



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

West Oxfordshire Training Services

SUMMARY

West Oxfordshire Training Services provides outstanding training in foundation for work. This is mainly centred on environmental projects. Trainees have access to a wide range of occupational accreditation including the licences they need to be able to gain employment. There is good provision in business administration. Training is satisfactory in health, care and public services where flexible forms of provision enable trainees to receive training and support even when they are working shifts or are based in rural areas. Training in management and professional studies, and in retailing and customer service is less than satisfactory. Seven subcontractors are involved in training and assessing, and the quality of provision varies. Weaknesses in the customer service area include some poor assessment practice, inappropriate qualifications, trainees' poor understanding of the NVQ process and inadequate training. Equal opportunities and trainee support are satisfactory. The organisation attracts trainees by providing free transport and trainees who need it receive effective additional support. Equal opportunities data is not used constructively. Initial assessment is fragmented and the outcomes of assessment are not always reflected in trainees' individual training plans. Management of training is less than satisfactory. The work of subcontractors and employers is poorly managed and inadequately monitored. Some management information is unreliable. Quality assurance is poor. There are systematic and comprehensive quality assurance arrangements.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	4
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	4
Health, care & public services	3
Foundation for work	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	5

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good placements and support from employers in many areas of work
- ◆ wide range of occupational accreditation in the foundation for work programme
- ◆ effective transport arrangements to enable people to train

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor management of subcontractors and employers
- ◆ poor assessment in some areas of work
- ◆ inappropriate qualifications offered to trainees in one occupational area
- ◆ inadequate initial assessment
- ◆ some unreliable management information
- ◆ underdeveloped quality assurance arrangements

INTRODUCTION

1. West Oxfordshire Training Services (WOTS) was established in 1984 as a division of West Oxfordshire District Council. In November 1998, the district council made a decision to make WOTS into a charitable organisation limited by guarantee. At the end of December 1999, it was decided not to go ahead with the restructuring and WOTS remains as a division within the district council. WOTS aims to provide quality guidance, assessment and training services for the benefit of the local community.

2. WOTS is based in Witney, Oxfordshire and has administration offices, training rooms, a meeting room and workshop facilities in the town centre. It has contracted with the Heart of England Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) since 1991 and has increased the size of its contracts and areas of provision over the last nine years. It provides programmes for both young people and adults from all over Oxfordshire. There are 10 members of staff involved in the TEC-funded programmes. WOTS also acts as a subcontractor to the TEC unit of delivery for New Deal. At present, however, there are no New Deal clients. The 140 trainees are spread across the programmes listed in the table below:

Occupational area	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Management & professional	15			6		21
Business administration	18	12	9	2		41
Retailing & customer service	17	4	22			43
Health, care & public services	3	2	15	1		21
Foundation for work			1		13	14
Totals	53	18	47	9	13	140

3. Oxfordshire has a population of 607,200 with West Oxfordshire making up 98,000 of the total. People from minority ethnic communities make up 3.2 per cent of the population, compared with the national average of 5.5 per cent. Approximately 75 per cent of this number live in Oxford City while the average concentration in the other four local authorities is 0.4 per cent. The unemployment rate in Oxfordshire is low at 2 per cent and West Oxfordshire, at 0.8 per cent currently has one of the lowest rates in the country. In May, the unemployment rate for England was 3.8 per cent. West Oxfordshire has no single large employer but has 54 employers employing more than 50 people and covering a variety of skill areas. The opening of the M40 Oxford to Birmingham link has brought about the development of large distribution and warehousing complexes in the Northeast

and the South of the county. These offer employment to semi-skilled operatives and relevant training programmes have been developed by WOTS to meet both employees and employers' needs. Public transport links are fragmented and difficult. Many of the unfilled training vacancies are because of transport difficulties, particularly for the youth programmes. A high percentage of 16 year olds stay on at school and, therefore, participation in government-funded training is below the national average.

	School leavers gaining GCSEs (per cent)		Participation in full-time education and training (per cent)		Participation in government-funded training (per cent)	
	5+ A-C grades	None	Age 16	Age 17	Age 16	Age 17
England	47.9	6.0	69	57	10	11
TEC area	47.3	5.7	76	60	7	10

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The final version of the self-assessment report was completed in February 2000. Staff were fully involved in the self-assessment process and in the production of the report and the resulting action plan. Not all subcontractors were involved. The self-assessment report identifies a large number of strengths and some weaknesses. Inspectors judged many of the strengths to be no more than normal practice. They identified additional strengths and a substantial number of additional weaknesses. One grade was higher than that proposed in the self-assessment report, two grades remained the same and six grades were lower.

5. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 17 days at WOTS in May 2000. They interviewed 49 trainees, eight staff, 14 supervisors/employers and 12 staff from subcontracting agencies. They visited 17 placements. They observed eight training sessions, two assessments and eight progress reviews. They examined trainees' individual training plans, review records and files. They also looked at a wide range of paperwork, including contracts, external reports, records of meetings, staff personnel records, policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Management & professional			4	1		5
Business administration		2	2	1		5
Retailing & customer service			2			2
Health, care & public services	1	1	2			4
Foundation for work	1	1				2
Total	2	4	10	2		18

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Management & professional

Grade 4

6. The training in this occupational area is carried out by a subcontractor, based in WOTS' training centre. The programme is designed for trainees who want to work in language training with speakers of English as a second or other language. Trainees also work towards a customer service qualification and this aspect of their training is covered in the retailing and customer service section of this report. There are 21 trainees: 15 modern apprentices and six trainees on work-based training for adults programmes. The programme lasts for eight weeks. Most trainees learn about it by word of mouth. They are recruited nationally and those from distant locations take up temporary accommodation in the locality. All trainees undertake a training and development national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3, a customer service NVQ at levels 2 and 3, a teaching English for speakers of other languages (TESOL) certificate and an English-for-business qualification. The 15 modern apprentices following the customer service framework also undertake four units of the administration NVQ at level 2 and key skills. All the modern apprenticeship trainees are employed by the subcontractor for the duration of their programme. The work-based learning for adults trainees are not employed. The work activities of all trainees involve the teaching of English language to members of the public, mostly locally based, foreign au pairs. In the last contract year, 93 per cent of trainees achieved the English for business qualification, 99 per cent achieved the TESOL certificate and 96 per cent achieved one or both of the NVQ outcomes. There is a very high retention level. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weakness identified in the self-assessment report. However, some strengths were no more than normal practice. A further strength and a number of significant additional weaknesses were identified. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly motivated trainees
- ◆ high levels of achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inappropriate qualifications
- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of the NVQ process
- ◆ poor portfolio evidence
- ◆ poor training model presented to trainees
- ◆ failure to use individual training plans as working documents

7. The trainees recruited to this intensive programme have a minimum academic level of two A levels or their equivalent. Their suitability is confirmed by an

POOR PRACTICE

During an assessment, the trainer provided feedback on her observation of a training practice session delivered by the trainee. No mention was made of the NVQ and the trainee was given no guidance on how and where this evidence could be used to demonstrate competence against particular unit(s). When questioned by the inspector, the trainee did not connect the assessment with his NVQ programme and understood only that he should keep the assessment record in his portfolio.

POOR PRACTICE

All trainees are given an identical evidence record for every unit in which the evidence is already listed and the performance criteria, range and knowledge boxes are already ticked. The trainees are responsible for ensuring that their portfolio contains the evidence listed and that it is numbered as indicated on the evidence record.

interview and an initial test of English grammar and phonology. Trainees are intelligent, articulate and highly motivated but many of them, particularly the adult trainees, lack confidence. All the trainees spoken to by inspectors during the inspection expressed their enthusiasm for the programme, confirmed their increased levels of confidence and had no doubt that they would find suitable employment as a result. There are two groups of trainees on the programme. One group has been on the programme for two weeks and the second group is in the last week. Many trainees in the second group have already secured jobs and others have interviews arranged. There are seven full-time members of the subcontractor's staff working solely on this programme. This high ratio of staff to trainees has a positive impact on the training and ensures that all trainees have a high degree of personal support.

8. The main focus of the programme, for trainees and trainers, is the achievement of the TESOL and business English certificates. The customer service NVQ, together with key skills and the administration units, is an essential component of the modern apprenticeship framework. The length of the programme, its content and the way in which it is structured, make it impossible to generate sufficient work-based evidence of the required breadth, depth and quality. The NVQ in training and development at level 3 is also completed in the eight weeks, which does not give trainees enough time and opportunity to develop training across the broad range required by the NVQ standards.

9. The intensive nature of the course and trainers' lack of experience of the NVQ process means that trainees develop little understanding of their NVQ programme. Trainees are given an information pack at the start of their course, which includes an outline of the NVQ structure and processes involved but there is no further reference to the book during their programme. The trainees do not have copies of the standards or the candidate pack. None of the trainees interviewed could explain the relationship between units, elements, performance criteria and range statements. Trainers miss opportunities to increase their trainees' understanding of the NVQ process.

10. Demonstration of competence relies heavily on essays and witness statements from the tutors. The essays are not directed at the NVQ standards and contain no reference to any of the performance criteria or range statements. They are not sufficient or relevant as evidence of competence for the criteria against which they are claimed. They demonstrate only the background knowledge which trainees have acquired. In many instances, essays and witness statements are the only evidence produced. Most of the witness statements in each portfolio are identical except for the trainee's name. They are not dated. The name or status of the provider does not support the signature and they are not directed at the NVQ standards. The failure to involve trainees in the NVQ process is resulting in lost opportunities for them to produce good, relevant evidence portfolios for themselves. The portfolios are not internally verified or externally verified until after the trainees have completed and left the programme. This means that there is no opportunity for trainees to add evidence to their portfolios, if it is required.

11. Trainees on this programme are training to be trainers. However, they are being exposed to poor and badly used resources. In two of the three training sessions observed, trainers did not have detailed lesson plans. In two of the sessions, trainers used badly hand-written overhead projector slides and slides of poorly photocopied extracts from publications. Text was not enlarged and was therefore difficult to read. The projector glass was dirty and the projector was out of focus. The trainees have no opportunity to try out and use a wide variety of methods of training. Trainees are offered additional training in information technology for their key skills but they are not encouraged to produce word-processed projector slides or handouts. One trainee observed teaching a lesson had produced poor hand-written resources, made mistakes on the flip chart and continually walked in front of the overhead projector. Another trainee had made a cassette recording but, because he had not realised that he should have used a proper microphone, the recording was difficult to hear and, for his class of foreign students, even more difficult to understand.

12. Individual training plans are identical and contain only a list of the qualifications the trainee is undertaking. The trainees do not remember them. They are not used during reviews and are not updated with relevant information. One trainee suffers from dyslexia and correspondence in her file shows that certain support activities have been arranged for her. Yet these activities are not recorded on her individual training plan. Trainees receive only one progress review during their eight-week programme. The reviews concentrate on the progress the trainee is making in relation to the course work schedule that all trainees receive at the beginning of the programme. They also tackle trainees' personal problems, the most common of which is the delayed issue of housing benefit cheques. The space on the review form referring to progress in the NVQ is completed in the same way for all trainees, simply stating that they are working towards all units.

Business administration

Grade 2

13. There are 41 trainees. All trainees are based in the workplace and most are employed. Trainees attend off-the-job training sessions. WOTS is responsible for some of the training and assessing but most is subcontracted to other training providers. Two of these subcontractors assess their trainees in the workplace. Three subcontractors are colleges which provide off-the-job training at the college, with the majority of assessment carried out by their own assessors. The local college provides the majority of the training. Two trainees choose to attend a college nearer to their home. Training co-ordinators from WOTS visit trainees in the workplace every 12 weeks. Information on achievement and retention rates was imprecise and fragmentary because the organisation was unable to provide accurate, comprehensive statistics. Retention and achievement rates for accountancy trainees are high but rates for modern apprentices in accountancy are lower. Thirty per cent of trainees leave with no qualification. The national traineeship programme is new. At present the retention rate is 63 per cent. Last year 76 per cent of adult trainees achieved the outcomes recorded in their individual training plans. Inspectors agree with many of the weaknesses identified

in the self-assessment report, but many of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

Business administration	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Accounting levels 2 to 4	10					10
Business administration NVQ levels 1 to 3	7	11	7	2		27
Information technology levels 1 to 3	1	1	2			4
Totals	18	12	9	2	0	41

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ good additional training opportunities
- ◆ good assessment in business administration
- ◆ good support for trainees in developing key skills
- ◆ accountancy trainees' consistently high achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective reviews
- ◆ employers' lack of knowledge of NVQs
- ◆ weaknesses in the conduct of assessment and verification

14. There is varied, relevant and effective work-based experience for most trainees. Employers provide coaching, guidance and encouragement. Two trainees with restricted mobility are working effectively in their placements and have gained in confidence with the support of their employers. Trainees often have their own workstation and most are given time to develop their portfolios. Some employers offer additional training courses to enable trainees to broaden their skills. WOTS also offers courses designed to meet particular needs identified by employers and trainees, such as communications and specific information technology skills. Trainees attending college for off-the-job training have access to all the normal college facilities, including learning support workshops. Trainees and assessors use these additional courses and workshops as evidence towards the NVQ.

15. Business administration trainees make good use of action planning their portfolios. Assessment methods are suitably varied and most assessors make effective links between on- and off- the-job training. College trainees have

assessment logs for recording the outcomes of observations carried out by their training co-ordinators. Evidence is gathered efficiently from off-the-job training, work-based assessment and key skills assessment and, in a few instances, use is made of trainees' prior learning. Trainees fully understand the NVQ process and know how to identify evidence in their everyday work.

16. A key skills assessor visits trainees, who are on the local college programme, in their workplaces to help them to map key skills against occupational activities. A project has been designed to enable a trainee with a limited job role to identify the application of number key skills. Key skills have recently been integrated with occupational competencies in the assessment of work-based trainees. WOTS offers regular key skills workshops for those trainees who need extra support and is encouraging its assessors to gain the key skills practitioner award. Accountancy trainees have consistently high levels of achievement and many achieve NVQ level 4.

17. The reviews conducted by the training co-ordinators are concerned mainly with pastoral matters. They rarely involve setting and reviewing targets for achievement. Employers are not always involved in the reviews. Co-ordinators may see them separately or ask them to sign the review sheet. There is informal liaison between employers and assessors but it is left mainly to the trainees to negotiate with employers for appropriate opportunities to gather evidence for their NVQ.

18. Employers are not fully aware of the NVQ process and weak links between the subcontractor, WOTS and the employer result in missed opportunities for work-based assessment. Information technology trainees are given a list of tasks which are already linked to the performance criteria, range and knowledge statements. These trainees make little use of witness testimony statements from the workplace. The training co-ordinators are not always qualified in their occupational sector, which limits the opportunity for work-based assessment and leads to an over-reliance on simulated evidence. Trainees do not appear to have been particularly disadvantaged by these weak links, as informal systems have been developed to support them. There is, however, a lack of efficiency in collecting work-based evidence.

19. Portfolios are internally verified once the trainee has completed the NVQ. Issues, therefore, are not identified early enough in the programme. It may be too late for the trainee to add any additional evidence if this is required. Not all subcontractors have an internal verification sampling plan and there has been little observation of assessments by the verifier. WOTS relies on its subcontractors to forward copies of internal and external verifiers' reports and not all of these were available at inspection. In information technology, no individual units are signed off by the assessor, which leaves trainees unsure about which units they have completed. Assessors from the subcontractors meet with WOTS staff three times a year to discuss issues. Although there is evidence of some tracking documentation in subcontractors' files, subcontractors do not have central systems for tracking trainees' progress.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 4

20. WOTS offers warehousing, retailing and customer service NVQs. There are 43 trainees. These numbers do not include the 21 customer service trainees who are reported on in the management and professional section of this report, 15 of whom are modern apprentices and six are adults on the work-based learning programme. Training is undertaken mainly by the employers and assessment is provided by seven subcontractors. The frequency of assessors' contact with trainees varies between daily, for those on the eight-week training and development programme, and once a month. A WOTS training consultant carries out reviews at least once every 12 weeks. Achievement rates vary considerably depending on which subcontractor is carrying out the assessment. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that awarded by the organisation.

Retailing & customer service	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Retailing	5	1				6
Warehousing	4		5			9
Customer service	8	3	17			28
Totals	17	4	22	0	0	43

STRENGTHS

- ◆ employers' high level of support for trainees
- ◆ good evidence in many trainees' portfolios
- ◆ strong support from assessors for many trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor assessment in customer service for some trainees
- ◆ poor understanding of the NVQ programme on the part of some trainees
- ◆ failure to meet NVQ criteria on eight-week customer service programme

21. Employers claim that trainees' competence in the workplace is significantly improved as a result of their participation in the programmes offered by WOTS. Some employers are using the NVQ programmes as part of a planned strategy to retrain trainees and to enable them to gain promotion within the company. Many employers offer trainees off-the-job training to help them to develop the knowledge required to achieve their NVQs. They are equally active in attempting to ensure that trainees receive the on-the-job training necessary to achieve their qualifications. In some cases, the on-the-job training is provided by senior managers. Many trainees are encouraged by employers to develop their portfolios during working hours. Trainees take considerable pride in their portfolios and use

the opportunities provided by employers to develop a good range of portfolio evidence. Some trainees have shown considerable imagination in producing their evidence. For example, a sequence of photographs taken immediately one after another is used to illustrate competence in relation to a particular activity. Trainees fully understand the NVQ programme and progress quickly.

22. The frequency of assessors' contacts with trainees varies from one subcontractor to another. One subcontractor in customer service has an office at the training centre and assessors have daily contact with the trainees. Other subcontractors visit trainees on a weekly basis and a few trainees receive visits from an assessor on a monthly basis. One subcontractor arranges for a key skills assessor to visit modern apprentices once a fortnight. This is in addition to the weekly visits made by the occupational assessor who provides tutorials to help trainees develop the knowledge required for the qualifications towards which they are working. Most assessors agree realistic but demanding targets with their trainees to ensure that they make good progress. One subcontractor arranges assessor visits outside normal working hours to accommodate those who work evening shifts. Assessors work closely with employers to ensure that assessment is integrated effectively with on- and off-the-job training.

POOR PRACTICE

One subcontractor offers a level 2 customer service NVQ and uses this qualification together with a specific unit at level 3 to enable trainees to achieve a full level 3 customer service qualification. This is very poor practice, which does not meet the requirements of the awarding body.

23. The assessors belonging to one subcontractor which provides assessment for a substantial number of customer service trainees, have a limited understanding of the nature, structure and requirements of the NVQ standards for customer service. The portfolio evidence produced by trainees is of poor quality and does not meet the requirements of the customer service NVQ. Internal and external verification takes place at the end of the programme, after the trainees have left and external verifiers have no opportunity to meet the trainees. The evidence produced by trainees assessed by another subcontractor also fails to fully meet the requirements of the customer service NVQ level 3.

24. Trainees on the eight-week management and professional programme, who are following a customer service NVQ are unclear about which level of qualification they are working towards and the key skills units that they must achieve. They do not receive copies of the customer service standards or the candidate pack. They have little knowledge or understanding of how the evidence they produce links to the assessment criteria of the NVQ they are working towards. The highly structured eight-week programme in customer service, which is delivered by the one subcontractor, fails to provide trainees with enough opportunity to practise the full range of customer service skills. Trainees cannot produce the variety of types of evidence from a sufficiently wide range of situations, over a period of time, to meet the requirements of the customer service NVQ.

Health, care & public services**Grade 3**

25. WOTS is approved to deliver NVQs in care and early years care and education at NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 and housekeeping at NVQ level 1. There are 21 trainees. The childcare programme will not continue after the one remaining trainee has

completed the programme. WOTS also has privately funded trainees who follow the same programmes as the 21 government-funded trainees. All trainees are employed. There are 16 placements spread across a wide geographical area. They include a hospital, residential care for the elderly and people with learning difficulties, respite care for children and a nursery. If trainees are unemployed when they apply, WOTS identifies possible employers and submits potential trainees to them for an interview. It also ensures that placements offer trainees the opportunity to complete their NVQs at the appropriate level. The training co-ordinator visits the placement to explain to the employer and trainee the requirements of the programme. All assessment and most training takes place in the workplace. Most trainees have a work-based assessor. Where no work-based assessor is available WOTS provides an assessor. All assessors are qualified or working towards the assessor qualifications. WOTS offers monthly workshops on portfolio-building at the training centre and where travel to the centre is a problem, workshops are held in the workplace. Three staff co-ordinate the care, childcare and housekeeping programmes, all of whom are qualified assessors and internal verifiers. The training co-ordinator, trainee and employer meet formally every 10 to 12 weeks to review progress towards achievement of the qualification. The trainee and employer both retain a copy of the review record. Most trainees are visited in their workplace by the training co-ordinator every six to 10 weeks. Housekeeping trainees are visited every four weeks. The organisation was unable to provide accurate statistics on retention and achievement. The number of trainees recruited over the last three years has been low. The retention rate for youth trainees on the other training programme rose from 41 per cent in 1997-98 to 62 per cent in 1999-2000. The self-assessment report identified some strengths that were no more than normal practice. Two of the weaknesses identified were more appropriate to management of training. Inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

Health, care & public services	Youth programmes			Adult programmes		Total
	Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other	Work-based learning	Basic employability	
Housekeeping NVQ at level 1			3			3
Early years care and education NVQ at level 2				1		1
Care NVQ at levels 3 and 3	3	2	12			17
Totals	3	2	15	1	0	21

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support for trainees in building their portfolios
- ◆ flexibility of the training programme
- ◆ good written and verbal feedback on trainees' portfolio work

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak review process
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate resources for developing theoretical knowledge

25. Trainees find the monthly portfolio-building workshops useful. They receive individual attention and say that the guidance helps them to understand the NVQ and to progress quicker. Trainees' portfolios are appropriately presented and organised, and of a satisfactory standard.

26. The opportunity to start the programme at any time during the year enables trainees to take advantage of employment opportunities as they arise. WOTS staff provide strong personal support. Trainees are visited according to need even where, in the case of care and housekeeping programmes, the trainees are spread out geographically and work varied shift patterns. Frequent visits ensure that trainees do not feel isolated. Trainees and work-based assessors are confident that training co-ordinators can easily be reached by telephone to give advice and support, where needed. Trainees are encouraged to attend additional courses leading to qualifications in food hygiene, first aid and manual handling. National trainees and modern apprentices have the opportunity to attend key skills workshops at the centre and the organisation provides transport for trainees where distance is a problem.

27. The assessment centre co-ordinator provides good written and verbal feedback to assessors and trainees on the quality of NVQ portfolios. Internal verification standards are discussed twice yearly at formal meetings and verbal feedback from internal verifiers is comprehensive. Appropriate action is taken, where necessary, to ensure that assessment is sound and that care standards are maintained. However, there is no sampling plan or monitoring of the activities of work-based assessors and internal verifiers.

28. Individual training plans are not used as working documents. The formal 12 weekly reviews do not refer to the training plan. Reviews give insufficient attention to work-based learning issues and fail to ensure that employers are providing appropriate experiences for trainees. The review does not lead to a development plan for the trainee involving realistic achievement targets. Two trainees with recognised literacy and numeracy learning needs were not being helped in any effective way.

29. On- and off-the-job training is not planned and co-ordinated effectively and there is too much focus on assessment at the expense of work-based learning. Some employers do not recognise their responsibilities to the trainees and fail to provide appropriate opportunities for learning. Trainees learn practical skills through work experience and informal discussion with their colleagues rather than as part of a planned process. There are not enough planned opportunities to link work-based experiences to other forms of learning. Most trainees do not receive enough off-the-job training. They are not allocated time during working hours to

devote to NVQ work in spite of this being part of the written agreement with employers.

30. Practical resources to support the development of theory are inadequate both at the training centre and at most employers' premises. Trainees are not routinely exposed to relevant, up-to-date reading matter or brought into contact with developing professional practice. There are few planned opportunities to consider NVQ theory requirements with appropriately qualified professionals. Trainees are not encouraged to develop the ability to work effectively on their own. Some trainees are provided with open-learning material but they are not given the support necessary to enable them to benefit from this. There are inadequate resources for trainees with learning difficulties and those who lack confidence.

Foundation for work

Grade 1

32. Foundation for work has been a key part of provision at WOTS since 1984. Programmes enable trainees to develop both occupational and personal skills at their own pace and are centred around project work and contracts with local councils to provide services. Some trainees are based in occupational areas and receive additional support. The number of trainees dropped in 1999-2000 owing to changes in contracts but it has increased this year. There is one youth trainee on the other work-based programme for young people and 13 adults on basic employability training. Most of the adult trainees are long-term unemployed. One is in a supported placement, working towards business administration NVQ level 1. The one youth trainee and the other adult trainees are working on projects which include countryside work, work for local councils in parks and playgrounds and laying canal footpaths. All trainees work towards a qualification as well as receiving extra support to meet needs identified. In the three-year period up to March 1999, 73 per cent of adults achieved the outcomes specified in their individual training plans and 49 per cent gained employment. Achievements on the youth programme over the same period were not so good: 60 per cent of trainees left with no qualifications. Youth trainees' achievements, however, were affected adversely by the failure of a specific youth project in Oxford which the TEC had asked WOTS to run. The project was closed early due to problems outside the control of WOTS. The numbers of trainees since that period have been too low to make statistical data meaningful. The self-assessment report identified many strengths that were judged to be no more than normal practice and some weaknesses with which inspectors did not agree. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of occupational accreditation
- ◆ trainees' high level of achievement
- ◆ good teamwork and strong mutual support on the part of trainees

- ◆ good, in-depth reviews
- ◆ highly effective training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal job-search programme
- ◆ inadequate recording of the additional support given to trainees

33. All trainees work towards occupational accreditation. Business administration activities are covered in the business administration section of the report. Qualifications include specific trade licences such as those for forklift trucks and dumper trucks, NVQs at levels 1 and 2 in relevant occupational areas, prevocational awards, safety awareness certificates and the emergency first aid certificate. The work of the project teams is planned to enable trainees to gain qualifications in specific areas. The project team training is very practical, directly related to the work being carried out and linked to the qualification the trainees are working towards. Trainers provide strong support for trainees in building portfolios and revising for tests. All trainees have the opportunity to work on an individual basis with the training manager in the training centre which also ensures that any basic skills needs can be addressed.

34. The individual support and practical training lead to high levels of achievement. Trainees talk about the difference the programme has made to their lives, both personally and in terms of their ability to gain a qualification and get a job. Trainees grow in self-esteem. They work hard during the day and they feel a sense of worth. They achieve certificates that they take home with pride. One trainee who had not worked for many years talked about how he is earning his benefit and the difference that has made to his life. Trainees work as a team and support from the staff encourages them to identify and develop team skills. Trainees feel able to share their strengths and weaknesses and support each other. When instructions have to be read, team members work with those who have literacy problems and encourage them to learn to recognise key words.

GOOD PRACTICE

The project team leader uses a tape-recorder during the review sessions so that he does not need to take notes. He writes up the review and discusses his recording with the trainee the next day. The trainee then signs the review sheet. Both the project team leader and the trainee say that they prefer this method because it lets them talk in a more relaxed atmosphere than if notes were being taken.

35. Trainees have regular in-depth reviews either with the project team leader or with the training manager. The reviews are very practical. They focus on progress in skills development, and in working towards the relevant qualification, and include feedback for the trainee on how the practical part of the work is being carried out. Development areas identified on the individual training plan are discussed. Issues relating to more personal areas are also covered. Actions are agreed at each review meeting and trainees recognise the importance of these and work hard to achieve them. The reviews are well written up.

36. Members of staff involved in this area of work are highly competent both occupationally and in the support areas of the work. They are also enthusiastic. The training manager regularly visits project sites and works with the trainees. She has recently achieved her fork-truck and dumper-truck licenses. Trainees speak highly of the staff and feel able to talk to them openly and share their concerns and problems. The positive attitudes of staff and effective methods of training help to

ensure that work is purposeful as well as enabling trainees to progress and develop at their own pace.

37. Job search is undertaken on an individual basis. The training manager identifies suitable job vacancies and discusses them with individual trainees. None of this activity is recorded and there is no formal job-search programme to ensure that all trainees cover all the key areas. Recent development work with TEC has focused on these weaknesses. Trainees receive a lot of extra support but very little of this is on record. This means that there is no overall picture of the programme each trainee has followed and there is no data to analyse in order to determine the extent of extra support given and how effective it has been.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

38. WOTS has a written policy on equal opportunities which is circulated to staff, trainees and employers. The policy meets TEC contractual requirements but it is not comprehensive. It does not, for example, refer to relevant legislation such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The organisation plans to widen the scope of the current policy and to develop more effective means of evaluating its effectiveness. Thirty per cent of staff have recently attended an external equal opportunities training course and they, in turn, are training other members of staff. In the year ending March 2000, 5 per cent of youth trainees and 10 per cent of adult trainees starting training programmes at WOTS were from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with the 3.2 per cent of the local population who come from minority ethnic communities. Trainees with disabilities starting training programmes during the same period comprised 2 per cent of all youth trainees and 18 per cent of all adult trainees. The self-assessment report identified eight strengths and one weakness for this area of provision. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths but awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

A female training manager has recently trained as forklift truck and a dumper-truck driver alongside the other trainees. This has helped to break down the barriers to training in a traditionally male-dominated area of work and has also given the training manager more credibility when working with her, mainly, male trainees.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good provision for the long-term unemployed
- ◆ effective transport arrangements to enable people to train
- ◆ strong links with referral agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities data not fully used
- ◆ complaints not formally recorded

39. Many adult trainees are long-term unemployed and require a lot of support to enable them to gain employment. Staff have a good knowledge of the local job

market and the organisation is quick to respond to changing employment needs within the local community to enable its trainees to take advantage of job opportunities as they arise. Courses are developed and offered to those in need. For example, the organisation has recently re-developed an existing course to enable trainees to achieve a basic forklift truck licence within four weeks and to apply for well-paid jobs. In the care sector, trainees are offered an NVQ housekeeping course at level 1 to give them the opportunity to progress to training in care at higher levels.

40. WOTS has responded to the transport difficulties in rural Oxfordshire by providing minibuses to collect trainees from their homes. Minibuses provide reliable, free transport to and from the WOTS training centre and also to the sites of the various projects in which trainees are involved as part of their training. Without such support many trainees, particularly those in the foundation and care sectors, would not have been able to undertake training.

41. WOTS has strong links with referral agencies such as the Employment Service and probation service. The organisation accepts many trainees who are otherwise difficult to place, accommodating them in safe, supported placements or on appropriate projects. WOTS operates an open-door policy. It is rare for anyone to be turned away.

42. Equal opportunities issues are not always covered adequately during trainees' induction. Some trainees have little or no awareness of the organisations' equal opportunities policy or of the official grievance and complaints procedure. Most trainees, however, know who to approach if they are experiencing difficulties, either in the workplace or at college. The organisation collects data on trainees' gender, ethnicity and disabilities. There is no systematic analysis of the data to provide information for managers or for planning purposes. Changes made recently to the structure of the organisation mean that individuals now have responsibility for aspects of the organisation's work, including the analysis and use of equal opportunities data. Complaints from trainees and employers are taken seriously and dealt with satisfactorily. Complaints are not recorded effectively, which means that it is difficult to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of any actions taken or look at trends.

Trainee support

Grade 3

43. Prospective trainees are referred by the careers service and Employment Service. They also apply directly to WOTS following recommendations from schools and colleges or from previous trainees. The organisation also markets its services directly to employers. All prospective trainees are interviewed by a WOTS training co-ordinator to determine their aptitude for a career in their chosen area. The co-ordinator may also carry out an initial assessment to establish the trainee's ability in communication and numeracy. Each trainee receives an individual induction, carried out either at WOTS or in the workplace. Subcontractors usually conduct their own induction, which involves an

introduction to the training and to the handbooks provided for their trainees. Employers may also provide an induction to the workplace. Each trainee is assigned to a training co-ordinator who is responsible for reviewing their progress. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and they identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective additional support
- ◆ imaginative key skills initial assessment pilot
- ◆ regular key skills workshops

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate arrangements for initial assessment
- ◆ failure to use the outcomes of initial assessment in constructing individual training plans
- ◆ failure to record learning support needs

44. Training co-ordinators visit their trainees in the workplace every eight to 12 weeks. The review focuses on the trainee's progress and a record of the review is given to both the trainee and the employer. On occasions when a barrier to progress is identified, the training co-ordinator works with the trainee and the employer to find a solution to the problem. Solutions have included: a lap-top computer loaned to a trainee who found it difficult to gain access to a computer in the workplace; a uniform supplied to a care trainee at the start of her programme; the arrangement of accommodation for a trainee; and advice on benefits. Trainees have access to their training co-ordinators, outside scheduled review meetings, by telephone or e-mail. There are many examples of support for trainees with particular learning needs, such as dyslexia. Trainees who attend college have access to all the college's learning resources, including learning support facilities and the services of a personal counsellor.

45. WOTS has been experimenting with several initial assessment tests. They are currently piloting a key skills initial assessment test with 10 trainees. If it is considered effective it will replace many of the existing tests. Regular key skills workshops are provided, on an open-access basis, for trainees who have difficulty in achieving their key skills. Trainees bring their NVQ portfolios to the workshop to work with the tutor in identifying links between key skills and occupational activities. Numbers attending the workshops are low at the moment but trainees who take advantage of them are able to integrate evidence of occupational competencies with the evidence required for key skills units and to progress more quickly to the completion of their key skills units.

46. The initial interview is the main vehicle for determining the suitability of trainees' intended programmes and likely support needs. Basic skills initial

assessment tests are used only where the training co-ordinator considers them appropriate. There is some accreditation of prior learning, though there are no agreed procedures for this and details are not formally recorded. The results of any basic skills tests are rarely recorded on the trainees' individual training plan and do not lead to a structured programme of learning support. Where subcontractors carry out their own initial assessment, this is not monitored or reviewed by WOTS. In the case of one subcontractor, all individual training plans are identical. Although the organisation provides a great deal of effective additional support, the support is usually identified informally by the training co-ordinator, assessor or employer and is provided on an individual basis for each trainee. There is little formal recording of additional support needs.

Grade 4

Management of training

47. WOTS has undergone significant changes during the last 18 months. Work had taken place to prepare the organisation for privatisation but this did not happen and the training organisation remains within the district council. A new management structure has recently been agreed. There is 10 staff at the training centre. There is a programme manager who is responsible to the chief executive of the district council, three training managers, three training co-ordinators and one project team leader who provide the day-to-day training, and a small administrative support team. The programme manager holds formal monthly meetings and a weekly team briefing. There are policies and procedures to guide day-to-day operations. Most staff possess appropriate occupational experience and qualifications. Trainers are all qualified assessors and internal verifiers or are working towards assessor qualifications. Staff have new job descriptions that accord with the new structure of the organisation. There is an annual staff appraisal system which is currently under review. The training organisation uses subcontractors to provide most of the training and assessment for which it is responsible. These include local colleges, training providers and companies. WOTS achieved the Investors in People Standard and the ISO 9002 quality standard in 1999. The self-assessment report for this area of work included many strengths which were no more than normal practice or which could not be validated. Inspectors agreed with both the weaknesses identified. The self-assessment report failed to give adequate consideration to some of the wider functions of management of training, including its impact on trainees' experience. Several significant weaknesses were not identified in the report and inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ staff fully involved in organisational development
- ◆ good support for staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate agreements with subcontractors
- ◆ poor management of subcontractors and employers
- ◆ weak programme management
- ◆ unreliable management information

48. WOTS has been through a period of uncertainty over its future. However, the open and relaxed style of the programme manager has meant that staff have been informed about developments as they happened and have been involved in regular discussions. Members of staff have a broad understanding of their role and the direction of the organisation. They support the new structure and have a positive attitude to their work with trainees. Staff are highly motivated and well supported by the organisation. Trainers are provided with mobile telephones which are useful when visiting trainees in rural locations, and when working unsocial hours. They are also provided with other up-to-date equipment including tape-recorders to tape progress review meetings with trainees. Staff development is given a high priority. Recent activities include the opportunity to gain learning and development qualifications, forklift truck driver training and key skills practitioner training.

49. Contracts and agreements with subcontractors and employers are inadequate. There is not enough explicit reference to WOTS requirements for training and assessment. The responsibilities of the contractor are not clearly stated. Contracts and agreements are mainly concerned with financial arrangements. They say little about how trainees will be protected, what training they can expect from their employer and how training will be monitored. The training provider does not routinely ask for employers, subcontractors or work-based assessors' curricula vitae, and it does not keep a record of the qualifications and competencies of people working with its trainees.

50. Training managers and training co-ordinators are responsible for the work of subcontractors and employers but they do not exercise this role with any confidence or effectiveness. Although the organisation has procedures for examining the suitability of new employers and subcontractors, it has no formal performance criteria against which to judge their subsequent effectiveness as trainers and assessors. An annual evaluation and monitoring scheme for subcontractors and employers has just been introduced.

51. The writing of a business plan for WOTS has been delayed because of the recent organisational uncertainty, a new staff appraisal system has yet to be introduced and programme management procedures have yet to be developed fully. Staff are aware of funding contracts but they are not adequately briefed about the managerial aspects of their roles. They do not have an adequate grasp of management responsibilities, and of what is required in the way of programme planning and quality assurance. A few staff lack recent occupational experience and there are no reliable mechanisms for monitoring occupational competencies and ensuring these are kept up to date.

52. The organisation collects and analyses management data and uses it to influence some of its decisions. However, the accuracy of the data cannot be guaranteed. It is difficult, for example, to obtain accurate data about trainees' achievements and the numbers of trainees on the various programmes.

Quality assurance

Grade 5

53. As a result of a mock inspection by the TEC and the production of its self-assessment report, the organisation has developed an action plan which was last updated at the beginning of May 2000. Quality issues are discussed if it is felt appropriate at the weekly and monthly meetings of staff. There are also two quality circles, based on occupational areas, at meetings of which ideas for quality improvement can be put forward. The provider complies with TEC contract requirements. The quality documentation for ISO 9002 contains both a quality manual and a procedures manual. A number of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. Inspectors found substantial additional weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ full commitment of staff to improving the quality of provision

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic arrangements for quality assurance
- ◆ no formal analysis of feedback from trainers and those involved in training
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of work provided by subcontractors
- ◆ no sharing of good practice

54. Staff work in teams, providing mutual support and are committed to providing a quality service for their trainees. When problems are identified, they are dealt with effectively by a member of staff or by the team, on an individual basis. The staff were involved in the production of the self-assessment report and the resulting action plan.

55. The procedures contained within the ISO 9002 quality manual are not comprehensive, are often not appropriate to the circumstances and do not cover all the activities related to training. There are no procedures for monitoring the quality of subcontractors' work or for dealing with unsatisfactory performance on the part of a subcontractor. The organisation does not require its subcontractors to operate under any quality assurance arrangements.

56. Feedback is collected from trainees after they have left the programme. Any improvements made as a result of the feedback, therefore, do not benefit those trainees. The proportion of trainees and employers returning their evaluation forms

is low. Recent attempts to reward trainees for returning their forms has made little difference. There are no formal arrangements for analysing the feedback in order to identify trends or to effect improvements.

57. The activities of most subcontractors are reviewed once a year at a meeting in which past and future programmes and achievements are discussed. There is little observation of these activities by WOTS staff and there are no criteria against which the performance of subcontractors can be measured. Some subcontractors send copies of some of their external verification reports to WOTS, others do not. They are not required to submit internal verification reports. WOTS has files on the subcontractors but these are not kept up to date and often contain little or no information on the processes of assessment and verification and few records of review meetings. In the file of one subcontractor, who delivers a large NVQ programme, information on staff had not been updated to include the trainer and assessor units they had achieved and there was no evidence that any reviews had taken place. WOTS relies on the subcontractor to provide information and would not necessarily know if there were any issues affecting the quality of the service to trainees.

58. The lack of systematic quality assurance arrangements and the failure to monitor the work of subcontractors mean that the quality of training varies. In the occupational areas of care, administration, customer service, and training and development, there is no record of internal verifiers and/or assessors' occupational competencies in their curricula vitae. In accounts, internal verification works satisfactorily, but in some care provision, it is not planned effectively and in administration, training and development and some customer care provision, it is not carried out until the end of the programme. Internal verification for that part of the care programme for which WOTS is directly responsible is good. Training and assessment on some programmes fall below a satisfactory standard. However, there are also examples of good practice which could be applied successfully to other programmes in order to improve the quality of training. At present the organisation has no system for identifying and disseminating this good practice throughout the subcontracted provision.

59. The most recent version of the action plan arising from self-assessment is not sufficiently comprehensive and target dates for the completion of the listed actions have not been updated to take account of revisions to the original draft of the plan.