



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 2000

The Laird Foundation

SUMMARY

The Laird Foundation provides satisfactory training in the carpentry and joinery skills required by the engineering and construction industries (including ship repair). Off-the-job training for the construction trainees and the engineering trainees is well resourced. However, the overall training programme for engineering trainees is unsatisfactory. Arrangements to ensure satisfactory progression towards qualification of trainees in the workplace are inadequate. Training opportunities are well promoted to socially disadvantaged groups but there is insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Trainee support is satisfactory with good initial tasters of training activity to assist both trainees and employers in the selection of specific trade skills. Management of training is unsatisfactory with inadequate preparation made for the rapid increase in demand for workplace training and assessment. Arrangements for assuring the quality of the training and assessment processes are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Engineering	4

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent retention rates
- ◆ excellent physical resources for training
- ◆ good guidance programme for applicants to training
- ◆ well-managed engineering foundation training
- ◆ effective use of links with external groups

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ slow progression at NVQ level 3 in engineering
- ◆ insufficient staff training on equal opportunities
- ◆ little focus on NVQs during progress reviews
- ◆ lack of involvement of workplace supervisors in key skills and NVQ processes
- ◆ underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ weak internal verification

INTRODUCTION

1. The Laird Foundation is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Partners from public and private sectors together with local community groups formed the company in February 1998. The company is based in Birkenhead, adjacent to the river Mersey and the industrial premises of the major engineering partner. The Laird Foundation offers training and education facilities for young people entering the ship-repair and engineering industries on Merseyside. Training leads to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3. The facilities include workshops, classrooms, offices and a dock. A second company, The Laird Foundation Enterprises Limited, was formed in August 1998 as a commercial company which reinvests any profits into the charitable training company.

2. After closure of a large ship-building company in 1992, the local area was in economic decline. The building currently used by The Laird Foundation was empty for more than seven years. Following extensive refurbishment, the building was opened as the training centre in 1997-98. Further work on training facilities is currently supported by European funding as part of a major regeneration initiative. The Laird Foundation is expanding rapidly to meet resurgence of the local ship-repair industry and to fill an identified skills gap in the existing workforce of the newly formed main employer.

3. In April 2000, the unemployment rate in Wirral was 7.7 per cent compared with the national rate of 3.8 per cent. The total population in Wirral is 326,000 and at the 1991 census 1 per cent were from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of 16 year olds in Wirral continuing in full-time education is close to the national figure of 69 per cent. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 46.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

4. The Laird Foundation contracts with the Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) for government-funded work-based training. The first group of 18 engineering modern apprentices and two construction modern apprentices commenced training with The Laird Foundation in September 1997. The second group was an additional intake of 106 modern apprentices in September 1998. This large intake was at the request of the major employer and occurred while the site refurbishment was still incomplete. In September 1999, the rapid growth continued with a new intake of 107 engineering trainees and 11 construction modern apprentices. During July 1999, The Laird Foundation accepted transfer of a number of third- and fourth-year apprentices following the closure of a local training provider. The Laird Foundation is currently supporting work-based training for 234 engineering modern apprentices, three engineering national trainees and 13 construction modern apprentices. All trainees are employed at one of seven local engineering companies in the Wirral. Over 85 per cent of the trainees are employed at the main ship-repair company, with the significant majority working in the fabrication and welding specialisation.

The number of trainees in each of the specific occupational areas is displayed in the following table.

	MODERN APPRENTICES	NATIONAL TRAINEES	TOTAL
Carpentry and joinery	13	0	13
Fabrication and welding	146	3	149
Mechanical engineering	52	0	52
Electrical engineering	36	0	36
Total	247	3	250

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Three members of the management team attended several training workshops with the TEC and Training Standards Council (TSC) on the self-assessment process. Most of the staff in The Laird Foundation were made aware of the self-assessment process. Staff with particular responsibility for specific areas were consulted. Feedback from trainees and staff was used to substantiate the report findings. The draft report was subject to significant modification following an audit of the training by a specialist team from the TEC. The final report and action plan was published in February 2000. This report represented the first self-assessment undertaken by The Laird Foundation. The report provides substantive information on the development of the training. The socio-economic context for the training is well described. The report has adequate introductory paragraphs to each occupational and generic sector. Each of the strengths and weaknesses are clearly stated. References are given to on-site evidence supporting each of the strengths.

6. Four inspectors spent a total of 16 days with The Laird Foundation. Inspectors interviewed 59 trainees, and made 10 workplace visits. They met with 12 workplace supervisors. Seventeen interviews were conducted with staff at the training centre responsible for off-the-job training. Eleven interviews were conducted with other of The Laird Foundation's staff. Thirty-five trainees' files and 36 portfolios were examined. One trainee's review was observed. Other paperwork reviewed included contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance processes, minutes of meetings, promotional arrangements, and management and quality assurance evidence. Inspectors observed and graded 11 off-the-job training sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	0	0	1	1	0	2
Engineering	0	3	4	2	0	9
Total	0	3	5	3	0	11

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. There are 13 trainees in carpentry and joinery programmes, all of whom are modern apprentices. They began their training in 1997 and 1999. Eleven first-year trainees are currently following NVQs at level 2 and two third-year trainees are working towards NVQs at level 3 having completed their NVQs at level 2. The first year of training is done off the job in The Laird Foundation's training centre, where training and assessment is carried out up to the NVQ at level 2. The first 11

weeks are spent on a rotational off-the-job training programme having 'tasters' of the specific occupational skills that the trainees are able to learn. The major local employer provides on-the-job training upon commencement of the level 3 programme. Level 3 trainees attend the training centre on day release for further off-the-job training and assessment. The retention rate for the modern apprenticeship scheme is currently 100 per cent. The self-assessment report provides a range information and lists five strengths and two weaknesses. Some strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice by inspectors, and others were validated. Inspectors agreed with the identified weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good-quality training resources
- ◆ well-structured off-the-job training programmes
- ◆ good rate of retention
- ◆ good integration of key skills with NVQ training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ lack of rigour in assessment of some level 3 units

8. Material resources for training are good and trainees have access to a range of good-quality materials and equipment for training on and off the job. Trainees have a high regard for the quality and range of the off-the-job training. Trainees recognise the relevance of experience in the workplace to the off-the-job training they receive at level 3. There is a range of well-developed training and assessment rigs in the training centre's workshops. These rigs mimic workplace conditions to help trainees learn actual job skills and be assessed on these. Trainees welcome the opportunities they are given to acquire good craft skills and they produce work of a high standard. Trainees have regular assessment opportunities during their training in the training centre. The training programmes are clearly recorded with good systems of monitoring trainees' progress. The learning support materials encourage and enable trainees to produce good portfolios of assessment evidence at level 2. Trainees have good working relationships with their trainers who are occupationally qualified and have assessor qualifications.

GOOD PRACTICE

To enhance their training experience and provide workplace opportunities, first-year trainees are given the opportunity of project work on live construction contracts. This work experience is valued by the trainees as it provides opportunities to practice skills learned off the job. The projects provide a transition stage between off- and on-the-job training.

9. The employer recognises the importance of providing a range of training opportunities in the workplace. Although the training programmes in the workplace are unplanned, the trainees are given the opportunity to practice the skills they develop on the foundation level 2 programme when they are placed with the main employer. There are no previously decided training structures. Trainees are given the opportunity to work with a range of different craftsmen within the workplace. In addition, trainees, where appropriate, are able to work without direct supervision. Trainees are well motivated and enjoy the variety of their training. All

the trainees who have begun with The Laird Foundation are still in training. None have left early.

10. Trainees have the opportunity during the taster programme to commence collecting evidence relating to key skills. This is further developed during their training and is effectively integrated within the NVQ training programme. Also, as part of their assessment evidence for level 3, trainees are encouraged to use witness testimony from the workplace.

11. Opportunities to plan assessments in the workplace are missed. There is an over-emphasis on the use of written evidence produced by the trainee and supported by workplace witness testimony. There is little use of assessment by direct observation of the trainees' performance in the workplace.

12. On an informal basis, employers do receive some information from The Laird Foundation's staff about the trainees' NVQ programmes. However, work-based supervisors lack awareness of the requirements and range of the NVQ at level 3. The level 3 assessments are poorly planned and trainees and workplace supervisors are not fully aware of the range of tasks required to complete a unit. There is a lack of rigour in the assessment tasks for some level 3 units. The current internal verifier has a construction industry background but lacks occupational experience in carpentry and joinery. Trainees' progress reviews do not set targets related to the units and elements in the NVQ. Effective links between on- and off-the-job training are reduced by the lack of focus in target setting for the trainees.

Engineering

Grade 4

13. The Laird Foundation has 234 modern apprentices and three national trainees in engineering. Sixty-three per cent of the trainees focus on fabrication and welding skills. Twenty-two per cent of the trainees specialise in mechanical engineering craft skills and the remainder are electrical specialists. The first 11 weeks of training is spent on a rotational off-the-job programme experiencing the various trade skills on offer. The rest of the first-year off-the-job training involves completion of an NVQ at level 2 in foundation engineering plus three additional NVQ level 2 units and work towards key skills units. The engineering foundation units are taught and assessed in the training centre by The Laird Foundation's staff. On completion of the first year of training, the trainees are based in the workplace of their employers for four days each week. There are 20 trainees currently undertaking formal educational qualifications by day-release attendance at one of three local colleges. The remaining trainees attend the training centre to take a formal educational qualification. The Laird Foundation's further education course in support of welding and fabrication commences by day-release attendance in June of the first year. The mechanical and electrical trainees attend the training centre on a day-release basis for a national certificate course from the start of the second year of training. Current second-year trainees spend four days each week in the workplace completing a second NVQ at level 2 in engineering production plus the mandatory units of the NVQ at level 3. They also continue work on their key skills qualification. The Laird Foundation's staff undertake assessment and

verification of the workplace evidence. Throughout years three and four, trainees continue to attend the centre for one day each week to complete their academic studies and spend four days in the workplace. The programme is planned to enable trainees to achieve an NVQ at level 3 and key skills by the end of the fourth year. The major employer supports approximately 85 per cent of the engineering trainees. The remaining trainees are employed in small local engineering companies. The self-assessment report identifies five strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors validated the strengths and weaknesses and identified further weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent retention rates
- ◆ high achievement rates on engineering foundation programmes
- ◆ high-quality portfolios at level 2 NVQ
- ◆ excellent physical learning resources
- ◆ highly motivated and enthusiastic trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ inconsistent level of knowledge among qualified NVQ level 2 trainees
- ◆ slow progression at level 3
- ◆ poor awareness among trainees of standards at NVQ level 3

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are given projects which involve them in planning, organising and manufacturing work for external customers. They are currently working on the repair of a former German U-boat which requires them to produce fabrication work off the job and assemble and fit this on site. These projects provide a link between foundation training and the workplace.

14. Since 1997, 266 trainees have started a modern apprenticeship with The Laird Foundation. There are 234 apprentices still in training, representing an overall retention rate of 88 per cent. Trainees value their training with their employer and The Laird Foundation highly. Those trainees employed at the main shipyard are proud of the international reputation of their employer. The average achievement rate for the level 2 engineering foundation NVQ over the past three years has been 91 per cent. Achievement rates for the fabrication and welding qualification have exceeded 90 per cent in the same time.

15. The initial 11-week programme enables trainees to experience different engineering and construction trades. Where possible, trainees are given the opportunity to undertake training in an occupation which best suits their abilities and personal preferences. This training counts towards the trainees' foundation qualification. The foundation training programme incorporates many of the skills to be found in the ship-repair industry which dominates the area.

16. Trainees' portfolios of evidence and training logbooks are of a high standard. Portfolios contain many examples of work which has been produced that is beyond the requirements of trainees' foundation qualifications and reflects the needs of the local industry. Trainees have, for example, been given specific training in shipbuilding terminology to enable them to relate their off-the-job training to what

they will need to know when they leave the training centre. Many of The Laird Foundation's staff were former employees in the ship-repair and building industry, which enables them to relate training sessions to industry requirements. The portfolios of several trainees specialising in electrical training contain effective learning support materials and assessment packs. There are good resources available and trainees compile good portfolios of evidence at NVQ level 2.

17. The training centre is less than three years old, and much of the machinery and equipment is new and meets current industry standards. The Laird Foundation has strong links with, and uses the equipment and support services of, several manufacturers who enjoy excellent reputations for providing state-of-the-art equipment to the fabrication and welding industry. Ample lecture and study facilities are made available to trainees. Information technology training is given in a well-resourced suite which contains up-to-date computer software and hardware. Resources and learning opportunities within the workplace are of a high standard. Some trainees are producing work to high specifications without the need for close supervision. Planning documents and work schedules specify work that each level of trainee can undertake. This workplace system provides trainees with clear achievement levels.

18. Trainees are highly motivated and display an eagerness to learn. Several trainees have requested and been given the opportunity to undertake multi-skills training beyond the immediate requirements of their employers. Several fabrication trainees who had completed their foundation qualifications have had additional training in machining and fitting. The acquisition of these extra skills is providing the trainees with greater careers opportunities and job security. The employer benefits from this training by having a more flexible workforce to meet its anticipated future business demands. Trainees are attentive in the workshop and theory sessions at the training centre.

19. Assessment of trainees is inadequately planned. When questioned, some trainees were unsure if the job they were working on was to be assessed. Trainees are not always informed in advance of assessments. Assessment occurs with inadequate reference to the performance criteria and NVQ range statements. Trainees' knowledge and understanding is not systematically proven through appropriate questioning following the assessment. Trainees are unaware of their right to appeal against an assessment decision. Most NVQ level 3 trainees do not have copies of the NVQ unit standards in their portfolios. The practice at the main employer is to keep the NVQ standards of competence in a secure location away from the actual place of work. This practice limits the opportunity for workplace supervisors to use the standards to structure and enhance the on-the-job training. Workplace supervisors are not fully aware of the assessment process and opportunities for evidence gathering are missed.

20. Some trainees who have completed and gained their foundation NVQ at level 2 are unable to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of some areas of basic competence. These trainees do not have the level of understanding and knowledge equivalent to the stage of training they have reached.

21. The NVQ at level 3 in engineering is undertaken on employers' premises. Twenty-four trainees have been working towards their level 3 qualifications for 21 months. None of these trainees have completed the NVQ at level 3. The current second-year group of 89 trainees has been working on the mandatory units of the level 3 NVQ for nine months. Trainees' progress at level 3 is slow. Some trainees have not had any workplace evidence assessed. Some second-year trainees have produced very little workplace evidence. Some trainees have a poor understanding of the evidence-gathering and assessment process. Two second-year trainees had each produced 20 recorded items of workplace evidence over a nine-month span but none of this has been authenticated by workplace witnesses or assessed. Many trainees are not in a position to drive their own training forward as they do not have ready access to copies of the NVQ standards and are unclear how to identify where they require additional training, evidence and assessment. The review process at level 3 does not set well-defined targets for the progressive achievement of NVQ and key skills competence. Many trainees are not aware that NVQs are not time-bound, and instead they are of the opinion that a level 2 takes one year and a level 3 takes three years. They are unclear as to how they can complete their qualifications.

22. Following a recent management decision, the second-year trainees at the main employer are now required to undertake an additional NVQ at level 2 in production engineering. The current strategy is for these trainees to develop workplace evidence towards this additional qualification as well as continuing to gather evidence towards the mandatory units of the NVQ at level 3. Some second-year trainees are unaware of this additional requirement. Other trainees do not understand the reasons why they had been asked to do this additional work.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

23. The Laird Foundation has an equal opportunities policy supported by procedures which comply with current legislation. The policy meets TEC requirements and has recently been reviewed and updated. The policy applies to all staff and trainees. The induction process for both trainees and staff includes reference to the policy and the company's commitment to equality of opportunity. Minority ethnic groups and women are under-represented on training programmes, but trainees from socially disadvantaged areas in the region form approximately 60 per cent of the trainees. The Laird Foundation has an equal opportunities monitoring group comprising assessors, instructors, administration staff, two apprentices and the personnel manager from the main employer. The group held their first meeting in early April and the co-ordinator reports group suggestions to the management team of The Laird Foundation. No date was set for the next meeting. Below 1 per cent of trainees are women or are from minority ethnic groups. The Laird Foundation has set itself a target of 4 per cent for both these groups, and would particularly like to attract women into areas such as fabrication and welding. The self-assessment report identified four strengths and two

weaknesses. Inspectors considered some strengths to be no more than normal practice and validated others. Another weakness was identified during the inspection. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good targeting of training opportunities to socially disadvantaged groups
- ◆ strong external links used to encourage under-represented groups
- ◆ well-informed trainees on harassment and bullying policies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient staff training
- ◆ weak monitoring of employers for equal opportunities

24. The Laird Foundation, through its commitment to equal opportunities, has recognised that because of high levels of social deprivation in the area the priority of social inclusiveness needs to be addressed. Through its links with the careers service and schools in the region, the company has targeted disaffected pupils from schools in areas with high levels of deprivation. In addition, wider links have been established within the secondary school sector, local multi-cultural organisations and the careers service with the aim of targeting under-represented groups in the engineering and construction industries. The company has also been involved in the awarding body's initiatives to overcome gender stereotyping in engineering. The company has produced a promotional video which highlights training, employment and career opportunities which are available in the industries concerned. Young people from under-represented groups such as women and those from minority ethnic groups, can be seen as role models in the video. The video is widely distributed to appropriate organisations in the area. Young people from these organisations attend The Laird Foundation in groups and are able to sample the full range of vocational training on offer. The training centre has been developed with good accessibility for people with mobility difficulties or physical disabilities. There are suitable ramps to all ground floor entrances.

25. At induction, trainees and staff are given an overview of the equal opportunities policy. Recently this has been reinforced by the production of a booklet covering a range of equal opportunities issues, including harassment, bullying, appeals and grievance procedures. The booklet aids the knowledge and understanding of equal opportunities of staff and trainees.

26. Although equal opportunities are covered at induction, there is no training offered to training staff to help them improve their own awareness of equal opportunities. The current staff development plan makes no reference to training in equal opportunities. A recent modification to the trainees' review documents prompt the reviewer to raise the subject of equal opportunities with the trainee. However, there has been no formal training provided to the staff in this key role. Issues relating to equal opportunities are missed during the trainees' review process.

27. Employers offering training to The Laird Foundation trainees are aware of its equal opportunities policy and encouraged to support it. If companies do not have policies of their own then, they are asked to adopt The Laird Foundation's policy. Monitoring of equality of opportunities in recruitment and selection procedures has recently been implemented, but there has yet to be an analysis of the impact of the procedures. Monitoring of the effectiveness of the policy in the workplace has recently commenced but the monitoring process is not yet effective. During visits made by The Laird Foundation's staff to the workplace, opportunities to address the display of pictures which some may find offensive are not being taken with employers.

Trainee support

Grade 3

28. The Laird Foundation operates a training scheme for which the significant majority enter employment with one major employer. Most trainees apply directly to The Laird Foundation for a training place. They apply either direct from school or through the local careers service. They attend The Laird Foundation's training centre for entrance selection tests. The test covers numeracy and literacy. All trainees are given an interview following testing. Trainees to be employed with employers other than the major employer are referred to their employer for an interview in addition to The Laird Foundation's interview and tests. Trainees destined for the major employer are not interviewed by the employer. The employer relies on The Laird Foundation to recruit on their behalf. A minority of trainees is selected and employed directly by other employers and sent to The Laird Foundation for training. During the first week at the training centre, trainees receive a three-day induction, which covers terms of service, health and safety, the NVQ and key skills qualifications. During the first 11 weeks of training, trainees undergo taster training in which they have a short period of time training in all trade areas. During this period, reports are prepared on their employability, trade suitability and progress. On completion of this period, trainees are allocated to a particular engineering discipline. During the first year of training, progress toward their NVQ is formally reviewed every eight weeks by a member of the training centre's staff. On completion of their first-year engineering foundation training, trainees enter the workplace for a projected three-year work-based training period. During this period, trainees receive a formal progress review every eight weeks in addition to informal visits in the workplace. A member of The Laird Foundation's staff is assigned to the role of reviewer and assessor for trainees in the workplace. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent guidance programme for entrants
- ◆ good enhancement of training experience
- ◆ wide range of support systems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal assessment of basic skills and key skills on entry
- ◆ little focus on NVQs during progress reviews

29. The first 11 weeks of training involve spending time in each individual trade area. After each mini-period of training, the relevant trainer makes an assessment of trainees' capabilities and performance. The process also acts as a protracted assessment of a trainee's basic skills ability. At the end of the 11-week period, trainees are told which discipline they will be allocated to. Numbers for each trade in the major employer are ultimately dependent on the identified demands, but take into consideration trainees' abilities and aspirations. The Laird Foundation's staff attempt to find alternative work placements for those trainees who choose a different trade area to that which they were recruited and who cannot be accommodated by their original employer. They have successfully replaced all such trainees. Trainees are able to make an informed choice on their future career.

30. In addition to NVQ and key skills training, trainees have many opportunities to enhance their training. Sailboat training and outdoor courses are on offer. Use is made of European-funded schemes to send trainees to member states for work experience. Recently, 12 trainees were based in a factory in Vienna for a two-week period and two were based in a shipyard in Belgium. Prior to leaving for their work placements, trainees were given a short language course. The funding for the venture is raised in collaboration with three like-minded organisations who share the allocated places. Trainees benefit from the experience. In the last year, 15 trainees attended a two-day conference for young managers at a local sixth-form college. They acted as group leaders and led small groups of sixth-form students through a variety of tasks, which were designed to create team-working and problem-solving skills. The trainees enjoyed the experience which enhanced their own skills.

GOOD PRACTICE

The Laird Foundation runs a schools link programme for 14- to 16-year-old pupils. First-year trainees work with these pupils and act as mentors to them. The experience gained by the trainees is used as evidence for the key skills unit on working with others.

31. Trainees are well supported in the workplace and in the training centre. Reviewer assessors are in frequent contact with work-based trainees in addition to the formal progress review interviews which are held every eight weeks. The Laird Foundation's training centre is situated adjacent to the major employer. Trainees find it easy to drop in from the site to the training centre. The reviewer/assessors also have an office on the main employer's site and trainees can visit them by booking an appointment. The major employer released some trainees for a four-week revision period prior to their higher national certificate (HNC) examinations. This extended revision period was spent at The Laird Foundation's training centre. The Laird Foundation is also involved in an unusual support project. A major high-street retailer has donated 30 mountain bicycles to The Laird Foundation. Trainees have to undergo an initial fitness and medical test. After a six-month period these tests will be repeated and trainees who pass these tests will be allowed to keep the bicycles. This initiative assists trainees in getting to and from work and raises their awareness of health and fitness. In keeping with this attitude, The Laird Foundation was instrumental in arranging for all trainees to undergo meningitis C vaccinations during a time of concern in the local area. During the first year of training, detailed attendance records are kept and monitored. The

purpose of this, apart from administrative reasons, is to observe trends in trainees' absences. The information is passed to the centre manager for investigation and to consider additional support for some trainees. This particularly applies to trainees who may have personal and social problems. The Laird Foundation's staff have good links with external support bodies for such matters.

32. There is no formal initial assessment of basic skills on entry to the training programme. A shortfall in a specific area of basic skills may remain undetected. There are no systematic arrangements to identify how individual trainees may benefit from additional learning support or training to rectify learning difficulties. During the initial 11-week programme, new trainees do undertake a range of tasks such as written and basic numerical work applicable to specific jobs, which do assist in identification of those in need of additional learning support. These are well integrated into the work tasters they are sampling. Recently, one trainee was identified in need of numeracy and literacy support. This support was delivered by an outside agency, but not until the trainee had been on the programme for four months. There is no key skills test on entry to the modern apprenticeship programme. Individually tailored key skills programmes are not developed. All trainees undergo the same key skills training programme regardless of their ability. Plans are being implemented to introduce entry tests for key skills and basic skills for the trainees. In addition, a systematic method to accredit trainees with previous learning or achievement in key skills is planned. At present there have been some examples of key skills accreditation, but in one case this was done when key skills training was close to completion.

33. Reviews of trainees in the workplace lack focus on progression towards the NVQ and key skills. Within the action planning section of the report, the comments relating to training and assessment do not give incremental targets and dates to enable trainees to progress efficiently. In many cases, the trainees' workplace supervisors are not present at the review. The workplace supervisor cannot readily assist the trainee in identifying opportunities for the trainee to gain evidence. These factors contribute to the slow progress of some trainees towards their qualification, with the trainee sometimes collecting evidence which is not appropriate.

Management of training

Grade 4

34. The chief executive of The Laird Foundation has responsibility for the management of training. The chief executive reports to a board of directors. The nine directors are drawn from the private, public and community/voluntary sectors. The management team at The Laird Foundation consists of four staff in addition to the chief executive. The management team meets formally on a weekly basis. The administration team comprises seven staff. The instruction and assessment team consists of a further 21 staff. Full staff meetings are arranged on a monthly basis; brief minutes are made and circulated. The self-assessment report identified five strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors did not agree with three of the given

strengths but identified another. A further weakness, related to on-the-job training, was found during the inspection. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed foundation training
- ◆ effective links with external groups
- ◆ well-informed strategy for trainees' recruitment by the main employer

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient staff resources
- ◆ lack of involvement of workplace supervisors in key skills and NVQ processes
- ◆ lack of objective target setting for staff

35. The Laird Foundation manages an engineering foundation programme which meets the needs of trainees and employers. The skilled training staff in the training centre are highly motivated in providing learning opportunities for the trainees. Development of the physical resources for the training centre has been well managed. Effective links have been made with a range of manufacturers of equipment and suppliers of materials. Manufacturers have provided courses for the training centre's staff in the use of the new equipment. The training centre's resources are recognised as 'state of the art' and attract staff from local employers for skills development courses. Professional organisations use the training centre as a venue for talks and presentations. Following a recent incident in the training centre, the management team is reviewing procedures to ensure that the use of all recently acquired high-risk machines are encompassed by the health and safety arrangements. The trainees' transition between the training centre's foundation programme and the workplace is assisted by their work on a number of commercial projects. Managers are particularly effective in securing the contracts for these projects. The training centre has a high profile within the fabrication and welding trade.

36. The Laird Foundation was established to provide training in skills which had been identified as potential regional assets through economic assessments in the Merseyside area. Three surveys of local employers' needs in terms of engineering skills have been undertaken by The Laird Foundation. The facilities and training opportunities have been established and developed in response to these identified needs. The good link with the main employer continues to be the main source of information affecting the recruitment strategy for trainees. The main employer provides The Laird Foundation with information on the range of skills needed and the number of potential vacancies well in advance of the recruitment of trainees. The wide range of representation on the board of directors including senior managers from engineering companies and public educational institutions provides the management team with a resource of advice and guidance.

37. The primary focus of the management team has been the development of the training centre's resources to meet the requirements of the rapid expansion in trainees' numbers. There has been inadequate preparation for the work-based training phase of the training programme. On-the-job training is not planned in accordance with the requirements of the NVQ. On-the-job training is dictated by the production requirements of the employers. There are very few work-based assessors within the workforce of the employers. There has been no strategy to develop skilled staff among the workforce into assessors or mentors to support the trainees. The recent introduction of an additional at NVQ level 2 has not been adequately discussed among all of the staff involved. There is a lack of clarity in the roles of The Laird Foundation's assessors relating to assessment in the workplace.

38. The development of the staffing resource has not kept pace with the increased demands for training and assessment. This issue is particularly evident at level 3 of the NVQ. In September 1999, The Laird Foundation made the first appointments of staff with the role of assessing workplace evidence. At this time, 24 trainees had already completed one year of on-the-job training. As the two new assessors commenced their role, a further 124 trainees started the NVQ at level 3. The role of the two assessors also includes the eight-weekly formal review of trainees' progress. It is common practice for these staff to attempt to combine the processes of review with the assessment of workplace evidence. In May 2000, two new work-based assessors were appointed to the training staff. Their primary role is to provide support and assessment to the second-year trainees as they commence work on the recently introduced additional level 2 NVQ programme in the workplace. In September 2000, approximately another 100 trainees will commence their on-the-job training and assessment. There have been a significant number of changes of staff within the training centre. An area of particular concern has been the training, assessment and verification of electrical engineering. Owing to staffing problems, there has been a gap of over two months in the training of basic electrical theory training to a group of second-year trainees.

39. Arrangements for workplace training have not adequately involved some of the workplace supervisors across the range of engineering employers. Some workplace supervisors lack information and involvement with the NVQ and key skills processes. This situation is particularly evident with workplace supervisors not involved with the major employer. Formal communication between The Laird Foundation and some of these companies is weak. Supervisors are not always directly involved in the review process. Some reviews of second-year trainees take place on their day release at the training centre. Lack of key skills awareness by the workplace staff results in missed opportunities for their further development and assessment. Some employers view the modern apprenticeship as time bound and their training plan for the trainee is commonly set for four years' duration. Some trainees share this misconception.

40. Following a review of the previous system causing a lapse in excess of six months, the current staff appraisal system began in May 2000. Most staff undertook the revised process during May. Some of the results of the appraisal

process have been used to develop a recent staff training plan. Targets set for staff are of a general nature and are not specific in terms of performance indicators. Management staff are currently developing a trainees' tracking systems which will provide the detail for more objective target setting for staff.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

41. Formal arrangements for quality assurance were initiated in September 1999 following the appointment of two new senior members of staff. A range of procedures has since been recorded in accord with an ISO 9000 quality standard system. A member of the management team has responsibility for quality assurance of the training. Quality assurance issues are discussed at management and general staff meetings. As an accredited centre for a wide range of vocational and educational qualifications, The Laird Foundation meets the requirements of several awarding bodies. The TEC's staff undertake six-monthly audits of the financial and administrative arrangements. The self-assessment report identified three strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors did not agree with all of the identified strengths and they found further weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective action planning to improve training
- ◆ good use of visual tracking systems for trainees' progression

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements for training
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of off-the-job training
- ◆ inconsistent practices in training and assessment
- ◆ weak internal verification

42. Following completion of the self-assessment process in February 2000, an extensive action plan was developed. A significant number of the actions have been fully or partially completed. An equal opportunities group has been established and a system for monitoring equal opportunities in the workplace has been initiated. Systems for monitoring absence records of first-year trainees are in operation. Materials for the initial assessment of basic skills have been acquired. Procedures for staff appraisal and identification of staff training needs have been implemented. Service level agreements with the three local subcontracted colleges have been developed. A recent survey of employers by use of a questionnaire has identified a number of issues and an action plan has been developed. Information from analysis of questionnaires completed by first-year trainees in December 1999 was used in the self-assessment process. The views of all trainees undertaking on-the-job training have not been formally obtained.

43. Wall charts within the training centre and at the main employer's workplace clearly identify trainees' progression towards NVQ completion. The charts indicate units in progress and units completed. This gives The Laird Foundation's staff, workplace supervisors and trainees a clear idea as to where the trainee has reached in the programme.

44. The current quality assurance manual contains 28 procedures. Many of the procedures have direct relevance to training but the manual does not make any reference to an annual self-assessment process. Until April 2000, the only procedures which had been subject to audit and action planning were those related to the administration of financial claims. Between April and the time of the inspection, there were a few audits of training procedures, but these have had little effect on the quality of training as yet. The arrangements for the audits of recorded procedures have had little effect on the quality of the training. Administration staff check that the reviews of first-year trainees are performed to a schedule, but there are no arrangements to directly monitor the review process or its results. Arrangements for the scheduling of reviews for workplace trainees are not monitored.

45. The Laird Foundation provides off-the-job training in NVQs and teaches the knowledge needed for formal vocational education and key skills qualifications. There are no arrangements for formal monitoring of this teaching. Arrangements are inadequate to ensure that staff are working towards an agreed scheme of work and an overall assessment plan. Performance indicators, such as success rates for achieving units, have not been set for the additional qualification that trainees take during off-the-job training, but the actual achievement rates are higher than national averages. These courses are not reviewed and action plans are not set for their improvement. A recent external verifier's report on an educational programme approved from September 1999 identified that assessments were not referenced to performance criteria and were not subject to internal verification. Arrangements to ensure that the programme team complies with the awarding body's requirements for operation of the programme are unsatisfactory.

46. NVQ training and assessment practices within the training centre are not standardised. There is inconsistency in the procedures adopted by different staff. The quality of training monitored during the inspection varied from good to unsatisfactory, with 27 per cent of sessions judged to be unsatisfactory. Several of the weaknesses identified in the training sessions displayed a lack of basic training skills, such as those to encourage trainees' participation in sessions. Training in the workplace varies depending on the workplace trainer and their knowledge of and commitment to the trainee's NVQ programme. Assessment practices on and off the job vary from a well-planned process with clear identification of performance criteria for the individual trainee to sessions where the trainees are unaware that they are being assessed. There is a lack of identification of poor practice and sharing of good practice among the trainers and assessors.

47. Internal verification at The Laird Foundation is insufficient to quality assure the assessment process. The purpose of the internal verification process is not fully

understood by all the training centre's staff. Internal verifiers' time was spent re-assessing trainees' work at NVQ level 2 and their feedback comments were to the trainee and not to the assessor. Internal verification occurs when requested by the trainee rather than being planned by the internal verifier. There is insufficient written feedback to assessors on the validity and consistency of their assessments. Until March 2000, there was no internal verification of NVQ level 3 assessments. Internal verification in electrical engineering has been delayed owing to a lack of staff with the appropriate qualifications. This situation has affected electrical engineering assessments at NVQ levels 2 and 3.

48. The self-assessment process undertaken by The Laird Foundation identified a significant number of the strengths and weaknesses which inspectors also found. The differences in the grading between the self-assessment report and those awarded by inspectors were mainly attributable to the significance of weaknesses relating to the on-the-job training. The action plan identified specific tasks to be undertaken against identified weaknesses. Some of this action had been carried out prior to the inspection, The action plan did identify timescales, but some were unrealistic. The plan identified who was responsible for each action, but did not state how success could be monitored. The Laird Foundation uses self-assessment as a quality assurance measure.