



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

Rocket Training Limited

SUMMARY

At the time of the first inspection of Rocket Training Limited training in business administration, engineering (motor vehicle) and manufacturing was less than satisfactory. Retention rates were poor and trainees' reviews lacked clarity and purpose. However, retention rates have since improved across all areas. Trainees' progress towards their qualifications has also improved. Review arrangements now include employers and are clearly focused on target-setting and progression towards qualifications. Trainee support and equal opportunities arrangements are sound. Trainees are interviewed and assessed on entry, frequent visits are made to the workplace and additional qualifications are encouraged. At the time of the first inspection, management of training was less than satisfactory. Training and assessments were often unplanned and unstructured and co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training was poor. These issues are now satisfactory and employers are more effectively involved in trainees' learning. Quality assurance arrangements are now comprehensive and include good internal verification arrangements. However, data are not used effectively in decision making and are not analysed in order to make continuous improvements. The company exercises little influence over the standards of subcontracted off-the-job training.

As a result of the reinspection of Rocket Training Limited, the original published report text for engineering, manufacturing, business administration, management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Engineering	4
Manufacturing	4
Business administration	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	2

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective reviews
- ◆ high level of staff expertise and competence
- ◆ equal opportunities training provided for staff and trainees
- ◆ well-planned induction for unemployed trainees
- ◆ effective communications
- ◆ measurable targets for success set for staff
- ◆ good internal verification arrangements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently planned on-the-job training in business administration
- ◆ no targets set to address equal opportunity imbalances
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment
- ◆ poor motor vehicle and manufacturing achievement rates
- ◆ weak management control of subcontractors
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of the standard of subcontracted training

INTRODUCTION

1. Rocket Training Limited (RTL) is based in Liverpool, with a training centre located near the M62 motorway. The organisation was originally founded as the Brothers of Charity Youth Training Workshop in 1981, working at that time with young people with mental and physical disabilities. The organisation began to offer vocational training in the late 1980s. The needs of awarding bodies and the work-experience requirements for trainees prompted a restructuring of the organisation and, in 1992, Rocket Training Limited was formed. In 1994, it became a limited company. At the time of the first inspection, RTL employed 15 people and had 199 trainees, with 47 on motor vehicle engineering programmes, 50 training in manufacturing, and 102 training in business administration. A significant amount of additional support was required by 64 per cent of trainees in manufacturing, 43 per cent in motor vehicle and 11 per cent in business administration respectively to achieve a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 2. This represented 32 per cent of all trainees.

2. Staffing numbers have now increased to 19. There are three new tutors for foundation training and the additional training required for trainees with literacy and numeracy support needs, and one new administrator responsible for data. Numbers of trainees have fallen to 142 with the greatest reduction in business administration. There are currently eight foundation trainees, 62 in business administration, 38 in engineering and 34 in manufacturing. Of these, 36 are 'advanced modern apprentices' formally known as modern apprentices, 47 are 'foundation modern apprentices' formally known as national trainees, and 51 are on other youth training. Thirty-one trainees have been identified as requiring additional support to complete a level 2 NVQ. Eighty-nine trainees are employed and 53 are on work placements within local companies.

3. Fifty-eight trainees are women and 84 are men. All engineering and manufacturing trainees are men, 84 per cent of business administration trainees are women, and 2 per cent of all trainees are from minority ethnic groups. There are two trainees with disabilities.

4. Most of the training and assessment are undertaken on the job. Three subcontractors are used to deliver training and assessment: two colleges of further education and one private training provider. RTL has one training contract with Merseyside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide youth training, national traineeships and modern apprenticeships, and it offers NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. Most trainees are not employed and gain work experience in one or more of the 110 work-placement providers and employers RTL has established in the Liverpool area.

5. A large proportion of the trainees are recruited from southeast Liverpool and the district of Huyton in Knowsley. Both of these areas have suffered a significant

decline in employment opportunities in recent years, particularly in manufacturing and transport industries. However, there has been some growth in the leisure and tourism and business and finance sectors.

6. Employment rates in Merseyside have been low for some considerable time, particularly for men. Employment rates and economic activity continue to decline. In 1999, the unemployment rate was 18 per cent for men and 6 per cent for women, compared with the national average of 5.2 per cent and the Northwest average of 5.5 per cent. In May 2000, unemployment is 8.2 per cent compared with the national average of 3.9 per cent.

7. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 31 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. The 1999 figure for Liverpool is 32.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Over 70 per cent of school leavers in the area continue in full-time education after the age of 16. Minority ethnic groups within the Liverpool area represent 6 per cent of the population and long-term unemployment is high within these communities.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

8. The managing director and the training manager completed the first self-assessment report in November 1998. They both attended a number of self-assessment workshops run by Merseyside TEC. The self-assessment tool kit was used to cross-reference evidence against the quality statements within *Raising the Standard*. Trainees and employers' feedback was used as a source of evidence to develop strengths and weaknesses for the report and establish grades for each different aspect. The original report lacked detail about the local community and economy and did not correctly identify strengths and weaknesses in all aspects. RTL had not fully addressed the weaknesses in its quality and management arrangements, which were identified in the self-assessment report. The report contained a good list of cross-referenced evidence available on site, and RTL produced all additional documentary evidence requested by the instructors. The training manager and the operations director produced a report for reinspection, with statistical data and other information provided by the managing director. The reinspection report identified the original weaknesses and the action taken to improve them. The report also identified the evidence available for the improvements. All other information required, for example, data analysis, new procedures and contractual arrangements were provided during the reinspection.

9. A total of seven inspectors spent 28 days at RTL in April 1999. They interviewed 56 trainees, 16 tutors, and 20 managers, and visited 38 employers and work-placement providers. They also observed eight graded training sessions and one progress review. Inspectors were able to see trainees' portfolios and records of progress as well as interview trainees at the start, middle and end of their programmes. A representative sample of trainees from all occupational areas, employers and work-placement providers were visited.

10. Reinspection was carried out by four inspectors for a total of 16 days in May 2000. They interviewed 34 trainees. Of these trainees, three had been interviewed during the first inspection and 31 were trainees who had started training since then. This sample group was chosen to enable inspectors to assess the improvements and trainees' understanding of these improvements. They held interviews with seven tutors and five managers. Twenty-two employers/workplace supervisors were interviewed and inspectors observed one internal verification. Inspectors agreed with the grades given by RTL. Three off-the-job classroom-based training sessions were observed, two of which were awarded a grade 2 and one a grade 3.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

11. At the time of the first inspection, there were 47 trainees in motor vehicle engineering. There are now 38 trainees on a range of motor vehicle NVQ training programmes. Of these, seven are advanced modern apprentices, 21 are foundation modern apprentices and 10 are on other youth training programmes. Trainees work in two main trade areas: vehicle mechanics and parts. The three trainees working in parts departments are working towards NVQs at level 2 in customer service. Twenty-eight trainees are working towards NVQs at level 2 in vehicle mechanical and electronic systems, with a further seven trainees working towards an NVQ at level 3. Eight trainees are employed, and all other trainees are placed with employers in the motor trade throughout the Liverpool area. RTL works with a network of 33 work-placement providers, ranging from small, privately owned garages to large franchised main dealerships. Theory training for customer service trainees and vehicle mechanical and electronic systems level 2 trainees takes place on a weekly or fortnightly day-release basis at RTL's training centre. The evidence required for assessment purposes is gathered from trainees' workplaces. Training for the level 3 vehicle mechanical and electronic systems NVQ is carried out at one of two local colleges of further education and assessment is carried out by the college tutors, using evidence from workplace or from the colleges' workshops. The company's first self-assessment report identified one weakness, but did not recognise other important strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than the grade given by RTL.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor achievement and retention rates
- ◆ some inappropriate work placements
- ◆ no workplace training plans
- ◆ poor integration of on- and off-the-job training

12. RTL's action plan and self-assessment report outlined measures the company is taking to improve engineering. A wide range of qualifications are now available. Work-based supervisors are now fully included in the qualification review process. Employers are also now given a detailed breakdown of the qualification and assessment requirements. The reinspection self-assessment report identified one strength and one weakness. Inspectors found further strengths and weaknesses and major improvements in motor vehicle engineering training. Inspectors agreed with the reinspection grade proposed by RTL in its reinspection report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of expertise and competence of RTL's staff
- ◆ good knowledge of qualification requirements by workplace supervisors
- ◆ good retention rates
- ◆ good use of target setting to improve progress rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor achievement rates
- ◆ some poor integration of key skills with NVQ work
- ◆ insufficient off-the-job training for some trainees

13. RTL's own motor vehicle section provides well-planned theory training at level 2. It is organised by well-qualified, occupationally experienced staff. Tuition sessions are lively and interesting, engaging the attention of all trainees, and they have a high technical content. There is an effective working relationship between the trainees and the trainer, and trainees maintain a high level of enthusiasm within an open, supportive and flexible working environment. RTL's training workshop is only used for demonstration purposes and rehearsing practical exercises. The workshop lacks modern vehicles and up-to-date diagnostic tools and equipment, and is not equipped to undertake the full range of assessments necessary for the NVQ.

14. Employers are now fully involved in the review process and have a detailed knowledge of the NVQs that trainees are working towards. Copies of review documents are now given to trainees and work-based supervisors. RTL has issued booklets to all workplace providers, outlining their duties. Workplace supervisors now have a better understanding of the NVQ requirements.

15. Retention rates have improved since the first inspection. The average retention rate in engineering for the three years preceding the first inspection was 25 per cent. It is now 64 per cent.

16. Trainees gather evidence for assessment from their workplace. RTL's staff visit level 2 trainees to observe some assessments in the workplace and to advise trainees on their NVQ progress. The visits are frequent, in many cases every two weeks, and these visits, along with reviews of training, result in clear targets being set which are sufficiently detailed to allow trainees to fully understand the progress they need to make. This target setting is used to inform workplace supervisors and trainees of the type of work which trainees need to practice on the job. Targets are also set to clarify the evidence trainees are required to record for assessment purposes. The co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training provided by the colleges or RTL has improved. Achievement rates are still low. Less than 50 per cent of the engineering trainees who started with RTL over the last two years have

completed their individual training plans. However, trainees are routinely gathering more evidence and there has been a 40 per cent increase in the number of trainees achieving a level 2 NVQ since the first inspection.

17. Some trainees have recently been changed from a youth training programme to foundation modern apprentices and have little knowledge of what the key skills requirements are or how these will be assessed. Trainees who have been on the foundation modern apprentices programme for some time are aware that the key skills aspects of their training will be covered, but they are not clear about the content of the key skills units, or when the units will be taught and assessed. Trainees who are close to completing of their level 3 NVQ still have a great deal of their key skills training to complete.

18. New engineering trainees initially attend off-the-job training for one day every two weeks. As they settle in to their workplaces and become more capable of producing the evidence for their NVQ, attendance for off-the-job training is changed to one day every week. The more established trainees at RTL only attend off-the-job training every two weeks. These trainees are not progressing towards their qualifications as quickly as the new trainees. RTL has not fully recognised that the improved progress rates are linked to more off-the-job training, and has not responded to the requests made by these trainees for more off-the-job training.

Manufacturing

Grade 3

19. At the time of the first inspection, there were 50 youth trainees in this area. RTL now has 37 youth trainees working towards NVQs at levels 1 and 2 within the furniture manufacturing industry. Twenty-eight trainees are working towards the performing manufacturing operations NVQ, two at level 1 and 26 at level 2, working in a wide variety of manufacturing companies. Seven trainees are working towards furniture upholstery NVQs at level 2 and two trainees are working towards polishing and finishing NVQs at level 2. All training and assessment for the performing manufacturing operations NVQ is undertaken in the workplace. Upholstery trainees attend a local training centre on a day-release basis for off-the-job training. Assessment for these trainees is carried out both on and off the job. Both level 1 trainees are currently receiving additional learning support for literacy and numeracy on a full-time basis at RTL's learning support unit. The remaining 35 trainees are placed with 25 local employers. RTL attempts to offer a training place to all prospective trainees. Most trainees are referred to RTL by the careers service. All trainees receive an induction at the start of their programme, which includes an initial assessment of their basic skills. Currently 19 trainees (51 per cent) are identified as requiring additional learning support to achieve a level 2 NVQ. There is a high drop-out rate during the early stages of training. Seventy-five of the 190 trainees leaving early over the last three years have left because they got a job. Of the 115 trainees leaving early without a job, 60 (52 per cent) left with an NVQ or sub-level 1 qualification. Two staff from RTL are responsible for the

manufacturing trainees and carry out most of the assessment and internal verification. The number of trainees starting the programme has increased each year since 1995 with 141 starting in 1996-97, 149 in 1997-98 and 165 in 1998-99.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor links between on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inappropriate training for level 3 trainees
- ◆ unplanned assessments
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities for upholstery trainees
- ◆ poor internal verification arrangements

20. Improvements have been made in accord with the company's action plan and the original weaknesses were considered to have been addressed at reinspection. The links between on- and off-the-job training for upholstery trainees are now good and well established. RTL no longer provides manufacturing training at level 3. Assessments are now planned and assessments for upholstery trainees are good. Internal verification is now being carried out in line with awarding body requirements. Inspectors identified new strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given by RTL in its new self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of training and assessment opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ frequent reviews
- ◆ excellent links between on- and off-the-job training for upholstery trainees
- ◆ good standard of off-the-job upholstery training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low awareness of NVQ requirements by performing manufacturing operations trainees and employers
- ◆ poor achievement rates
- ◆ missed opportunities to collect workplace evidence in performing manufacturing operations

21. Trainees are able to join manufacturing training programmes throughout the year. This flexibility enables RTL to respond quickly to the unpredictable recruitment demands of the manufacturing industry. Trainees follow a comprehensive induction programme at the beginning of their training, which includes an initial assessment of their basic skills. Most manufacturing trainees have been identified as requiring additional learning support to achieve an NVQ at level 2. Some trainees require literacy and/or numeracy support and this is normally carried out on a full-time basis at the RTL's support centre before trainees start their work placements. Trainers have good links with the furniture industry and can arrange work placements in pool table and church seating manufacturers, kitchen

manufacturers and installation and large volume furniture producers. This wide range of work placements available allows most trainees to work within their chosen manufacturing environment. Trainers are also able to change work placements for individual trainees and to change the optional NVQ units in the performing manufacturing operations programme to reflect their different working roles. RTL arranges special off-the-job training sessions in health and safety for performing manufacturing operations trainees.

22. Arrangements for visiting trainees and employers have improved since the first inspection. Trainees are now visited at their work placements at least every two weeks for progress reviews and assessments. These visits are recorded on contact sheets and copies are left with both trainees and employers. All assessment for performing manufacturing operations trainees takes place at the workplace, all visits by trainers are recorded, and progress towards achievement of the NVQ discussed with both trainees and workplace supervisors. In some instances, visits may be more frequent if, for example, trainers feel that a particular trainee needs additional support following a change of work placement. Retention rates have also improved. Since visits to trainees have been increased, no trainees have left the programme prior to achieving their NVQ. The visits are used for pastoral as well as assessment and review purposes, effectively dealing with both workplace and personal problems.

23. There are excellent links between on- and off-the-job training for upholstery trainees. Assessment takes place either at the workplace or at the subcontractors' training workshops and is carried out by a highly experienced trainer. The off-the-job training sessions are good and constantly relate to and draw from trainees' experiences at work. Portfolios are excellent and demonstrate the high standard of trainees' individual work both within the centre and at the workplace. The portfolios are carefully produced and a variety of methods are used to record work completed in the workplace and skills gained towards the achievement of their NVQ.

24. Overall achievement rates are poor. Of the 262 trainees starting programmes over the last two years, only 113 left with a qualification. This year, 34 per cent of trainees have remained on the programme so far, compared with 19 per cent last year. RTL operates an 'open-access' recruitment policy, and some potential trainees join through the careers service. Many trainees are undecided on their career route and leave training early, before starting their work placement. RTL introduced the performing manufacturing operations NVQ in place of the furniture manufacture NVQ to ensure that training is relevant for all trainees, as they are often working in a variety of companies and carrying out a wide range of manufacturing operations as part of their job. No trainees are currently employed, although employers attempt to employ all trainees at the end of their training programme.

25. Employers and trainees have a poor understanding of the performing manufacturing operations NVQ. Trainees are unable to identify, from current work being carried out, operations which may be suitable as evidence towards NVQ unit

assessment. Trainees contribute little to the completion of their portfolios, which is done mainly by RTL's assessors. Workplace learning is often dictated by the needs of the production line and not the broader requirements of the NVQ. As a result, some assessment opportunities are missed and progression towards the NVQ for performing manufacturing operations trainees is slow.

Business administration

Grade 2

26. At the time of the first inspection, RTL had 102 trainees in business administration. There are now 62 trainees, of whom 29 are advanced modern apprentices, 26 are foundation modern apprentices and seven are youth trainees. All trainees are working towards NVQs in administration at level 2 or 3 and undertaking an additional NVQ in customer service at level 2 and 3. Eight per cent of trainees on business administration programmes have been assessed as requiring additional learning support to achieve their level 2 NVQ. Thirty-seven trainees are in full time employment, 23 trainees are in work placements and two trainees are awaiting placements. Ten of the trainees who are in employment or on a work placement with an employer, come into RTL's training centre for a half-day off-the-job training session each week. Formal training sessions have recently been introduced and consist of a combination of tutorials and group work designed to improve trainees' skills and knowledge. The rest of the training day includes portfolio-building sessions and information technology training. RTL's tutor/assessors visit trainees in the workplace for assessment and action-planning purposes every two weeks. Work placements range from major blue chip companies to small legal practices. All assessors have relevant work experience and hold appropriate qualifications.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ ineffective individual training plans
- ◆ no integration of key skills into vocational programme
- ◆ poor assessment planning of key skills
- ◆ qualification requirements not understood by employers
- ◆ no planned or structured training
- ◆ poor physical training resources in RTL's training centre
- ◆ missed workplace assessment opportunities
- ◆ some trainees undertaking inappropriate additional NVQs

27. RTL's action plan, developed to address its weaknesses and improve business administration training, has led to improvements, specifically in the integration of key skills with NVQ work. Individual training plans have been revised to show target achievement dates and employers have been encouraged by RTL to become more involved in training. Inspectors identified four strengths and one weakness and awarded a higher grade than that given by RTL in its self-assessment report for

reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective reviews
- ◆ good retention rates
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of NVQ requirements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently planned on-the-job training

28. Trainees are taught and supported by enthusiastic staff who are occupationally experienced and appropriately qualified. RTL's staff visits trainees in the workplace at least once every two weeks to review their progress, monitor their achievements and provide them with detailed individual action plans. Trainees are now clear about the NVQ requirements and about how evidence from work can be used for assessment purposes. A report is prepared by RTL's staff after each review visit and a copy is given to trainees and their supervisors outlining the action required before the next visit. Every trainee has the mobile telephone number of their assessor so that they can ask for guidance between visits. Three members of staff have completed the key skills assessor award and have successfully integrated key skills into the NVQ assessment process. Trainees are highly motivated and make good progress towards their qualifications. Since the initial inspection, assessors carry out more direct observations of trainees in the workplace. This evidence is used for assessment purposes and trainees now benefit from a wider range of assessment methods used by RTL's staff. The foundation modern apprentices and modern apprentices qualification requirements for business administration include the completion of two units from the customer service NVQ. Trainees at RTL are given the opportunity to improve their employability and range of skills by completing the full customer service NVQ.

29. Retention rates are good. The last three years have shown a steady improvement, from 59 per cent in 1997-98 to 77 per cent in 1999-2000. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices have increased from 58 per cent in 1998-99 to 80 per cent in 1999-2000. However, achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices have declined from 76 per cent in 1996-97, to 72 per cent in 1997-98 and to 63 per cent in 1998-99. Youth trainees' achievement rates have also declined during the same period, from 67 per cent in 1996-97, and 80 per cent in 1997-98 to 37 per cent in 1998-99. Current progression rates indicate that both advanced modern apprentices and youth achievement rates will increase to the 1996-97 rate.

30. All trainees have a copy of their individual training plans at the front of their portfolios. The plans have been revised and improved since the first inspection. They now show individual target dates against each NVQ unit. This helps trainees to focus on achievement, and the original plans are updated as NVQ units are

achieved. However, in some cases, trainees' additional support needs identified at induction are not recorded on their training plan.

31. The training centre has a newly equipped training room with six computers for trainees to practise their information technology key skills, using current software packages which match current commercial standards. There is a supply of textbooks and recently developed learning support materials in the training centre, both for trainees on day release and for trainees in the workplace if they are unable to access off-the-job training. In order to improve theory training, a series of training sessions has been devised with the intention of inviting trainees into the centre as the need arises. These sessions are part of the plan to extend the training taking place within the workplace.

32. RTL's assessors have produced an employer's handbook. This clearly outlines how employers can quickly learn important details about the qualification and assessment requirements. It also encourages employers to be more actively involved in trainees' NVQ work. Employers are asked to work with the assessor to provide on-the-job learning opportunities.

33. On-the-job training is not well planned. RTL is slow to identify instances where employers are not able to provide the range of work or skills development opportunities required for the NVQ. Where such instances are identified, they are not well recorded and off-the-job training is not structured so that it covers any gaps.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

34. Rocket Training Limited is located in the Broadgreen area of Liverpool. The company is based in two separate buildings. One building is not accessible to wheelchair users. RTL has a concise and easily understood equal opportunities policy, which is included in contracts with trainees, employees, employers and subcontractors. It includes a complaints and grievance procedure for staff, trainees, subcontractors, and placement providers. Trainees receive a copy of the equal opportunities policy (revised in late 1998) and an introductory briefing during initial induction. Trainees are recruited from Sefton, Knowsley and Liverpool through careers service referrals, by peer recommendation, and through local newspaper advertising. Merseyside TEC has recently set targets for the recruitment of trainees with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups. RTL plans to meet these targets by actively recruiting from Liverpool schools with a high proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups. RTL does not analyse data collected on applicants for training in order to monitor the level of applications from members of minority ethnic groups and from those with disabilities. Of the current trainees, 57 per cent are men and 43 per cent are women. In 1996-97, 66 per cent of the trainees were men and only 34 per cent were women. Of the current 199 trainees, five are from

minority ethnic communities. The proportion of trainees who have been assessed as needing significant additional support in order to have some prospect of achieving an NVQ at level 2 stands at 34 per cent, while 7 per cent have been assessed as having no realistic prospect of achieving an NVQ at level 2. Five trainees have physical disabilities. In business administration, 84 per cent of trainees are women; in motor vehicle and furniture manufacturing, all trainees are men. Of a total of 16 staff, 15 are white. There are nine men and seven women, and two of the staff have disabilities. Management and team meetings include discussions of equal opportunities issues. RTL recruitment material includes equal opportunities statements and illustrations show a balance of gender and ethnicity, with positive images of women in non-traditional vocational areas. The company's self-assessment report did not identify particular strengths in its equal opportunities provision. However, the report did recognise that there was insufficient reinforcement of commitment to equal opportunities after initial induction. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ equal opportunities training provided for staff
- ◆ effective complaints procedure
- ◆ protection from discrimination and harassment for staff and trainees
- ◆ clear and concise equal opportunities policy

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no targets set to address equal opportunities imbalances
- ◆ limited access for people with disabilities
- ◆ equal opportunities statistics not used for planning purposes
- ◆ no monitoring of employers and subcontractors' equal opportunities arrangements

35. All staff receive training in a range of equal opportunities and employment-related topics. Two members of staff have qualifications in sign language, one has a counselling qualification, and one is attending deafness awareness training. RTL has written an equal opportunities policy which is easy to follow, clearly set out, and covers all the key aspects of equality. It rights and responsibilities, employer commitment and complaints and grievance procedures for staff, trainees, subcontractors and employers. Trainees' awareness of the equal opportunities policy is checked through the trainees' charter questionnaire and postal surveys of leavers. Staff and trainees are protected from discrimination and harassment through an effective complaints procedure, which is promoted to trainees at induction and regularly reconfirmed by placement officers and assessors on visits to employers. Employers are required to comply with RTL's equal opportunities

policy, but no monitoring takes place to ensure trainees are fully aware of employers' policies on equal opportunities.

36. There is an effective and active complaints procedure which has recently been invoked by a trainee who felt that Rocket had failed to provide a suitable placement. After intervention by both the TEC and RTL the matter was quickly resolved. While trainees are aware of the existence of RTL's equal opportunities policy from their induction training, they are unable to recall the details. One trainee explained that the induction training was crammed with forms and regulations. He could recall health and safety, as his employer provided workplace briefing on this, but he was unable to recall much of the equal opportunities policy (apart from knowing about the complaints procedure).

37. Data collection and analysis for equal opportunities is a retrospective process completed after recruitment and currently limited to what is required for TEC contractual purposes. RTL's equal opportunities monitoring and analysis arrangements are not sophisticated enough to allow for the impact of any forward planning, recruitment target setting or strategic planning to address equal opportunity imbalances within occupational areas. RTL has not fully analysed the local community to establish realistic recruitment targets for trainees from under-represented groups, and has no plans to address this. Access to workshops is possible for wheelchair users, but no access is available to the other half of the training centre where theory training takes place. The buildings are old and lifts or other proprietary access options are not practicable.

Trainee support

Grade 3

38. RTL offers training places to all general applicants and career service referrals. At the beginning of the training programme, all unemployed trainees receive an interview and undertake basic skills testing for literacy and numeracy. They also complete a one-day induction programme at RTL, where the key areas of health and safety, equal opportunities, the training agreement, and grievance and disciplinary procedures are covered. At this stage, an individual training and development plan is produced, a named assessor is allocated to each trainee, and occupational assessment tests are undertaken. Trainees who begin the programme as employees do not undertake any initial assessment or induction programme. Trainees are visited in the workplace every 12 weeks by a placement officer, who reviews health and safety arrangements and offers support on general progress. In addition, an assessor visits trainees fortnightly to undertake assessment and, in some cases, to review progress against agreed targets for achievement. The self-assessment report did not clearly identify strengths or weaknesses. Inspectors identified a number of both strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given by the provider.



INSPECTION REPORT: ROCKET TRAINING LIMITED APRIL
1999 REINSPECTION MAY 2000

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned induction for unemployed trainees
- ◆ frequent visits to trainees in the workplace
- ◆ effective personal counselling and guidance support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of information transfer from initial assessments to individual training plans
- ◆ individual training plans not routinely updated
- ◆ some work placements inappropriate to the level of training

39. RTL recruits most trainees who apply. This policy is supported by a year-round induction programme. Trainees joining the programmes attend a structured and comprehensive induction to RTL, which ensures they are clear about key issues like equal opportunities and health and safety. The induction takes place in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and trainees are made aware of their rights and responsibilities, including their access to an independent grievance procedure. The recent introduction of a charter for trainees ensures all new trainees are aware that they will receive what is termed the 'minimum entitlement' which is explained at the induction phase of training. That is, that every trainee is entitled to an equal opportunity, regular reviews, a weekly allowance, a work placement, and so on. The style of delivery for induction is dull. It is based around standard forms, lacks variation and does not include trainees in the learning process.

40. Trainees receive a further induction to the workplace, and are visited by their assessor every two weeks on average. In addition to this, trainees receive visits from their placement officer and, where additional support is required, from the tutor and assessor for basic skills training. Each trainee is allocated a placement officer during induction and this officer remains with them throughout their training. Trainees are made aware from the beginning of their training that a number of staff are available to them if they experience personal or occupational difficulties, and trainees value this support. Trainees' difficulties are quickly resolved but, if necessary, trainees are relocated to new work placements. Trainees with personal problems, such as difficulties with housing, are referred to the appropriate agencies.

41. Trainees who are in employment do not undergo any initial assessment or induction by RTL. This disadvantages them, as their support needs are not systematically assessed, and they are not introduced to RTL's staff or to the support arrangements available. Basic skills tests are undertaken prior to the completion of the individual training plan, but training needs identified as a result are not recorded on the training plan. Occupational and key skills assessment does not occur until after the individual training plan has been agreed, and sometimes training plans do not reflect trainees' needs or ensure that support needs are addressed.

Individual

Management of training

Grade 3

42. At the time of the first inspection, RTL's management structure consisted of two directors and one training manager. The training manager was responsible for three vocational teams of tutor/assessors and placement officers. Each team would meet every two weeks to consider the performance of the vocational programme against TEC targets. Full staff meetings were held on a monthly basis. All staff had a job description, which linked to the company's business plan. The annual staff appraisal reviews identified individual training and development needs linked to organisational objectives. There were some policies and procedures, but they did not cover all aspects of the company's operation. RTL was awarded the Investors in People Standard in March 1997. RTL had subcontracting arrangements with two local colleges and one private training provider, but most of the vocational training took place at RTL's training centre. Where possible, assessments were carried out in the workplace by suitably qualified staff from RTL. Some off-the-job assessments were undertaken at RTL's training centre and by all three subcontractors.

43. At the time of reinspection most of these arrangements are still in place. A new staff appointment has been made to improve the collection and control of data for business purposes, as well as providing managers and staff with management data. The main structural change has been to redefine the vocational areas as business teams; and these teams have increased from three to four. The additional team is the support team, whose members provide general support training for trainees with identified additional learning support needs and also provide the tutoring and support for trainees on preparatory foundation training programmes at RTL. Subcontracting arrangements have been changed and all employers, subcontracting colleges and private training providers have signed new, more comprehensive agreements with RTL. These are monitored by RTL's placement officers on a six-monthly basis. All documentation has been standardised and many new documents and forms have been produced. RTL's staff have all contributed to the development, review and commissioning of the new forms and documents. All RTL's staff sign to confirm their understanding of any new process or document. The first self-assessment report did not identify any clear strengths or weaknesses. Inspectors, however, identified several strengths and some significant weaknesses.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ weak monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some ineffective progress reviews
- ◆ inconsistent use of forms and documents by staff

44. Some of the improvements identified in RTL's action plan following the first inspection and the specially prepared report for the reinspection have been made. RTL has introduced a range of initiatives to more effectively control trainees' progress reviews and standardise the use of documents within the organisation.

Work is being done to improve the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. RTL has improved the management of its own training centre-based training and the arrangements it has for reviewing trainees' progress. It has not yet developed effective measures to manage and influence the training that it subcontracts to other training providers. As a result of these changes, RTL has strengthened its communication links with all external partners. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by RTL in its report for reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ carefully prepared staff development plan
- ◆ effective internal and external communication
- ◆ clearly understood individual responsibilities and management roles
- ◆ measurable success targets for staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of subcontractors
- ◆ inadequate use of data for decision-making purposes

45. Through its annual cycle of staff appraisal and review RTL has established and agreed a carefully selected range of staff development activities for nearly all staff. These activities focus predominantly on the training and support needs of trainees and broader organisational objectives, including assessing trainees' key skills work and improving the staff's information technology skills. Staff development activities include the ongoing updating of vocational and key skills assessor and training qualifications, information technology training to NVQ level 3, health and safety training, management information software training, drugs and alcohol abuse and dyslexia awareness training.

46. Lines of management are clearly defined and staff understand the aims of the organisation. All staff have job descriptions and are aware of their individual roles within the company. All staff have their performance reviewed and monitored against agreed individual and company targets every two months. Internal communications are effective with well-structured meetings where staff are encouraged to contribute new ideas for strategic and operational planning. All meetings are recorded and action points are raised. A named member of staff is responsible for each action point raised. RTL's staff roles and responsibilities have been more clearly defined since the first inspection. This has also extended to include workplace supervisors. Employers and trainees are more closely involved in the planning and review of training and assessments. Internal communication links are effective, including all employers and trainees. Employers are now clearer about their responsibilities, the NVQ requirements and assessment practices.

47. A comprehensive range of data relating to trainees' progress towards the NVQ is produced to update managers at their weekly meetings and to inform staff of their progress against targets. RTL's staff's performance is measured against these and other targets. Staff follow and understand operational procedures. Those procedures which were not fully operational at the time of the first inspection are now in use, and problems with verification, trainees' reviews and documentation have been resolved. Recognising the problem of trainees dropping out of programmes shortly after joining them, RTL set up a system to monitor trainees closely during their first three months of training. The analysis of retention rates over the last year shows that more trainees now stay in training than for have done for any of the previous three years.

48. RTL has introduced new service level agreements with its three training subcontractors. However, these agreements fail to ensure that subcontractors routinely communicate key management information to RTL, such as internal and external verifiers' reports, external inspection reports and subcontractors' action plans, trainees' attendance records and trainees' progress reports. RTL has not established with subcontractors what should be routinely communicated between both parties. The new monitoring forms used by RTL's staff every six months fail to provide RTL's managers and staff with a clear view of how training is managed and structured. Current monitoring arrangements do not ensure that RTL plays an active and influential role in the management of off-the job training. RTL has made a number of changes to improve co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. There are now stronger links with employers and subcontractors, improved review arrangements and qualification and assessment arrangements are communicated to employers.

49. Since the first inspection, RTL has improved the way it monitors data. Data are available to show NVQ achievement, retention and progression rates, and the attitudes and perceptions of trainees, staff and employers. However, these data are not analysed fully to routinely guide management or staff decisions, nor are they used routinely to develop action plans, or to carry out strategic planning or targets setting.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

50. At the time of the first inspection, RTL used a number of procedural documents covering initial assessment, trainee support, progress reviews, and health and safety procedures and equal opportunities issues. Many of the quality assurance arrangements were new and some procedures had not been implemented. The quality assurance manual contained the procedural documents and some of the operational forms and instructions. All staff had a copy of the manual and were familiar with the new quality assurance arrangements through a series of staff training sessions. Since the first inspection, the arrangements have become more established and there are procedures to control the standard of assessments

conducted by RTL. There are also new arrangements to ensure that employers, trainees and subcontractors' views are monitored and analysed in a systematic way. Achievements and destinations are now monitored more closely to identify trends and provide the basis for remedial action and longer-term action-planning and target-setting. The original self-assessment process led to many changes in the quality control of training and assessment and to the production of an action plan. All TEC and awarding body requirements are being met. The first self-assessment report did not identify any strengths or weaknesses.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic analysis of achievement and destination data
- ◆ no effective monitoring of the training standard across all areas
- ◆ weak quality control of internal verification
- ◆ no collection or analysis of staff, subcontractors and employers' views

51. Since the first inspection, significant progress has been made to address the weaknesses identified at the first inspection. RTL has introduced a procedure to monitor training, although it recognises that this does not provide managers with a sufficiently clear insight into the training process. Significant progress has been made with internal verification arrangements to control the quality of assessment and RTL now routinely seeks the views of employers, subcontractors and trainees. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by RTL in its report for reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular review of quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ good understanding by staff and employers of quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ targets set for improvements
- ◆ good internal verification procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective monitoring of the standard of subcontracted training
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data for continuous improvement purposes

52. Many of RTL's quality assurance procedures and documents have been changed since the first inspection. It has introduced procedures to address issues raised by external audit, verification and RTL's annual self-assessment. Monthly reviews of quality assurance arrangements are still carried out and issues are raised on training, assessment and trainees' progress. At the time of the first inspection, many of these procedures were new and not fully established. During the last 12 months many of RTL'S quality assurance procedures have been reviewed and new arrangements have been developed, in particular those linked to internal verification

and to employers' understanding of important quality assurance arrangements, for example trainees' reviews and the roles and responsibilities of workplace supervisors. All of RTL's staff sign a document to demonstrate their acceptance and understanding of new procedures or documents as they change. RTL has recognised the importance of annual self-assessment and action-planning to enable it to make continuous improvements.

53. RTL monitors its performance against the TEC targets for NVQ achievement. Although this meets contractual requirements, there is insufficient emphasis on trainees completing their individual training plans. Target setting in other areas, however, exceeds the requirements of the TEC contract. RTL sets its staff targets to reduce the number of trainees who cancel their workplace appointments with a tutor/assessor, and to improve NVQ achievement on a monthly basis. This last target is also linked to the staff appraisal system. Targets are also set for RTL's staff to improve workplace supervisors' involvement in the training and assessment process. This includes developing a team approach to training by involving supervisors in trainees' reviews and slowly developing their understanding of the NVQ requirements.

54. Internal verification arrangements have improved since the first inspection. Internal verification is now planned in advance, and records of observed assessments clearly identify where action is required. Assessors are now observed assessing in the workplace where applicable. Formal procedures for internal verification have been identified and are included in the quality assurance manual. Assessors are assigned to trainees at the start of training, and the sampling plan for the verification of assessments is now agreed with the external verifier. Assessors/internal verifiers meet formally every three months and the agenda for these meetings includes the analysis of external verifiers' reports, assessment practices and internal verification issues. Minutes of the meeting are circulated to all RTL's staff and a member of staff is assigned to ensure that any agreed action points are carried out.

55. RTL's quality assurance arrangements do not ensure that the effectiveness of subcontracted training is monitored. The only way of monitoring the quality of subcontracted training is the frequent visits made by RTL's staff to trainees in college and at work. RTL still relies heavily on the colleges and other subcontracted training providers' own quality assurance systems. Since the first inspection, RTL has helped subcontracted training providers to take a more planned approach to visiting trainees in the workplace for assessment purposes. However, it still exercises little control over the standard of subcontracted training.

56. Data analysis is still weak. RTL does not fully analyse the data derived from its own statistical monitoring, external inspection reports for its subcontractors, colleges, employers and trainees' questionnaire responses or subcontractors' action/improvement plans for the purposes of continuous improvement and action planning. Self-assessment has become a part of its annual performance review and action planning but it is still not an established part of its quality assurance



arrangements as a whole. The specially prepared report for reinspection was accurate in identifying the action taken to address the weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with most of these improvements. However, other areas of weakness have not been fully addressed by RTL.