



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 1999

REINSPECTION APRIL 2000

# North Lincs Training Group Ltd

## SUMMARY

North Lancs Training Group Ltd offers training across a range of occupational areas. The construction, retailing and hospitality programmes are good. The manufacturing programme is satisfactory, although the quality of provision within the different occupations in this sector does vary. Business administration is less than satisfactory, with a high number of early leavers, low achievement rates and generally slow progress. Equality of opportunity is well managed; policies and procedures ensure equality for all, with good representation from, and links with, minority ethnic groups. Some trainees had difficulty in recalling or understanding equal opportunity issues. Trainee support is satisfactory. Although trainees are well-supported throughout their training, the initial assessment and induction processes are weak. Management of the training provides a sound platform upon which to build. Employer links are good, and there is a positive and open management style within the organisation. However, the provider does not influence training and learning on the job. Quality assurance systems are satisfactory and well documented. Action plans are routinely used, although some monitoring systems are not sufficient to assure continuous improvement throughout the organisation. North Lancs Training Groups Ltd was reinspected 10 months after the publication of the first report. Business administration training remains unsatisfactory. Assessment practices are poor, trainees are making slow progress, especially in information technology, and problems highlighted at the first inspection relating to achievement and retention have not been addressed satisfactorily.

**As a result of the reinspection of North Lancs Training Group Ltd, the original published report text for business administration has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Construction	2
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	4
Retailing & customer service	2
Hospitality	2

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

REINSPECTION	
Business administration	4



### **KEY STRENGTHS**

- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ frequent reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ good equal opportunities practices
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ excellent staff teamwork

### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ key skills not integrated in most areas
- ◆ little work-based assessment
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective induction
- ◆ some unplanned on-the-job training
- ◆ poor management of employers

## INTRODUCTION

1. North Lancs Training Group Limited (NLTG) is owned by 80 member companies, located predominantly throughout the northwest of England and Northern Ireland. The company is based in Accrington, Lancashire, and was originally established in 1971 by the Furniture and Timber Industry Training Board. It became self-financing in 1983 and a limited company in 1986. All profits are re-invested in training activities. The company employs 68 staff. A board of directors manages the company, which includes representation from several member organisations together with the managing director and operations director. Both the latter are employed by NLTG. In return, NLTG provides training, personnel and health and safety services to its member companies.

2. NLTG has been delivering government-funded training programmes since 1983, and was initially contracted to provide youth training for 70 young people within the furniture and timber sector. There are now 1366 trainees on programmes following national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3 in construction, manufacturing, business administration, retailing and customer service and hospitality. Four hundred and twenty-two trainees are modern apprentices, 391 are national trainees and 525 are on other work-based training for young people. There are also 28 clients receiving training through the New Deal employment option. Ninety-nine per cent of trainees are employed.

3. NLTG has contracts with eight training and enterprise councils (TECs) and chambers of commerce training and enterprise (CCTE). These are Bolton and Bury, Calderdale and Kirklees, Cumbria, East Lancashire (ELTEC), Lancashire West (LAWTEC), Oldham, Rochdale, and North and Mid-Cheshire. The largest contract, totalling almost 50 per cent of the government-funded provision, is with ELTEC, who were the co-ordinating TEC for this inspection. NLTG has well-established links with over 500 employers, throughout all seven of the above TEC areas, providing employment and placement opportunities. NLTG are also members of local consortia responsible for the delivery of the off-the-job training elements for employed New Deal clients. They also deliver work-based training for the training and employment agency (T&EA) in Northern Ireland.

4. NLTG's head office is in Accrington. In addition, they have eight other centres, including premises in Northern Ireland and Cumbria. Specialist centres for information technology and fork-truck training in Accrington, and a sewing centre in Blackburn are used for the delivery of some off-the-job training. There is also a new sewing training school in Rochdale. Most training takes place on the employers' premises. However, the company also subcontracts training to three local colleges of further education which provide a limited amount of off-the-job training. Subcontracted provision includes national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in carpentry and joinery, furniture programmes and hospitality. Previous arrangements subcontracting administration training to a local college of further education have been discontinued since the first inspection.

5. NLTG operates in areas where a high proportion of employment is in manufacturing. Although in decline, manufacturing remains a major source of employment across the region, as does the service sector. Unemployment across the area varies considerably, from 2.6 per cent in Bury to 5.7 per cent in Oldham, compared with a national average of 5.2 per cent. Unemployment for 1998 year 11 school leavers ranges from 7.9 per cent in the Oldham area to 2.8 per cent in Bury. In 1998, 17.9 per cent of the school leavers in the Rochdale area entered government-funded training programmes. This is substantially higher than the other areas covered during this inspection, ranging from 16.6 per cent in Oldham, to 8.1 per cent in the Cumbria area. The percentage of school leavers progressing to further education ranges from 73.4 per cent in Bury, to 62.9 per cent in the ELTEC area. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was highest in Bury, at 53.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 38.1 per cent. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups varies considerably across the area, from 11 per cent in Oldham and Calderdale and Kirklees, to 0.4 per cent in Cumbria. The following table shows a breakdown of the above statistics, furnished by the TECs and CCTEs.

TEC	Unemployment rate	School leavers: percentage entering work-based training	School leavers: percentage entering further education	School leavers: percentage unemployed	School leavers: percentage achieving five GCSEs at grade C and above	Percentage of population from minority ethnic groups
ELTEC	5.7%	14.7%	62.9%	5.7%	44.5%	6.75%
LAWTEC	4.1%	12.5%	66.2%	6.5%	51.7%	3.0%
Rochdale	5.1%	17.9%	64.0%	4.4%	44.0%	6.75%
Calderdale & Kirklees	4.6%	14.0%	64.0%	4.0%	45.1%	Calderdale 5.0%
						Kirklees 11.0%
Oldham	4.6%	12.2%	66.6%	7.9%	39.9%	11.0%
Cumbria	4.3%	8.1%	69.2%	5.9%	44.2%	0.4%
Bolton & Bury	Bury 2.6%	Bury 13.1%	Bury 73.4%	Bury 2.8%	Bury 53.5%	8.3%
	Bolton 4.6%	Bolton 16.6%	Bolton 67.9%	Bolton 5.2%	Bolton 43.2%	

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. North Lancs Training Group (NLTG) prepared its self-assessment report in October 1998. Staff attended a number of training sessions and workshops designed to help them to contribute towards the preparation of the different report sections. Team leaders and training staff carried out self-assessment for their own occupational areas. The operations director took overall responsibility for the self-assessment process and led the preparation of the final report. She was supported by the quality manager, who was also responsible for the co-ordination and production of statistical data. NLTG also collected feedback from trainees, employers and its own staff. An action plan has been developed by the company to help begin addressing the issues raised as a result of self-assessment. NLTG prepared a new self-assessment report for the reinspection. The associated action plan made reference to the progress made in addressing the weaknesses and consolidating the strengths identified through inspection. All staff involved in the administration section contributed to the report which was submitted in February 2000. The report noted a number of strengths and few weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths. Others represent no more than normal practice. Some of the strengths were not relevant to the occupational area being reinspected. Inspectors found weaknesses that NLTG failed to identify through self-assessment.

7. A team of 16 inspectors took part in the first inspection, spending a total of 56 days with NLTG in April 1999. They visited 97 employers and interviewed 188 trainees. Inspectors visited six of NLTG's training centres and interviewed 27 staff. Three colleges of further education which provide training on a subcontracted basis were also visited. Inspectors examined a range of documentary evidence including trainees' files, NVQ portfolios, assessment and review documentation, and internal and external verifier reports. Policies and procedures, marketing information and a wide range of performance and occupancy data were also examined. Opportunities to observe sessions of learning, assessments and trainees' reviews were limited. The grades awarded to instruction sessions are detailed in the table below.

8. Reinspection took place in April 2000. A team of four inspectors spent 16 days at NLTG. They visited 38 employers, interviewed 55 trainees and 31 workplace supervisors. Ten NLTG staff were interviewed. Forty-three NVQ portfolios were examined, together with a wide range of documentation, including policies and procedures, assessment records, review documents, trainees' files, external verifiers' reports, and feedback from trainees and employers. Nine assessments or reviews were observed. There were no opportunities to observe formal training.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1					1
Manufacturing				1		1
Business administration		1	3			4
Retailing & customer service		2				2
Hospitality		2	1			3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 2

9. There are 47 trainees following NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in carpentry and joinery. Forty-three are modern apprentices, two are national trainees, and two are on other work-based training programmes for young people. All trainees are employed, and work with a range of employers, primarily joinery businesses, but including some do-it-yourself outlets and kitchen installation companies. Approximately 40 firms across the region are used to provide on-the-job training. Four colleges of further education are used to provide training off-the-job. All trainees attend college on a day-release basis each week, supplemented by periods of block release. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and one weakness. Inspectors agreed with some of these strengths but others represented no more than normal practice. They did not agree with the weakness claimed in the self-assessment report. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good on-the-job experience
- ◆ company's effective teamwork with trainees, employers and colleges
- ◆ good-quality off-the-job training and assessment
- ◆ well-planned training clearly understood by trainees
- ◆ good level of NVQ achievements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no assessment in the workplace
- ◆ no use of evidence from the workplace to support off-the-job assessment
- ◆ little awareness of key skills by trainees

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*A number of NLTG trainees have won prizes donated by the training provider and colleges. One of the colleges has recently been designated a centre of excellence by a major building materials manufacturer, who has awarded an annual prize for NVQ level 2 and 3 trainees.*

10. Training officers make regular visits to the workplace and carry out thorough reviews of trainees' progress. These are well-documented and helpful to trainees, who actively participate in self-assessment of their progress and target-setting. Opportunities for learning on the job are good and varied, but largely unstructured. NLTG exercises little influence over the content and direction of on-the-job training. Reliance is placed on employers to make relevant decisions on trainees' workloads, and this takes place within the context of individual business commitments. However, there is a positive, close working relationship between the provider and employers, and problems are quickly identified and promptly addressed.

11. This spirit of teamwork and co-operation extends to the colleges, all of which provide high standards of off-the-job training and assessment. Resources at colleges are of a high standard, and training is rigorous and challenging. Trainee progress and achievement at college is well documented and informative, and trainees have a strong awareness of their current performance, and the progress they are making through their NVQ.

12. Trainees are exceptionally well-motivated. Staff, both on and off the job, are well qualified and dedicated. There is a strong emphasis on providing incentives and rewards for outstanding performance, which is fully appreciated by trainees. Completion rates are good, at over 60 per cent. NVQ success rates are also good, at 100 NVQs per hundred leavers. However, this disguises the fact that a minority of trainees left the programme without achieving any qualification. All trainees are employed, and most remain in permanent full-time employment with their employers on completion of their training programme. Although committed to training, some employers are unsure about trainees' NVQ programmes, yet they express high levels of satisfaction with their performance and attitude to work.

13. Although key skills form an integral part of off-the-job training, trainees are uncertain about the notion, content and relevance of this area of their programme. No assessment takes place in the workplace, and opportunities are missed to use workplace evidence in the assessment process, with no examples of witness testimonies, photographic or product evidence used to complement on-the-job assessment. All assessment and internal verification takes place off the job and is based on practical and theory work undertaken at the colleges. Both procedures are applied fairly and rigorously. However, one college adds some realism to these activities by providing training and assessment on real work projects within the college campus and, on occasions, on small-scale works for charitable organisations in the community.

**Manufacturing**

**Grade 3**

14. NLTG offers a wide range of training programmes within the manufacturing sector. There are 581 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 across a range of disciplines. Nineteen are in textiles, 304 in machining, assembly and



processing skills (MAPs) and performing manufacturing operations (PMO), 18 in meat processing, 159 in wood machining and furniture production, and 81 in glass manufacturing and processing. One hundred and eight trainees are modern apprentices, 16 are national trainees, and 435 are following other work-based training programmes for young people. Ninety-eight per cent are employed. There are also 32 young people on the New Deal training in employment option. The range and size of employers is extremely diverse, including furniture production and assembly, upholstery, window manufacturing and glazing, slaughtering, retail butchering, sewing, and a variety of manufacturing and production occupations. Most of the training and assessment takes place in the workplace, although off-the-job training for modern apprentices working towards NVQs in wood machining is subcontracted to local colleges of further education. NLTG has set up a textile training school in Blackburn, where trainees working towards NVQs in this sector undertake a period of off-the-job training, up to 13 weeks in duration, prior to employment with local companies. Another centre has recently opened in Rochdale, to support New Deal clients wishing to undertake training prior to following a career in the textiles industry. Where necessary, employment is arranged for trainees in order to accommodate both the work experience and training requirements of their NVQ programmes. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths representing no more than normal practice, together with some weaknesses. Inspectors did not agree with some of the weaknesses, but identified others, together with a number of additional strengths. They awarded a grade lower than that given by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ detailed, well-recorded reviews
- ◆ highly effective assessment on the job in most areas
- ◆ good qualification achievement rates
- ◆ good and wide range of opportunities to gain occupational skills
- ◆ excellent team-working among trainers, trainees and employers
- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of NVQ process
- ◆ good quality and range of work placements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ employers' own training plans not integrated with NVQ programme
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ poor quality of some training
- ◆ some trainers not occupationally experienced
- ◆ low awareness of key skills among modern apprentices
- ◆ insufficient programme information given to employers
- ◆ poor off-the-job training provision for machine woodworking

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*There are good NVO practices in manufacturing companies. If trainees are unable to carry out any aspects of the NVO at their workplace, e.g. deep buttoning on chairs and settees, arrangements are made for the trainees to receive this training at other companies who can provide the necessary experience in order for them to complete their qualification.*

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*An example of the good use of technology to improve training. A new centre in Rochdale provides basic sewing training, mainly for New Deal clients. Training is closely linked to the needs of local employers. In order to facilitate the training process, extensive use is made of video recordings of skilled operatives at work. Trainees are also recorded and the resulting videos are analysed and used to provide them with feedback.*

15. Relationships among trainees, trainers and employers are good across all occupational sectors. Regular and frequent visits to the workplace by NLTG staff are the key means of maintaining contact with trainees and employers. Detailed reviews clearly record progress towards objectives and set targets for completion by the next scheduled visit. Trainees are also required to carry out a self-assessment of their progress. Workplace supervisors grade the trainees against the same criteria and any significant differences are followed up by the trainer. In most cases, training staff are also available to give support and advice to trainees by telephone outside of normal working hours.

16. Trainees are well-motivated and recognise the relevance of their qualifications to their employment. With the exception of slaughtering and retail butchering, trainees keep extensive logbook records and workplace diaries. Assessment is rigorous and fair, and is carried out in the workplace by NLTG staff supported by workplace supervisors. Some of the latter are qualified assessors, and most are fully involved in the assessment process. Those who are not qualified assessors, but are occupationally experienced, endorse trainees' claims to competence, and these are then counter-signed by a qualified assessor.

17. Achievement rates for qualifications across all occupations within the sector are good, especially in MAPs and furniture production, where they are 78 and 80 per cent respectively. The number of leavers failing to complete their programmes is high in some of the smaller occupational areas within the manufacturing sector. However, these issues have already been recognised by the company and steps taken to address them.

18. There are well-established links with employers. The overall quality of employers and work placements used is good, with excellent opportunities for trainees to gain a wide range of occupational skills. In furniture and textiles in particular, there is a range of good-quality work placement and employment opportunities available to trainees. The review process is helpful in identifying any requirements for additional training, and trainees are frequently moved into different departments in order to gain experience in the various stages of production.

19. Most training takes place on the job, although its quality varies from employer to employer. There is some formal training on the job, but most learning is coincidental through working, although trainees are coached and supervised until deemed competent. Employers are not routinely asked whether they have their own in-house training programmes. Where these do exist, they are not integrated into trainees' individual training plans. Training plans in the sewing centres only cover exercises for very basic sewing options, and there are no advanced or job-related exercises available. NLTG has not developed training material in partnership with employers. Those training plans which have been developed take the form of checklists, and do not include work instructions or assessment guidelines. On-the-job training is best where employers are directly involved in the assessment process.

20. In glass and meat processing, the NLTG training officers are not occupationally experienced. In retail butchering there have been no formal assessments for up to nine months, although the trainer gives guidance on portfolios and sets targets at review visits. In slaughtering, the lack of an occupationally experienced trainer prevents NLTG staff from entering the production line on certain days of the week when culling work is being carried out. Good opportunities for assessment in the workplace are, therefore, missed.

21. The teaching and assessment of key skills is not well developed. This is particularly the case in glass and furniture production. Employers and trainees alike have a very limited understanding of key skills, and employers, unless being used as workplace assessors, have little information about the vocational training programmes.

22. Off-the-job training for the wood machinists following the furniture production programme is poor. Training is subcontracted to a local college, where facilities are cramped and overcrowded. Practical training sessions are badly planned, and trainees have some difficulty in completing projects as they have to queue to use essential woodworking machines. In addition to their NVQ, trainees are also working towards an exam-based craft certificate. However, they are confused and unsure how the qualifications relate to one another. Storage facilities for completed work are inadequate, and some trainees have had their work stolen. Trainees have resorted to taking practical project components and work home for safe keeping.

### **Business administration**

### **Grade 4**

23. There are 394 young people working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in business administration and information technology. One hundred and ninety-two trainees are modern apprentices, of whom 165 are on business administration programmes and 27 on information technology programmes. There are 15 national trainees working towards information technology NVQs and 169 working towards business administration NVQs. Seventeen trainees are on other work-based learning programmes for young people, 12 of whom are working towards NVQs in administration and five towards NVQs in information technology. One employed New Deal client is working towards an NVQ level 2 in business administration. With the exception of 49 trainees in administration and two in information technology who are working towards NVQ level 3, all TEC-funded trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2. There are seven full-time and one part-time training officers responsible for trainees in this occupational area.

24. All trainees are employed. Most are employed in the manufacturing and service sectors, with smaller numbers in professional environments such as information technology firms, solicitors' offices and medical practices. Most training takes place on the job, although trainees are encouraged to attend off-the-job training at NLTG's information technology centre in Accrington, for information

technology and key skills training, and portfolio building. Reviews and assessment are carried out in the workplace. Trainees are visited in the workplace regularly, approximately every eight weeks. Some trainees are visited more frequently, for example, one trainee is visited every two weeks.

During the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ high proportion of early leavers
- ◆ low NVQ achievement rate
- ◆ slow progress of most trainees
- ◆ lack of understanding of NVQs amongst work-based supervisors
- ◆ some inappropriate training programmes

25. The self-assessment report noted many strengths and few weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths, while others were found to represent normal practice. Some were not relevant to the reinspection of business administration. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified through self-assessment and found others, most of which had been identified at the time of the first inspection. They awarded a grade lower than that proposed by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ some effective training officers
- ◆ effective short-term action planning towards achievement of NVQs
- ◆ many good-quality work placements
- ◆ well-resourced information technology centre

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ high proportion of early leavers
- ◆ low NVQ achievement rate
- ◆ slow progress of most trainees
- ◆ no initial, formal, planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ some trainees following inappropriate NVQs
- ◆ no integration of key skills in information technology

26. Trainees are visited at work at least every eight weeks. Their progress is reviewed, and discussion focuses on NVQ portfolio development. Training officers make effective use of a range of coaching and assessment techniques and give advice to trainees on the best methods of collecting evidence. Short-term targets are set and reviewed in subsequent visits. This has led to increased motivation among trainees since the last inspection. This constructive support has also contributed in many cases to trainees' improved awareness of the NVQ they are

working towards and better understanding of their progress. However, this new awareness has also brought home to trainees the lack of progress they have made over previous months. Some trainees request more visits when they have gathered extra evidence, and training officers respond promptly to these requests. However, in some cases, the assessment process is entirely trainee-led. Some examples of good assessment techniques were observed, where assessors tested trainees through probing questioning to confirm their understanding.

27. The information technology centre is used to provide off-the-job training for those trainees in the Accrington area who are unable to experience the necessary range of work for their NVQ on the job. It is well-equipped with industry-standard hardware and software. Portable equipment is also available for trainers to take out on visits to trainees who are unable to attend the centre.

28. As at the time of the first inspection, almost all training was undertaken on the job by employers. Most trainees are in good-quality working environments, but there are some exceptions where the working environment is not conducive to effective learning or where business demands impede progress. However, learning is still largely unplanned, and NLTG's input remains minimal. There is some discussion with trainees about their duties and the NVQ they will be working towards when they commence training, but this is not recorded or used when formulating the trainees' individual learning plans. Most work-based supervisors support and encourage trainees, but many are still unaware of the NVQ process and their role within it.

29. Assessment practices are poor. NVQ assessment relies heavily on paper-based evidence. Some evidence collected in the workplace does not have confirmation of its authenticity. In some units, for which trainees have been assessed as competent, the evidence is insufficient when matched against performance criteria. The quality of the assessment process varies between assessors. There is no standard practice for assessment within NLTG. The assessments observed during re-inspection varied from good to less than satisfactory. Neither of the assessment or verification staff in the information technology section is occupationally competent or appropriately qualified to carry out their role.

30. The quality assurance of the business administration programme is inadequate. Some units, which have already been certificated, have been assessed and internally verified by assessors and verifiers who are not yet qualified to do so. This has been done without the support or endorsement of a qualified colleague and none of these assessment decisions have been counter-signed by appropriately qualified NLTG staff. There is no planning of internal verification, which only takes place when an assessor decides to submit a unit of the NVQ. This part of the internal verification process is led by the assessors and not the internal verifier. Some internal verification is carried out on completed portfolios, and this often happens after most units have already been certificated using unit accreditation.

31. The proportion of early leavers has declined since the first inspection but remains high, and a large number of trainees are still failing to complete their training programmes. In information technology, 13 out of 24 modern apprentices and six out of 16 other young people starting training in 1998-99 have left the programme without completing or achieving any qualifications. In administration, 45 out of 97 trainees who started a modern apprenticeship and six out of 29 of those on national traineeships in 1998-99 have left without achieving any NVQ. Twenty-one of the 62 other young people starting administration training in 1998-99 have also left without completing their training plans or achieving an NVQ. NLTG have introduced follow-up procedures, resulting in a small number of administration trainees coming back onto the programme.

32. The rate of achievement is poor. In administration for example, of those young people starting training in 1998-99, only 15 out of 62 youth trainees and 18 out of 97 modern apprentices have achieved an NVQ. This is worse than the previous years' intake, for which fewer than half the trainees have yet to achieve an NVQ. None of the national trainees starting in 1998-99 have achieved an NVQ, although 10 of the 16 who converted from other youth training programmes have done so. The achievement rate on information technology NVQs is very poor. The programme has been operating for a little over two years. Of the 44 trainees who started in 1998-99, three have achieved an NVQ level 2 and one an NVQ level 3. Only two have completed their training plans.

33. Trainees are making slow progress towards the completion of their NVQs. Some information technology modern apprentices have been on the programme for over two years and have yet to achieve a single unit of their NVQ. Thirty-two trainees started on the information technology programme in 1999-2000, all of whom have yet to achieve their NVQ, and most have failed to complete a single unit. The ratio of trainees to trainers remains high. Trainers are, on average, responsible for 70 trainees each. Numbers fluctuate during the year. Different trainers have different workloads and responsibilities for trainees from other occupational areas. The high ratio contributes to the slow progress made by trainees, as it limits the number of assessment visits that can be made to trainees over the duration of their training programmes.

34. Some trainees are following inappropriate NVQ programmes. In information technology, trainees in technical and support roles at work are working towards use of information technology at level 2. More appropriate specialist NVQs, such as system support and installation, are available and fit their job roles more closely. In other cases, trainees are enrolled as modern apprentices but, although they do not hold the award, are not working towards the NVQ at level 2. This is in contravention of the modern apprenticeship framework for information technology, where NVQ level 2 is a mandatory component. In administration, some modern apprentices have job roles which will not enable them to complete the level 3 NVQ.

35. In some cases there is effective integration of key skills evidence into NVQ portfolios. In others, trainees still have little awareness of key skills, or plan to start

gathering evidence once all other aspects of their NVQ have been completed. In information technology the development of key skills is not integrated with other aspects of the programmes and in many cases there is no evidence that trainees have developed any new key skills.

## **Retailing & customer service**

## **Grade 2**

36. There are 185 trainees in this occupational area. One hundred and one are following customer service programmes at NVQ levels 2 and 3. Eighty-two are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in distribution and warehousing operations, with a further two working to achieve NVQ level 2 in fork-lift truck operations. Seventy-two trainees are modern apprentices, 22 are national trainees and 80 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. All trainees are employed. There are also 11 trainees on the New Deal training in employment option. Most training takes place on the job. The exception is fork-lift truck training, where trainees attend two- to four-day courses, either at NLTG's own fork-lift truck centre or on their employer's premises. NLTG's training officers visit trainees in their place of work to carry out reviews, assessment and action-planning. All trainees are offered the opportunity to attend fortnightly half-day key skills training sessions at NLTG's information technology centre. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths, some of which represent no more than standard practice, and few weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and both weakness cited in the report and identified others. They awarded the same grade as that given by NLTG.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ well-motivated trainees
- ◆ thorough and rigorous assessment practices
- ◆ effective relationships among trainers, trainees and employers
- ◆ good, well-constructed portfolios in customer service
- ◆ well-equipped fork-lift truck training centre

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of involvement by employers in learning and assessment
- ◆ some missed opportunities for recording evidence from the workplace
- ◆ low NVQ achievement in customer service

37. All trainees are employed in companies of a good quality and which provide a wide range of opportunities for occupational and personal development. Trainees are very motivated and work well on their own initiative. NLTG staff offer a good level of support, and there are well-developed and effective relationships with

trainers, trainees and employers. However, some New Deal participants do not feel well supported and lack motivation. Trainees on the customer service programme receive a good introduction to the NVQ and have an excellent understanding of the qualification. This is not as evident in the warehousing programme where trainees' knowledge is limited to the elements being worked on after each review.

38. All trainees understand how they will be assessed and what is required of them. Assessments are planned in advance, occur frequently and are well documented. Trainees are given positive, constructive feedback after each assessment. The review process helps trainees see how quickly they are progressing, and they are all involved in setting future goals and targets. Within the customer service programme, trainees are currently making good progress with their qualification, exceeding their target achievement dates set for the completion of their NVQ units. However, overall completion rates on the customer service modern apprenticeship for 1998-99 are low, only 22 per cent left the programme with an NVQ. On the youth training programme, it is more encouraging with 77 per cent leaving the programme with an NVQ. On the warehousing programme, 74 per cent of trainees left the programme with an NVQ. NLTG have a well-equipped fork-lift truck training centre. Achievement rates on this programme are good, and 78 per cent of leavers from the programme achieve at least one NVQ. There is a problem with retention of trainees and early leavers across all programmes, but the organisation is aware of the problems and has taken steps to address this issue.

39. Customer service trainees have well-constructed portfolios and demonstrate a good understanding of the portfolio-building and cross-referencing process. Warehousing trainees do not construct their own portfolios. The training officer does this for them. These trainees do not have the same depth of knowledge of their NVQ programme. Key skills are delivered as an integral part of the national traineeship and modern apprenticeship programmes. This process is supported by the introduction of key skills workshops at NLTG's information technology training centre. These workshops are run for trainees on a one-to-one basis for half an hour every fortnight.

40. Although many employers are not directly involved in the training programmes, they are very supportive towards the trainees and NLTG. Many do not understand the NVQ process and, therefore, some trainees miss out on support in between the training officers' visits. Training and learning takes place at work, but it is not planned, nor is it integrated into the NVQ programme. There is no collaboration between employers and NLTG in the planning of trainees' progression. Workplace supervisors do not hold details of the qualification standards. The lack of employer understanding of the NVQs results in many opportunities for recording naturally occurring evidence of trainees' competency being missed. This is especially true in the case of warehousing trainees. On this programme, trainees are not fully aware of the NVQ units outside the particular elements that they are currently working on. Trainees are sometimes unable to relate work to different units within their qualification, leading to some tasks being repeated at a later date. Although NLTG offers at-cost assessor training to employers, to date there has been little take up.



## Hospitality

## Grade 2

41. NLTG has 43 trainees working towards NVQs in catering and hospitality. Of these, seven are modern apprentices, 22 are national trainees and 14 are on other training programmes for young people. Trainees are working towards qualifications at level 2 or 3 in food preparation and cooking, or serving food and drink. A further 30 youth trainees are working towards NVQ level 2 in food manufacturing. All trainees are in employment and are working in one of the 27 work placements currently in use. Eighteen of the work placements are in hospitality and catering and nine in food and drink manufacturing companies. All food preparation and catering trainees attend a local college of further education one day each week for off-the-job training. Trainees working towards food and drink NVQs attend the same college for two hours every two weeks. Assessments are normally carried out at college. All trainees are visited every four to six weeks by one of two training officers responsible for this occupational area. Progress reviews are conducted during these visits, and training staff use this contact with the trainees to carry out assessments. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths and one weakness. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and the weakness. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses, awarding the same grade as that given by the organisation.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-planned off-the-job training
- ◆ good, well-organised portfolios
- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ on- and off-the-job programmes enhanced by additional training
- ◆ highly qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ high level of trainee and employer satisfaction

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to integrate key skills training into vocational programme
- ◆ lack of rigorously maintained assessment documentation
- ◆ some missed opportunities for work-based assessment

42. All trainees on food preparation courses attend a local college each week, on a day-release basis. The training is well-organised, with clear schemes of work and lesson plans. Lessons are taught in good quality accommodation and trainees appreciate the opportunity to work in a new and successful commercial restaurant unit operated by the college, which provides a real work environment where they can develop their skills and undergo assessment. The training observed during inspection was of a high standard. Trainees demonstrated a good understanding of

theoretical knowledge and cooking skills, including those necessary to prepare dishes demanding a high level of culinary expertise. Assessments are fair, rigorous, and effectively carried out during off-the-job training. Trainees clearly understand the assessment process and are well-supported by college tutors.

43. Trainees on food and bar service only attend the college for two hours every two weeks, but during this time receive individual help and support in the completion of their portfolio. In addition, college tutors visit one establishment to give extra training in food service. NLTG training officers provide effective theoretical training on a one-to-one basis in the workplace where necessary, with the use of workbooks and handouts. The two training officers are both highly qualified and occupationally experienced, and employers recognise this knowledge and experience in their dealings with trainees. Trainers provide trainees with a high level of support and are available to support them during their sometimes unsociable working hours in the food industry.

44. In food and drink manufacturing, the number of trainees is decreasing. In 1997-98, there were 41 trainees with a 59 per cent completion rate and an NVQ achievement rate of 56 per cent. In 1998-99, there are only 30 people in training, but the completion and NVQ achievement rates so far are 77 per cent. The numbers in the catering and hospitality programmes have increased in the last two years from 16 to 43 trainees, but the completion rate has dropped from 50 to 28 per cent. However, the achievement rate has increased from 50 per cent in 1997-98 to 57 per cent in 1998-99.

45. All the trainees are employed, and work in a wide range of good quality hotels, restaurants and food manufacturing establishments. These companies provide the trainees with a variety of additional in-house training programmes, including health and hygiene, control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH), fire precautions, customer care and specialist food courses. The good quality of these placements has contributed to NLTG having a trainee with the northwest trainee chef of the year award. There are few qualified assessors in the workplace, but there are seven workplace staff working towards these qualifications. There are missed opportunities for trainees to have work-based assessments, and some are taking a long time to complete their portfolios.

46. Trainees are given good guidance and support in the completion of their portfolios. These are well-organised and some trainees have used their information technology skills to good effect. Documentation relating to the assessment process is not always completed and necessary signatures are not always in evidence. The organisation has been slow to integrate key skills into the programmes, and many trainees have little awareness of key skills and their significance in their programmes.

47. All trainees and employers are satisfied with the quality of the training programmes. They are all appreciative of the support and help they receive during the regular visits to the workplaces. Relationships between the training officers and

the employers are good, and training officers demonstrate understanding and sensitivity when dealing with the trainees and the work-based supervisors in these companies. Two trainees from NLTG's hospitality programmes have been named as the ELTEC modern apprentices of the year.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 2**

48. NLTG has a detailed equal opportunities policy, last revised in August 1998, covering staff and trainee issues. Although overall responsibility for this area rests with the managing director, staff training on equal opportunities has ensured heightened staff awareness. External monitoring of equal opportunities is carried out against targets set by all seven TECs who contract with NLTG. NLTG monitors applications onto all training programmes. Employers' equal opportunities policies are checked against legislative requirements. Marketing and publicity materials are translated into other languages to meet the needs of the local community. Initial assessment and psychometric tests are also translated and three NLTG staff speak the same languages as the local minority ethnic population. There are 7.2 per cent (86) trainees from minority ethnic groups. Forty-two per cent (508) are women and 1.3 per cent (16) are trainees with disabilities. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses claimed in the self-assessment report. They identified some additional weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by NLTG.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ high participation by trainees from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ good links with local community groups
- ◆ use of promotional materials in different languages
- ◆ good gender balance in textile and furniture programmes

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little reinforcement of equal opportunities issues for trainees
- ◆ mixed awareness of grievance and appeals procedures
- ◆ some restrictions on access for people with mobility problems

49. Those who work with and for NLTG see equality of opportunity as important. Particularly so in relation to minority ethnic groups, where the organisation is very active in ensuring a good level of representation. Members of staff make home visits to potential trainees. Speakers of minority ethnic languages ensure that parents understand the training that their son or daughter may follow. Such

examples demonstrate the positive action which has resulted in participation rates by minority ethnic trainees which are higher than the percentage in the local population in some TEC areas.

50. Promotional materials, including leaflets and a video, are available in different languages. Some publicity leaflets feature pictures of trainees in non-traditional roles, such as a female warehouse worker. However, other leaflets confirm stereotypes, including men in information technology and women in administration. Despite this, there is a more balanced gender mix in some occupational areas. The training school in Blackburn has as many male trainees as female. Similarly, there are more women in furniture manufacture than is usual in the area. NLTG has the first two women in the country to achieve NVQ 2 in machine woodworking – and, at the time of inspection, they were on the point of achieving level 3. Other areas of manufacturing and administration do not have an equal gender mix.

51. NLTG staff make good efforts to link with the local community. This includes attendance at open days, careers conventions and awareness sessions in schools. Links with employers are effective, and they are all visited at the contracting stage to ensure, among other things, that appropriate equal opportunities policies are in place.

52. While some trainees can recall that equal opportunities was mentioned during their induction, their understanding is not checked or reinforced at any stage during their training programme. Trainees could not describe how NLTG had helped them recognise how equal opportunities could affect their training. Some trainees knew how to lodge grievances or complaints about their training, but this varied across occupational sectors. Some have been told how procedures worked, where others said that although they knew what to do, the procedures had not been explained to them by NLTG.

53. Access to premises for trainees with physical disabilities, both the premises of the training provider and some of the employers involved, is poor. NLTG have acknowledged this and have begun to address the issue. Aids have been acquired for a disabled trainee and NLTG are planning to adapt access to the information technology centre. However, this is in response to the needs of an existing trainee and does nothing to anticipate matching the needs of trainees or staff with mobility problems. Facilities on ground floor premises are, in some cases, insufficient and the structure of buildings makes adaptations difficult.

54. NLTG monitors applications from potential trainees for gender, disability and ethnicity. They recognised in the self-assessment report that these data must be used more effectively to inform recruitment and marketing decisions, and plans have been made to address these issues.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 3**

55. NLTG supports trainees from diverse educational and demographic backgrounds. Young people leaving school are referred to the company through the local careers service or are given information about training programmes by NLTG staff who work in partnership with local secondary schools. Companies also refer eligible employees to the organisation for training. Prior to starting their training programmes, trainees recruited from school are invited to attend evening briefing sessions which are held throughout the summer months. Trainees undertake an induction programme with either NLTG or in the workplace, covering all aspects of their training. Training officers monitor progress in the workplace through reviews during which trainees are set targets and their achievement is recorded. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths, and although inspectors agreed with a few, some represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weakness claimed in the self-assessment report, and identified other significant weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good support and advice to potential trainees
- ◆ frequency of progress reviews exceeds contractual requirements
- ◆ good personal development opportunities for trainees
- ◆ well-supported trainees in most areas
- ◆ alternative employment opportunities found for trainees facing job-loss

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective induction process
- ◆ varied initial assessment practices

56. NLTG offers regular opportunities for potential trainees and their parents to visit their centres, to view the facilities and to receive NVQ programme information. These sessions are held in the evenings to give parents the opportunity to attend. They explain in detail both programme and employment arrangements, and potential trainees have the opportunity to be introduced to NLTG staff. NLTG has developed effective links with local schools and the careers service. They attend careers evenings where potential trainees are given information about the range of programmes available to them.

57. Trainees have regular progress reviews. Work-based supervisors are usually involved in this process, and in most cases, these reviews set trainees effective targets for progression. The frequency of reviews exceeds TEC contractual requirements, taking place on a four to six week cycle. Trainees have individual training plans, which are used as working documents.

58. NLTG rewards achievement using a bonus payment scheme, as well as using a range of prize-giving events and outward-bound residential courses. The use of outward-bound courses as a part of the training programmes gives trainees good opportunities for individual personal development. Initially, many trainees are apprehensive about this. However, post-course evidence shows that most of the trainees view the initiative as a positive and rewarding experience.

59. There is a good level of pastoral support and personal counselling and advice is offered to trainees many of whom are able to access this service out of normal working hours. Employment rates are good and trainees have indicated high levels of satisfaction with the quality of their training. The company deals with redundancies and job-loss among trainees very positively, and most trainees in this situation are quickly found alternative employment, usually within the same sphere of employment.

60. In most cases, initial assessment is no more than a simple checklist and is not used effectively as a diagnostic tool. The use of initial assessment is not systematic and trainees' additional support needs are not identified at the start of training. Trainees who are directly recruited from schools or through the careers service experience a different initial assessment process, including psychometric testing in some TEC areas, which informs their training plans. Most directly recruited trainees receive a one-day induction programme at NLTG. Those trainees recruited from full-time employment are given one-to-one induction by training officers in the workplace. The content of the induction programme is superficial and trainees have a poor understanding and recall of the process and its content.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

61. North Lancs Training Group has a clear organisational structure. Regular staff and management meetings are held. The company has comprehensive policies and procedures which are regularly updated and devised to support operational activity and to meet external monitoring requirements. NLTG achieved recognition as an Investor in People in 1993, and successfully underwent re-accreditation for the second time in January 1999. The self-assessment report claimed a number of strengths and only one weakness. Many of the former represent no more than normal practice although inspectors agreed with some strengths claimed. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong staff development programme meets business needs
- ◆ open and supportive management style
- ◆ well-established links with employers
- ◆ good management of health and safety

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ unplanned training on-the-job across most occupational areas
- ◆ extremely high trainer to trainee ratios
- ◆ poor management of subcontractors and employers

62. All staff have job descriptions and a clear understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities. Lines of responsibility are clear across all levels of the organisation. All new staff undergo a comprehensive induction programme. Individual training plans are issued to all staff, and these are linked to the company's business objectives. All training plans are reviewed regularly during appraisal interviews and updated to meet the needs of the individuals and the aims and objectives of the business. NLTG has an effective staff development policy. Training officers are working towards key skill awards, in addition to undertaking other training and qualifications. All staff are given targets to achieve, which along with NLTG's performance against the TEC contracts, are closely monitored on a monthly basis.

63. Directors and managers provide strong leadership. This creates an effective management team that reviews and designs policies and procedures which are implemented across the organisation. All staff make use of the open lines of communication within the organisation, both formally and informally. Examples from staff demonstrated a high level of care and support by management when individual personal problems have arisen. Directors are always available both during and after normal working hours.

64. North Lancs Training Group enjoys particularly strong and well-established links with employers, with good employment opportunities for trainees. Some past trainees are now managers in these companies, and they are now providing employment and training opportunities for trainees currently on government-funded programmes. There are many examples of employers who have employed or provided work experience for groups of trainees, some as large as 33, in geographically dispersed organisations. The marketing approach by NLTG resulted in raised awareness of NVQs not only to potential trainees, but also across the whole staffing structure of the organisation. The strong links with employers can be further demonstrated by the fact in addition to all modern apprenticeships and national traineeships, over 97 per cent of trainees on programmes for young people are employed.

65. Comprehensive health and safety packs are issued to all employers. The policies and legislation contained in the packs must be adhered to. Employers are required to confirm this in writing as a contractual requirement. The packs contain a commitment to health and safety, risk assessment guidance notes, company insurance details, health and safety information and policy documentation.

66. Management of subcontractors, both colleges and employers, is poor. There is little integration of NLTG's policies with those of the subcontracted organisations. Subcontractors are responsible for training, yet NLTG does little to influence its quality. Most of the on-the-job training is unplanned and learning is coincidental through working. It is independent of the NVQ. With the exception of hospitality and furniture construction, there are no plans to demonstrate how gaps in the range requirements of the NVQ could be covered on the job.

67. The trainer to trainee ratio at NLTG averages over 60 to 1. Some trainers have in excess of 100 trainees. This is an extremely heavy workload to manage effectively. In addition, many trainers have additional roles, covering internal verification, internal auditing, and NVQ co-ordinators. Furthermore, staff turnover in administration is high, and training officers must share the additional workload caused while vacancies are filled.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

68. NLTG has a comprehensive range of quality assurance systems and procedures. It achieved ISO 9002 in 1994, and meets the quality standards of all seven TECs with which it contracts. It also satisfies the requirements of the awarding bodies. All staff have a copy of working instructions, based on the company's quality assurance systems. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths claimed in the self-assessment report, but others simply represent normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weakness and awarded a grade lower than that given by the organisation.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive and effectively documented quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ good understanding of quality assurance by staff
- ◆ effective review of quality procedures
- ◆ effective use of actions plans and quality documentation

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ quality assurance system not supported by subcontractors
- ◆ inadequate systems to ensure quality of work-based training
- ◆ no tracking of individual trainees' progress
- ◆ no mechanism to ensure individual training programmes are updated

69. Quality arrangements are clearly laid out and cover all aspects of NLTG's operations. These include the quality assurance policy, quality procedures, working instructions, and internal and external quality assurance documents. Quality issues



can be clearly traced through the various levels of the system. All staff understand and are committed to quality assurance, and receive quality assurance awareness training. Furthermore, 20 per cent of training staff are trained as internal quality assurance auditors. The review of quality assurance arrangements is strong, including planned annual audits, and quality assurance is covered as an agenda item at management meetings. Detailed action plans are routinely used and monitored to promote continuous improvement.

70. The colleges to whom NLTG subcontracts training have not adopted the NLTG quality assurance system, but continue to use their own. Liaison with the colleges takes place at the occupational level, and not at a higher level which would allow both systems to be integrated as appropriate. While NLTG has training programmes for most sectors, these are primarily checklists and do not include detailed working instructions. The emphasis is on assessment and internal verification. These are carried out satisfactorily. The quality of the actual training is not controlled or monitored, and is left to the work-based trainers and supervisors.

71. There is no system to track the progress of individual trainees, other than that which is triggered by the achievement of the full NVQ. While the reviews in many cases details progress, these data are not captured in any way to inform management of individual trainee's progress on a unit by unit basis. Early indications of slow progress or problems are, therefore, not identified until the target date for completion is reached.

72. Progress reviews are completed by the training officers and forwarded to the administration team to be entered onto the management system. This is a check to ensure that reviews have taken place. There is a section to complete when individual training plans have been updated, but there is no check to ensure that any changes have actually been recorded. Responsibility for completing the review and up-dating the individual training lies with the training officer, with no overarching check to ensure the procedure is followed. NLTG has put significant effort into developing a meaningful individual training plan, including space for recording unit progression. This is acceptable to all seven TECs, exceeding contractual requirements in several cases. However, this key document is not always up-dated. NLTG has recently changed its employer and trainee feedback systems as part of a continuous improvement process. It is not yet established within the system and the data collected are insufficient to provide qualitative feedback.

73. The self-assessment report is clearly presented and well set out. NLTG claimed a significant number of strengths and few weaknesses. Many of the strengths claimed represent little more than normal practice, but inspectors did agree with some. Inspectors also agreed with most of the weaknesses in the self-assessment. Claims were all supported by clearly referenced evidence.