



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 1999

REINSPECTION JUNE 2000

## The JGA Group



## SUMMARY

The JGA Group offers a career restructuring and job-search programme for unemployed older managers. The training programme is satisfactory. Over half of its trainees obtain jobs. The programme has some innovative and exciting features, and uses good work placements. Its trainees' handbook and completion of National Records of Achievement are good, as is the support pack for employers. But at the time of the first inspection, the planning and recording of trainees' progress was poor, with no individual training plans. By the time of reinspection, trainees' progress was well planned and reviewed although recording of progress was still patchy. Individual training plans are now well used. Management of training in work placements lacks rigour. Internal verification procedures were underdeveloped at the time of the first inspection, and some TEC contractual requirements were not being met. By the time of the reinspection, the verification problem for these trainees had been resolved. The TEC contract was well managed. Issues relating to equal opportunities are regularly discussed but there is little active promotion of equal opportunities.

**As a result of the reinspection of The JGA Group, the original published report text for trainee support and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes references to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	2
Quality assurance	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high number of jobs achieved
- ◆ exceptional work placements
- ◆ good networking opportunities
- ◆ well-produced handbook for trainees
- ◆ innovative use of National Record of Achievement



- ◆ detailed support pack for employers
- ◆ challenging targets set for staff

#### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ poor recording systems
- ◆ some unclear learning outcomes
- ◆ no management of training in work placements
- ◆ little off-the-job training
- ◆ little promotion of equal opportunities



## INTRODUCTION

1. The JGA Group (JGA) is a private training provider, offering a programme called 'Executive Challenge' for unemployed managers, professionals and graduates to help them re-enter employment. It is provided as an adult work-based learning scheme. The provider has a contract with the South London Training and Enterprise Council and Business Link (SOLOTEC), but takes referrals from job centres throughout the Greater London area and beyond. JGA operates from two centres, one in Ickenham, the other in Clapham. It offers placements with employers throughout the Greater London area. Most of these are in small and medium-sized enterprises, public or voluntary sectors. JGA has six staff, including the owner/manager. JGA uses consultants and associates to help to deliver the training programmes. At the time of reinspection, there were 61 trainees on the programme, an increase of 25 per cent on the numbers at the time of the first inspection. It also offers commercially funded training, and has run European Social Fund (ESF) programmes, although there were none running at the time of inspection. JGA registered as an accredited centre for delivering NVQs three months before the first inspection, but by the time of the reinspection, was not offering NVQs to trainees on this programme.

2. The local unemployment rate for the London region was 5.2 per cent in November 1999, compared with 4.3 per cent for England. At the time of the last census (1991), 11.8 per cent of the population in the SOLOTEC area was from a minority ethnic group. The largest minority group was black Caribbean, accounting for 3.4 per cent of the local population.



## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. JGA's self-assessment report for the first inspection was written with support from two separate TECs, including a two-day intensive training course offered by SOLOTEC. All of the provider's staff and associates were involved in the production of the report. The report gave clear and concise judgements about the 'Executive Challenge' programme, but listed only a small number of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors at the first inspection agreed with three grades proposed by the group but awarded lower grades for trainee support and quality assurance. The organisation prepared a second self-assessment report before the reinspection. It built on the action plan, which the organisation had put in place after the first inspection. Again, it gave clear and concise judgements, and realistic grades, but it did not offer new strengths for one of the areas being reinspected, and identified no weaknesses for either of the areas.

4. For the first inspection, two inspectors spent a total of seven days based at JGA's premises in Ickenham in April 1999. They observed two workshops, one in Ickenham and one in Croydon, and interviewed 29 trainees, seven work-placement providers, and four members of JGA's staff. They also examined records and other documents. For the reinspection, in June 2000, two inspectors spent six days based with the provider. They observed three workshops, one in Ickenham and two in Clapham, and five trainees' reviews. They interviewed 17 trainees, two work-placement providers, and four members of staff. They also examined trainees' files, procedures manuals, trainees' handbooks, and other documents.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Management & professional

**Grade 3**

5. The programme's purpose is to assist experienced managers, professionals, or mature graduates in gaining suitable employment after a period of unemployment. It is aimed specifically at older trainees. Few trainees have been under 40 years of age. The average age is over 50 years. The oldest participant, who was 63, succeeded in finding a job while on the programme. The programme is based upon a job-search activity, supported by a period of time at a work placement. Seventeen of the 48 trainees are in placements with local employers or voluntary organisations, mostly undertaking project-based assignments. The remaining trainees are engaged in job-search initiatives, but some are awaiting or have completed a project in a placement. A small number of trainees have declined a placement. Eight trainees are currently undertaking a basic employability programme. All trainees work towards four objectives, three of which are mandatory. These are the production or updating of a curriculum vitae, development of a National Record of Achievement, and participation in a simulated interview. The fourth objective is set individually. This is usually either



achievement of a work placement, or pursuit of free psychometric testing from a major provider, or pursuit of free job-search advice from one of the big management consultancies.

6. All trainees are required to attend pre-arranged workshops, initially on a twice-weekly basis, reducing to fortnightly attendance after the second month. Subjects covered during the workshops include presentational skills, consultancy techniques, networking, job search and counselling. When trainees are not attending workshops or work placements, they are expected to spend their time at home or elsewhere, looking for employment and networking. They are asked to complete diary sheets to demonstrate that this is what they have been doing. However, JGA does not check the sheets, and some are incomplete.

7. Trainees have recently been offered the opportunity to undertake NVQ level 2 in information technology, provided their work placement offers appropriate opportunities for collecting evidence. The assessors (with one exception) are not yet qualified. Most are working towards their assessor and verifier qualification units. The training programme is marketed through the job centre, although some of the job centre staff have a limited knowledge and understanding of the programme. Some trainees travel a considerable distance to be able to attend the programme. Others find out about it through word of mouth. There are trainees based in Plymouth, Newbury and Chippenham, as well as south and west London.

8. A new group of trainees starts around every 10 weeks. Once each group of trainees has completed the first eight weeks of the programme, the fortnightly continuation workshops are held for all trainees still on programme. The length of time trainees stay is usually between 16 and 26 weeks. Extensions beyond 26 weeks require the prior approval of the TEC. JGA listed a number of strengths and weaknesses in its self-assessment report, and inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good standard of work placements
- ◆ high level of job outcomes
- ◆ well-produced and detailed trainee handbook
- ◆ good use of the National Record of Achievement

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some unclear learning outcomes
- ◆ little off-the-job training
- ◆ little access to qualifications
- ◆ few resources for workshops and job search



9. JGA has secured work placements with employers in the local area, which offer the opportunity for trainees to conduct, and take responsibility for, a discrete management project. Employers are enthusiastic about the programme, and the opportunity to assess potential job applicants. Most of the job outcomes are directly linked to the work placement the trainee has undertaken. Several employers offer on-the-job training, either as an integral part of their placement activity, or after hours. Some employers have themselves participated in the programme. JGA spends considerable time and effort matching trainees and work placements. Over the past three years, it has averaged a job outcome rate of 61 per cent, based upon the number of jobs achieved compared with the total number of leavers. A further outcome of the programme is the raising of trainees' motivation towards job search and this results in an additional smaller number of trainees obtaining jobs after the 13-week (now 16-week) TEC post-course payment period. These are not included in the recognised rate, which for the previous contract year was 50 per cent, although job outcomes after the end of the contract year have been included in this figure. Trainees are issued at the outset of their programme with a detailed, good-quality handbook. It outlines the programme and gives additional help and advice. The manual is used at induction, in workshops and at work placements. Its contents include copies of the relevant policy statements, and supports the detailed production and revision of trainees' curricula vitae. Trainees have found the production of their National Record of Achievement difficult, but have found the process useful in retrospect.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*As a key target, JGA encourages trainees to develop a National Record of Achievement portfolio. This is a comprehensive and detailed account of the trainees' history, qualifications, training undertaken, previous occupations, and, in particular, their achievements. Trainees find the process of reflecting on their career, and identifying and recording the formal and informal learning which has taken place, useful for interview preparation. Once prepared by the trainee, the document is examined and, where necessary, moderated, before being signed off. When the record reaches the required standard, an accredited certificate is awarded.*

10. There is a lack of clarity about some of the learning outcomes from the programme. There are few opportunities for trainees to develop their skills before their work placements start. Several trainees express disappointment at not being able to have more opportunities to develop their management skills. Most trainees find the workshop content to be at too low a level, but value the interaction with fellow participants and group discussions. The aim of the programme (to achieve employment through work placements to fit existing skills levels) is not clearly understood by many trainees, who expect their skills to be further developed.

11. There is little off-the-job training. Workshops focus primarily on job-search processes, and on the thorough and detailed recording of skills already developed. Trainees' learning is not assessed, and trainees are unable to achieve recognition for their management competencies, either through training or through accreditation of prior learning. Some work towards an NVQ in information technology at level 2, but JGA has no facilities for this so trainees can only do it if there happens to be appropriate support and facilities at their work placement. Workshops are delivered in rooms with poor acoustics, which restricts the way trainees can work. Teaching aids are adequate, but there is no use of computer-based presentational methods, and little reference to the Internet as a source of information. Trainees are expected to conduct their job-search activities from home. They can use a computer linked to the Internet when they come into the office, and closed circuit television is used to develop trainees' interview and presentational skills.



## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 3**

12. The equal opportunities policy is updated regularly and is promoted to all trainees and placement providers. The equal opportunities manager monitors trainees by gender, ethnicity and disability, but does not monitor applicants who do not actually enrol, or enquirers who do not apply. TEC targets for members of minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities are met. Targets for women have been set for the first time in the current contract year. JGA recruits primarily from job centres, which tend to have few older women managers available for referral. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic groups overall mirrors the local population, although the mix between the groups is different. There are no staff from minority ethnic groups. Trainees are aware of the company's complaints procedure. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses to those cited in the self-assessment report, and awarded the same grade.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ active promotion of images of older trainees
- ◆ successful outcomes for targeted groups
- ◆ full integration of trainees on prevocational training programme
- ◆ regular discussion of equal opportunities issues in staff meetings

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no active recruitment of female trainees
- ◆ little active promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ difficult access to JGA's premises

13. JGA is acutely aware of age discrimination against its trainees, and promotes positive images of older managers at every opportunity. Job outcomes for women, people with disabilities, and people from minority ethnic groups are consistently better than those for the majority of trainees. Trainees on the prevocational training programme have exactly the same experience as mainstream trainees. Issues relating to equal opportunities are discussed at staff meetings regularly.

14. There is little active promotion of equal opportunities. JGA has no strategy to identify ways of attracting more women to the programme, or to identify any barriers to women joining the programme. Trainees and employers each receive a copy of the equal opportunities statement. Employers are told that there will be checks to ensure that they follow equal opportunities practices, but this is not enforced. Illustrations in the training materials are almost exclusively of white male managers. Trainees use stereotypical descriptions of job roles in the workplace, although they are being encouraged to challenge ageist attitudes. There





has been no recent staff training on equal opportunities. There is no wheelchair access to JGA's premises, although workshop sessions are run at hired venues, which do have access to wheelchairs.

## Grade 2

### Trainee support

15. The managing director oversees the co-ordination of training and implementation of many of the support arrangements. She and her staff supervise trainees closely from initial contact through to course completion. Most trainees come from local job centres, and all are normally interviewed within a week of initial contact. All the trainees have professional backgrounds, middle/senior management experience, or are mature graduates. Most have become unemployed following redundancy or the closure of their own personal business enterprises. Prospective trainees read about the programme through leaflets in their local job centres, libraries, leisure centres and other public places, or through personal recommendation. After contacting the JGA office all prospective trainees receive an application form with full details about the programme. Those applicants who are eligible for TEC funding under the work-based learning for adults programme, and meet JGA's criteria, attend for a structured interview and induction to the programme. Trainees have to commit to undertaking the programme on a full-time basis, so that unsupervised job-search activities are carried out in a comprehensive way.

At the first inspection, the following weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ no individual training plans
- ◆ no formal recorded reviews
- ◆ no evidence of extra support provided for trainees with additional needs
- ◆ no travel expenses provided for trainees

16. Precise action has been taken to address these issues, as set out in a post-inspection action plan. During the past year JGA has reviewed its procedures for producing individual training plans and formal reviews. The TEC performance and claims programme provided a basis for an extended individual training plan, capturing more personal information, including trainees' prior experiences and career aspirations. All new trainees are aware of the details and aim of their own individual training plan. It provides a useful mechanism for introducing trainees to the different requirements of the programme, but there is still a need to update some of these individual training records as milestones are achieved. Formal recorded reviews have been taking place since the first inspection, with new carbon-copied paper records filed in each trainee's file. The trainee also receives a copy at the time of the review or soon after. Travel expenses are paid in accordance with all TEC requirements, and agreements have been reached between the TEC and JGA to enable additional support to be funded where this is appropriate. The self-assessment report identified two strengths that inspectors agreed with. The report did not identify any new weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a

higher grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective recruitment into programme
- ◆ good use of milestones
- ◆ flexible provision to meet additional needs
- ◆ excellent mentoring provides individual support
- ◆ good use of current and past trainees' expertise

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*An excellent link has been made between Executive Challenge and an executive human resource company in the City. When trainees have achieved the first two milestones of an updated curriculum vitae and completed the National Record of Achievement, they are encouraged to attend a free monthly workshop which provides specialist insight into the latest job market trends.*

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient project placements
- ◆ insufficiently thorough review process

16. The programme is effectively publicised. The promotional leaflet is well written, clear and detailed, and produced in a style appropriate to the client group it wishes to attract. Each trainee undergoes a thorough interview, and as part of the induction process, sits a psychometric test approved by the TEC to determine their probable levels of motivation. Part of the purpose in carrying out initial assessment is to enable trainees to review their past experiences and successes with an open mind. Trainees are then encouraged to record those points most appropriate to the chosen occupation in which they are seeking employment on their individual training plan in preparation for their work on their National Record of Achievement.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*A trainee from a highly specialised scientific background had been approved for extension to the programme while he continued to pursue the options open to him. The report produced by this trainee gave some useful starting points for a way forward into an education-related career. When the organisation applies for an extension for a trainee, it makes a well-argued case that shows how the trainee will benefit.*

17. Integral to the design of the programme is the way that trainees are taken logically through a set of pre-determined milestones of achievement. The four main milestones include a personal development portfolio leading to a National Record of Achievement, an up-to-date, professional curriculum vitae, a simulated job-interview at management level in an external company, and a work report. This report covers their job-search activities, or market research in their preferred industry sector, or a business plan for those contemplating self-employment. The milestones help to provide trainees with a basis for establishing routines, particularly following sometimes lengthy periods of unemployment. These separate milestones flow logically from each other, and trainees see them quickly forming a dedicated and useful career toolkit. Where trainees require help in choosing the milestones personal advisers offer suitable guidance. Tutors offer helpful advice on writing the job-search reports, which provide a comprehensive examination of the occupational sector trainees are aiming for. Trainees complete diaries providing details of the time they have spent at home and networking, to provide the basis for these reports. They are generally precise, and well organised, with much valid and up to date analysis.

18. The programme is explicitly promoted as a 16-week course, with trainees encouraged to gain a good job from the moment they enrol. In many cases trainees



have their initial length of programme extended to a further period of 10 weeks or more. This is particularly useful for those trainees who need more support with job-seeking skills.

19. Personal advisers encourage and mentor all the trainees on the programme. The relationships formed are professional. Personal advisers give trainees their home addresses, phone numbers and e-mail contacts so that they can remain in close contact for support. A number of trainees highlighted this part of the programme as particularly valuable.

20. Workshop tutors are able to make good use of the considerable range of expertise within the group of trainees. The sessions are designed to maximise trainees' participation and contribution, and tutors use trainees' experience and willingness to help each other. A strong relationship is forged between personal advisers and the trainees, and when trainees secure jobs, they are often willing to assist on the 'Executive Challenge' programme by hosting simulation interviews or attending as guest speakers on the programme. Collaborative links with past trainees are gaining momentum as the programme continues, with an 'alumni' approach adopted by management. Some ex-trainees have been in a position to offer project placements to new trainees on the programme.

21. 'Executive Challenge' is designed to introduce all trainees to a new working environment with a suitable company of their chosen interest. At the time of reinspection nine trainees were on placement, of whom two were working on projects within JGA. All trainees were carrying out worthwhile business-related projects of benefit to the company and also to them individually. The available pool of placements, however, is too small. Competition for work-experience links within the inner-city urban area covered by 'Executive Challenge' is becoming increasingly difficult. New trainees who have joined the programme within the last month are aware that the acquisition of placements may be difficult. One trainee with a sales and recruitment background is working for JGA gaining new placements as part of his project. He is already having some success. An ex-trainee, now working for a local Business Link, has also provided some useful new contacts.

22. Improvements to the review process continue, with regular reviews now normal practice. When these occur they are recorded on new forms, designed to involve trainees and project-placement staff in the review. Although JGA attempts to carry out review on a more frequent basis than that required by the TEC, some reviews have not taken place according to the schedule set out in the individual training plan. Others have not been recorded on trainees' files, even though they have taken place. Some employers have not been involved in the reviews while a trainee is on placement with them. An employer where a trainee had been placed for over two months had not been involved in any of the reviews, and believed that he would sign a review form at the end of the placement. For practical reasons during the initial part of the programme, many of the reviews are carried out on the day trainees attend for their workshop. The tight timing of this means that the personal adviser records the agreed action quickly, with trainees signing off the



form as a matter of routine.

### Grade 3

#### Management of training

23. JGA previously held contracts with two TECs but this has now been reduced to one. Training has expanded considerably in recent years. It also has 15 self-employed associates to undertake specific tasks. It has recently recruited additional assessors for the introduction of NVQs. Many staff are new, some from JGA's own scheme. It also has four unemployed adult trainees undertaking projects within JGA. A small administrative section supports the training and assessment staff. Staff are occupationally qualified and experienced. JGA's policies, procedures, systems and documents are relatively new. It is making demonstrable progress in improving the management of training. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses to those identified in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given by JGA.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*JGA identifies employers who might offer suitable work placement opportunities for trainees. New employers are given a comprehensive information pack, which includes detailed guidance about terms and conditions, induction, study and training, mentoring and evaluation of the trainee. It also gives examples of the previous projects which have been successfully undertaken, to show the kind of opportunity JGA is looking for. Employers are pleased to have such clarity about what they are being asked for, and the extent of their commitment if they decide to offer a placement.*

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ detailed guidance for work-placement providers
- ◆ strong commitment of staff to company's objectives
- ◆ challenging targets set, monitored and met
- ◆ good staff training and development opportunities

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no management of training in the workplace
- ◆ no structured staff appraisal system
- ◆ incomplete trainee documentation
- ◆ underdeveloped management-information system

24. JGA has a good-quality guidance pack for work placement providers. It includes a well-presented and detailed guide to the programme, and expectations of work placement providers. Employers welcome the clarity about the programme, and use the pack for reference throughout the placement. Staff respond to the charismatic leadership of the managing director and have a strong commitment to helping trainees to achieve employment. Staff and associate tutors regularly telephone trainees to check their progress and offer encouragement. Staff have challenging targets to meet. Targets are monitored weekly and reported on monthly. The group regularly exceeds its overall TEC targets. JGA tracks the progress of individual trainees on a wall-chart. Managers and staff are highly qualified, and are keen to further their personal development. The main focus of staff training and development activities is the achievement of the assessor and internal verifier awards.



25. Training in work placements is not managed by JGA. Training and learning opportunities provided by the employer are incidental to the programme offered by JGA. This training is not monitored or evaluated, except by the trainee. There is no staff appraisal system, and no structure for monitoring or improving the performance of associates, except in their workshop delivery. Quarterly meetings are held to update associates on management issues, but they are not required to attend. Trainees' files are incomplete. There is no method for consolidating information into one overall record for each trainee. Trainees do not have copies of the record of discussions with or about them and there is no recorded action-planning. The financial-information system meets the TEC's requirements. It is difficult for staff to interrogate JGA's management-information system for taking decisions.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

26. In the year since the first inspection, the organisation has been audited by both the TEC and the Government Office. It is an Investor in People. It now complies with the requirements of the TEC and its awarding body. The organisation has devoted considerable effort to improving the reliability of its recording processes, and improvements have been made. There is a procedures manual which is regularly updated, and contains detailed descriptions of the course provision. Staff are familiar with the contents of the manual. Trainees are regularly asked for their feedback on individual workshops.

At the first inspection, the following weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ some non-conformity with the TEC contract
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification procedures

27. Both of these weaknesses had been addressed by the time of the reinspection. The TEC has worked closely with the organisation to find systems which are appropriate to this unusual programme, and which are able to cater for out-of-area trainees. The NVQ centre is now fully developed, but was not inspected at this time. As NVQs are no longer offered to trainees on this programme, the weakness related to internal verification is no longer a problem. The self-assessment report offered no new strengths and weaknesses, but inspectors found one significant strength and one equally balanced weakness. They awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ continuous improvement of training programme

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped system for monitoring trainees' progress



28. The programme is continuously being improved by managers and staff. The management of the whole programme has been revised since the first inspection. The self-assessment and action planning processes are providing a mechanism to monitor and evaluate the programme as a whole. Since the first inspection, trainees are offered a wider variety of milestones to work towards. Individual training plans are used to identify trainees' individual aspirations, targets and learning needs. Staff are constantly evaluating their own performance informally, and innovations in the way the programme is offered, or in the way trainees' progress is recorded, are frequently tried out. Although staff are familiar with the trainees' progress and any problems from their frequent informal contacts, there is now an emphasis on the importance of recording contacts and comments as they occur.

29. Trainees' views on individual workshops are collected routinely, and action is taken if there are unfavourable responses. However, trainees' views on the programme as a whole are not sought until they complete the programme or leave without completing. The success rate of the programme has been increasing over the last three years. At the time of reinspection, 59 per cent of trainees who have left the programme had been successful in finding work.

30. There have been various attempts to devise systems for easy visual monitoring of trainees' progress. However, no one system has yet been found to be fully satisfactory. Because many of the trainees' files' front sheets are incomplete, there is no visual warning when trainees are slipping behind their projected dates for completing milestones. It is possible for trainees to be on the programme for several months without any milestones being completed. The claims system provides a method for monitoring training milestones for some trainees, but those who are not classified as having basic employability needs to be addressed, will not be spotted by this method. Similarly, there is no system to identify when trainees' reviews have slipped, so the review system cannot be relied on to pick up trainees whose progress is slower than expected.