning materials, business plan, marketing materials and monitoring data.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Foundation for work	2	3	1	1	0	7

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for work

Grade 3

5. Bridge Training Resources' foundation for work programmes are available to people aged between 16 and 63, particularly those with a wide range of additional learning and personal needs. Many trainees have physical disabilities or learning difficulties. Some come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and may have behavioural or alcohol- and drug-related problems. The youth training programme provides training for trainees working towards an NVQ at level 1 in information technology. They have been endorsed by the careers service as having additional training needs. Sixteen trainees are on the life skills option of the Learning Gateway which was introduced in September 1999 for young people who require initial support before progressing to employment or further training. One trainee is on a similar programme, known as 'New Start'. Forty adult trainees are on the basic employability programme, designed to help them overcome barriers to

employment.

6. Trainees on the basic employability programmes and Learning Gateway work towards individual learning goals or 'milestones' designed to help them to overcome identified barriers to employment and further training. Individual programmes are negotiated with trainees during the first few weeks of training. Some trainees receive occupational training in information technology, business administration and basic construction skills. Some adult trainees work towards an NVQ at level 1 in information technology. The other trainees work towards nationally recognised foundation training awards and vocational certificates. Additional occupational training, leading to national certificates, is available in skills such as fork truck operation, health and hygiene and furniture restoration. Trainees choose to undertake either entire qualifications or units identified as of particular benefit to them. Trainees who have been identified as having literacy and numeracy learning needs work towards basic skills qualifications. Two members of staff who are qualified to teach basic skills offer training in numeracy, literacy and personal development. Training in health and safety and job search is included in all the programmes. One member of staff has responsibility for arranging work experience for trainees. Work experience of up to five days is arranged for the Learning Gateway trainees, whereas adult trainees have a work placement for four weeks. Five adult trainees currently have placements, which include a home for the elderly, a furniture recycling project and a city farm. Trainees' progress is reviewed every six weeks.

7. In 1997-98, 24 per cent of adult trainees achieved jobs. In 1998-99 and 1999-2000, this figure stood at 15 per cent and 17 per cent respectively. However, retention and qualification achievement rates have improved. In 1997-98, 62 per cent of trainees left the programme early without qualifications rising to 65 per cent in 1998-99. However, in 1999-2000, only thirty per cent left without achieving a qualification, while 21 per cent achieved some of their individual learning goals and 55 per cent completed their individual training plans. Of the 29 trainees who started the youth training programmes in 1998-99, 10 achieved the NVQ in information technology and 13 trainees left without qualifications. The five trainees who started in 1999-2000 are still in training. Ninety per cent of the 21 trainees who have started the 19-week Learning Gateway programme since it was introduced in September 1999 are either still in training or have achieved jobs. Two have left early without achieving a qualification. Self-assessment was not sufficiently focused on the occupational area. Many of the strengths and weaknesses related to the generic aspects. Some did not clearly address the issues. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good occupational training in basic construction
- ◆ excellent matching of trainees to work placements
- ◆ creative learning activities in basic skills training
- ◆ good progress towards individual goals

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work placements available
- ◆ no records made of on-the-job learning
- ◆ late assessment of trainees' progress in information technology

8. Training in basic construction skills is effective. Good use is made of individual and group projects to develop trainees' skills in woodwork and metal craft. Trainees design their own projects, which often involve making an item for the home or to support an interest or hobby. Staff provide an appropriate level of guidance, according to the trainees' individual learning needs. Trainees are encouraged to become increasingly independent in making decisions and finding solutions to problems. Skills in teamwork are developed through challenging group projects. For example, 11 trainees designed and built an ornamental canon out of wood. This involved each trainee contributing by taking the responsibility for one component. Trainees are well motivated and learn a good range of basic construction skills. Youth trainees, working towards NVQs at level 1 in information technology, are given a wide range of challenging tasks. Trainees develop their computing skills while working on other aspects of their training programme such as understanding health and safety or legal issues. However, some business administration and information technology workshop sessions for adult trainees lack structure. Trainees working through set assignments do not always receive adequate support. Trainees sometimes have to wait for long periods before staff are free to offer assistance. Feedback to trainees on the quality of their assignments is slow. Trainers mark trainees' work weekly. Although trainees receive verbal comments on their work during the sessions, they have to wait for up to a week to receive a more detailed response.

9. Trainees make good progress in basic skills. Innovative activities, such as visits to the Crown Court and the local radio station, are used to enable trainees to practise their literacy and interpersonal skills. The trainers are adept at finding different ways to catch the trainees' imagination. Trainees work well together planning and arranging events, outings and activities, incorporating a wide range of communication and number skills. A good variety of suitable learning materials are used to supplement this work. Home-produced handouts and everyday practical equipment complement the published materials, including videos and audio tapes. Youth and adult trainees work well together. Staff successfully adapt learning tasks and resources to meet the different levels and interests of all trainees. The trainers are responsive to the trainees' learning styles. Trainers use some good training techniques to help trainees to tackle specific basic or key skills which they have previously found difficult. Much of the trainees' work is assessed towards wordpower and numberpower qualifications or certificates in personal development. However, some trainees are working towards qualifications which are inappropriate to their abilities. They are not given sufficient information on the level of their qualification.

10. Trainees' learning programmes are well planned, and are realistic and relevant. Information obtained during the initial interview and induction is

effectively used to identify appropriate learning targets. Learning plans take into account trainees' interests and job aspirations, as well as their learning needs. Staff make effective use of a list of recognised targets for adult trainees. In 1999-2000, trainees who completed the programme achieved an average of three targets or 'milestones'. Trainees achieve a good range of additional vocational qualifications, such as certificates in chainsaw skills, basic electrics and computer literacy. Most trainees become significantly more self-confident while on the training programmes.

11. Bridge Training Resources has developed good links with a small number of local employers. Staff successfully arrange work experience opportunities which are appropriate to trainees' learning needs and personal circumstances, and they collaborate effectively with employers to ensure that the supervisors have a good understanding of the trainees' learning goals. The trainees' roles within the organisation are sensitively negotiated. Work tasks are challenging, but realistic, and trainees receive good on-the-job training to help them carry out their work. Although employers and trainees sign an agreement with Bridge Training Resources, the majority of the details about the arrangements for work experience are not recorded. Trainees and supervisors are not encouraged to keep records of on-the-job training. Trainees do not receive written acknowledgement of the skills they acquire at work. Bridge Training Resources does not find sufficient work placements for its trainees. Neither youth nor adult trainees are given sufficient opportunities to use the skills they develop in a work-related context. Some training in information technology, craft and basic skills is not sufficiently linked to the world of work. It is not made clear to trainees how some training activities are relevant to future jobs or work-based training programmes. The proportion of trainees progressing to jobs is low. In 1999-2000, 17 per cent of adult trainees achieved a job.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

12. Bridge Training Resources has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which meets the requirements of the TEC and the Employment Service. The policy, which is reviewed annually, is contained within the quality assurance manual, which is issued to all staff. Overall responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the training manager. Trainees are given a copy of the company's equal opportunities policy during their induction. Equal opportunities has recently become a fixed agenda item at monthly staff meetings. Equal opportunities data are collected in accordance with TEC requirements. Information on gender and ethnicity is held on a database. Bridge Training Resources' client group is mainly drawn from people with specific learning needs and disabilities. Between 1999 and 2000, 46 per cent of trainees had disabilities, and 10 per cent were from minority ethnic groups. Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the self-assessment report and with one of the weaknesses. Staff have been given training in equal opportunities. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded the same

grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good awareness by staff of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ prompt action taken to resolve complaints
- ◆ good recruitment of trainees with diverse needs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no equal opportunities action plan
- ◆ no routine monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ restricted access to training for those using wheelchairs

13. The policy is informative. It clearly summarises relevant legislation and includes clear descriptions of forms of discrimination and victimisation. Separate sections outline the company's stance on harassment and bullying. However, the policy is not adequately promoted to staff, trainees or employers. There is no overall plan either to implement equal opportunities procedures or to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy. A promotional leaflet is sent to referral agencies and potential trainees, but it does not contain a statement about Bridge Training Resources' commitment to equal opportunities.

14. Staff have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues. Recent training has effectively increased their understanding of their role in promoting equality of opportunity. Trainers and managers liaise to ensure that good practice in equal opportunities is incorporated in all aspects of the training programmes. Equal opportunities issues are discussed at monthly staff meetings. This includes reviewing learning materials and developing innovative ways to present equal opportunities issues to trainees. Equal opportunities is effectively introduced in the induction programme. Trainees' understanding is checked using a comprehensive questionnaire. Trainees are made aware of the grievance procedures and have a good understanding of the process for dealing with any grievances. Prompt action has been taken when complaints have been made. Formal procedures are strictly adhered to. Each case is discussed thoroughly with all parties concerned, including witnesses, until a satisfactory conclusion is reached. Details of complaints are appropriately recorded in the trainees' files, but there is no recording of the agreed outcome.

15. Bridge Training Resources effectively recruits trainees with diverse learning needs and specialises in working with people with disabilities. Staff have worked with a good range of external agencies, including other training providers, to increase the scope of support offered to those with disabilities at work. Fifty per cent of the workforce has a disability. Trainees' recruitment data are maintained and monitored. The 1999-2000 annual report published equal opportunities data on staff and clients. Recruitment of women is below the average for the county of

Gloucester, but recruitment of people with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups is above the average. The organisation has procedures to broaden its recruitment objectives but these are not planned. The data are not routinely analysed to identify trends and help with marketing. The organisation has no strategy to promote the learning opportunities available at Bridge Training Resources. The annual report sets recruitment targets for the following year but no action plans are produced to outline what action will be taken to meet the targets.

16. Equal opportunities practices are not routinely monitored in the workplace. Bridge Training Resources has no systems or procedures to ensure that its trainees are receiving fair treatment at work. Employers training agreements have recently been amended to include a section on equal opportunities. A handbook given to employers, outlining their responsibilities for providing equality of opportunity for trainees from Bridge Training Resources, has recently been completed but has not yet been circulated. Bridge Training Resources has made available an information leaflet on equal opportunities to employers, but the effectiveness of this approach is not monitored.

17. Access for those in wheelchairs is restricted. The craft workshop was specifically designed to enable those with restricted mobility to access the facilities, but the two other units are cramped. Entrances to some of the training and rest rooms are not level. Lavatory facilities for trainees with disabilities are inadequate.

Trainee support

Grade 3

18. Trainees are referred to Bridge Training Resources by the careers service or the Employment Service. Some trainees come to the organisation on personal recommendations. The placement and recruitment officer interviews potential trainees. An initial interview form is used to record their prior experience and aspirations for the future and establish their eligibility for the particular programme. If no place is available immediately, potential trainees are added to a waiting list. A confidential medical questionnaire is completed. Trainees have an induction to their training programmes on an individual basis and complete an initial assessment package which is used to identify areas for development. An information booklet includes health and safety, grievance and disciplinary procedures. A procedure to check trainees' understanding of the induction has recently been introduced. This is undertaken on the first day of training and comments are sought from trainees within the first week on how they feel about their process. Progress reviews are carried out every four to eight weeks, depending on the programme. Trainees carry out a self-assessment on their progress on a monthly basis and discuss these with the trainers during the reviews. Trainees on the level 1 NVQ in information technology are introduced to the NVQ programme when deemed appropriate. One member of staff is a qualified social worker and two have undertaken introductory courses in counselling. Basic skills and business administration trainees receive training in job-search skills for one and a half days each week. The self-assessment report was not sufficiently self-

critical. It did not include the weaknesses identified by inspectors. However, inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the organisation.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ staff highly responsive to trainees' individual needs
- ◆ good additional support given to meet trainees' specific learning needs and difficulties
- ◆ effective reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment
- ◆ no routine recording of additional support given to trainees
- ◆ insufficiently planned job-search training

19. Training and administration staff and managers are highly responsive to the individual needs of the trainees. The organisation has developed good links with a wide range of external agencies which provide specialist support and advice. Staff work closely and patiently with trainees to help them to overcome personal problems and counter disadvantages. Individual sessions are held with trainees to identify their barriers to employment and work out individual targets to ensure that, wherever possible, trainees complete their training.

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee made significant progress on the information technology programme after being given a keyboard for left-handed trainees.

Magnifying screens for computers and specific software have been purchased to help trainees with sight difficulties or those with low reading levels.

Another trainee received all his documents on green paper, after it had been identified that this improved his ability to distinguish print.

20. Additional training in basic and personal skills is available to trainees on all programmes. A high proportion of trainees receive this support. One member of staff has experience in supporting dyslexic learners. Good use is made of additional funds to support trainees with specific barriers to learning. Specialist equipment is available to meet trainees' specific additional training needs. Staff successfully adopt innovative and imaginative training methods to fit in with trainees' specific learning needs. The progress review process has been under review since December 1999. Revised paperwork is used to ensure that a wider range of aspects of the trainees' programme is discussed. The new review form provides trainers with a comprehensive checklist to prompt more in-depth planning. The forms are effectively used to identify and record action points and revised targets. Staff use record sheets when carrying out daily reviews of trainees' progress. Trainers and trainees complete a chart to record progress and any barriers encountered which have prevented progress that particular day.

21. Bridge Training Resources has no clear written procedures for conducting initial assessments and reviews. A comprehensive initial assessment process was developed in 1997 and shared with other training providers. However, practice is inconsistent across the programmes. The process has not been fully discussed to ensure that all staff using the information are aware of how assessments are carried out. Most trainees are assessed for their levels of basic skills when they join the programme. The results are used to produce trainees' individual training plans and

to alert staff to the need for additional learning and support. Details of trainees' prior learning are not systematically recorded on their individual training plans. There is no initial assessment of their occupational skills. All trainees follow the same set information technology work packs, regardless of their prior learning and experience.

22. There are no systematic procedures for identifying or recording additional support. Support is provided when trainees specifically request it or when a member of staff is astute in identifying trainees' particular need for help. There are no clear procedures to ensure that support is taken up nor that its effectiveness is reviewed. No one in the organisation has designated responsibility for managing the support given to trainees.

23. There are no training plans for use in job-search training. Resource packs are available, as are practice interviews and assistance in curriculum vitae and letter writing. Additional resources are limited to information received from the Employment Service and local newspapers. Some staff have insufficient training and experience in helping people to develop job-search skills.

Management of training

Grade 4

24. The chief executive and 12 members of staff are accountable to a board of trustees. Strategic and day-to-day management is carried out by the training manager with support from the financial administrator, eight training staff and five administration and finance staff. New staff are employed only after a period of voluntary work with the trainees to enable them to experience the demands of the job. Induction for staff includes an introduction to the quality assurance manual. A business plan is produced every year. The recently revised policies and procedures are contained in the manual, which is issued to all staff. All staff have job descriptions. Staff appraisals take place annually and are part of a staff development programme. Six of the 13 members of staff were former trainees with Bridge Training Resources or another training provider. There are regular monthly meetings for all staff. Employers are given an information booklet on the work of the organisation. Health and safety visits are conducted to check the suitability of employers and work placements in relation to trainees' individual needs. Bridge Training Resources has an agreement with employers to ensure that trainees' direct supervisors are aware of their individual requirements. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The report failed to identify the use of management information as a weakness. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good internal communication
- ◆ full involvement of management in training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate staff training and development
- ◆ weak business planning
- ◆ no co-ordination of some aspects of training
- ◆ inadequate use of management information systems

GOOD PRACTICE

The problem of poor attendance levels has been addressed by introducing a monthly activity. All youth trainees on information technology programmes use a database to present their monthly attendance record as a bar graph. These graphs are displayed in an information technology workroom. Significant progress or deterioration in attendance is discussed with the training manager. This raises the trainees' awareness of the importance of attendance for work. Attendance rates improved from 40 per cent to 80 per cent within one year.

25. Communication among staff and managers is effective. Staff are encouraged to make their views known, either at the monthly meetings or confidentially at informal individual interviews. Meetings are used effectively to openly debate all aspects of the training programmes. Staff are kept informed of progress to programmes, and any changes and developments. However, few meetings have clear designated action points. Managers take a close interest in the development and progress of the trainees. They have a good understanding of the training, assessment and verification processes, work closely with trainees and are known to all trainees and employers. Practical suggestions from management and staff to improve the quality of the training programmes are openly debated, before being piloted and reviewed.

26. New staff undertake a period of induction training, for which there is a recently produced booklet, and they usually shadow existing staff for a period of time. They do not receive any formal training in training skills. Two members of staff have a teaching qualification. No other members of staff have received any trainer training or achieved training qualifications. Training for staff is often reactive, springing from issues identified during daily activities, staff meetings or requests by staff during the annual appraisal. Training focuses on satisfying legislative and awarding body requirements. Some staff training needs have not been met. There is no training and development plan for the organisation as a whole or for individual members of staff.

27. Bridge Training Resources' aims are well understood by staff. However, the organisation's objectives have not been translated into clear targets. The organisation sets itself few targets other than those directly related to its contracts. Staff do not have personal performance targets to meet.

28. The management and organisation of the training programmes are fragmented. Basic skills, craft workshops and business administration take place in separate units of the company's premises. Youth and adult training in business administration also take place in separate departments and are taught by different staff. There are insufficient links between the teaching teams. Trainers and trainees do not have easy access to trainees' records when reviewing their progress or assessing trainees' suitability for work experience. For example, vocational tutors are unaware of their progress in literacy and numeracy or their specific training needs in basic skills. There are few opportunities for staff from different units to share good and innovative practice. These weaknesses have been recognised by the organisation and in its business plan it proposes the formation of teams with team leaders and re-defined roles and responsibilities.

29. Insufficient use is made of management information systems. Data are produced to monitor achievements against contractual targets, but management information is not used sufficiently in the organisation's planning and decision making. A database is being developed to make the range of data more comprehensive.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

30. Bridge Training Resources has a quality assurance policy which states its commitment to continuously improving the quality of its services. To implement the policy, a recorded quality assurance system has been developed which covers some of the key processes involved in providing training. Quality assurance arrangements have been reviewed annually since 1993. Every member of staff has been issued with a copy of the quality assurance manual. Bridge Training Resources has a nominated manager responsible for quality assurance. The organisation was awarded the Basic Skills Agency quality mark in 1997. Two members of staff are qualified internal verifiers. The strengths identified in the organisation's self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses and identified additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ prompt action to address identified weaknesses

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ weak internal verification
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment

31. Procedures to implement quality assurance arrangements are inadequate. Procedural documents and policies are not systematically dated. Proposed review dates are not specified. Staff are given insufficient written instructions or guidelines on how to carry out their work in accordance with the agreed policy or standards. Internal audits are primarily used to prepare for TEC and awarding body audits. Programme reviews are inadequate, as are arrangements to monitor the quality of training. There are no systematic procedures for managers to evaluate how staff are performing in each of the key training processes.

32. However, through its self-assessment and external audits, the company has identified the gaps in its quality assurance arrangements. Managers have taken prompt action to improve the quality of all aspects of training. Existing procedures

and policies have been thoroughly reviewed. Many have been substantially revised to address identified weaknesses. New procedures and policies have been developed to ensure consistency across some aspects of the organisation's work. Improvements include the development of a range of handbooks for staff, trainees and employers. The staffing structure has been reorganised to include development teams with designated responsibility for improving a key aspect of training. The impact of these new developments and potential benefits to assure quality in the training of trainees has yet to be realised. Quality assurance policies and procedures do not cover all the key training processes. There are no written procedures for induction, initial assessment, the development of training plans, off-the-job training, or reviews. Where written procedures have been developed for other key training processes, they are clearly expressed and follow a uniform format.

33. The newly developed quality assurance manual, published in April 2000, is comprehensive and clearly presented. The inclusion of the annual report provides an accurate picture of the organisation's current performance against TEC contracts and projected targets for the forthcoming contract year. Equal opportunities recruitment data are compared to the averages within Gloucester and the county of Gloucestershire. The annual report includes the company's quality assurance arrangements and clearly outlines steps taken by the managers to make continuous improvements.

34. Internal verification procedures are inadequate. The process is not planned and lacks structure. There are no procedures to ensure that internal verifiers sample all of the assessment methods used by assessors. Observations of assessors are not systematically planned or recorded. Assessors receive insufficient written feedback on the quality of their assessments. Target dates for action are not identified. Bridge Training Resources has been slow in addressing these weaknesses. New procedures for internal verification have only recently been issued.

35. The company has a satisfactory system for obtaining feedback from both trainees and staff. Questionnaires are used and these cover key aspects of training. A software package is available to analyse trends in areas of the training process. However, this analytical tool is still in its infancy and questionnaires issued and returned in 1999 have still to be entered and analysed. There is no formal process to obtain feedback from employers. This is currently done informally through regular contact with employers via the placement officer. Bridge Training Resources prepares statistical data in relation to its performance against TEC contracts. However, there is no systematic evaluation of data to identify trends in the company's performance. Achievement and retention rates are not used to analyse the effectiveness of the training. In some instances, staff ascertain reasons why trainees leave the programme but this is not recorded systematically.

36. The self-assessment process was not sufficiently rigorous. Although the self-assessment report correctly identifies some of the key issues, it fails to link the strengths and weaknesses with sources of supporting evidence. Significant weaknesses have not been identified and some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Grading in the report was overestimated in some areas. Senior



managers carried out the self-assessment process. The staff and external key stakeholders were not involved. Although only recently published, the action plan has resulted in some improvements which have had an impact on the quality of training. The review of action arising from the action plan is now a fixed agenda item at monthly staff meetings.