



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 2000

Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training Group

SUMMARY

Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training provides satisfactory training in electrical installation for modern apprentices. The organisation maintains good links with local employers. Work placements are good. They enable trainees to develop a wide range of skills. Trainees receive good personal support. Most trainees obtain an NVQ at level 2 but some make slow progress towards achieving this. Assessment and verification procedures are good. Many administrative procedures, however, have not been formulated fully. Reviews of trainees' progress carried out in the workplace and the college respectively are not co-ordinated. Equality of opportunity is not promoted effectively. Trainees have a poor understanding of equal opportunities. Subcontractors are not set targets relating to the quality of training they have to provide. Quality assurance processes are inadequate. The self-assessment process is insufficiently rigorous and does not lead to the planning of continuous improvement.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of experience in work placements
- ◆ good personal support for trainees
- ◆ close links with employers
- ◆ effective management of change
- ◆ trainees' achievement rates at NVQ level 2
- ◆ good assessment and internal verification processes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of co-ordination and rigour in the process for reviewing trainees' progress
- ◆ poor promotion of equality of opportunity
- ◆ lack of co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate service level agreements
- ◆ lack of rigour in the self-assessment process
- ◆ inadequate quality assurance process

INTRODUCTION

1. Devon and Cornwall Electrical Training Group (DCET) was set up by electrical contractors in the West Country in 1995 to provide apprenticeship training under contracts with the Devon and Cornwall Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), usually known as PROSPER. The organisation became an independent training provider in April 2000 and has developed its own procedures and practices. The group consists of 65 employer members and has 107 employed status trainees with modern apprentices working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems. The administrative base is in Exeter. The organisation works with local careers offices, schools and employers in recruitment, selection and placement procedures. It also undertakes monitoring and reviews of apprentices throughout their training. It achieved the Investors in People Standard in March 2000 and is a preferred supplier to the TEC. Off-the-job training is delivered through local further education colleges in Exeter, Tiverton, Barnstaple, Plymouth, St. Austell and Camborne. The company is developing its own training centre to undertake some of this work, with the aim of bringing flexibility and stability to training in a period of substantial change. The company has gained awarding-body approval to provide assessment for qualifications, independent of the subcontractors currently being used.

2. Training in electrical installation has undergone considerable change during the last decade and the company has apprentices following four different versions of the industry scheme. One scheme allowed all assessment to take place in a simulated, rather than real, workplace. In 1993, this scheme was revised and trainees were required to carry out work-based assignments and work towards an NVQ at level 3. In 1999, the industry lead body for this occupational area established requisite standards and DCET developed its own training programme to enable trainees to attain these. Towards the end of 1999, changes were made to the modern apprenticeship framework and modern apprentices are now required to achieve an NVQ at level 2. Graded electricians must have a registration card. To gain full registration, trainees have to complete the modern apprenticeship framework and succeed in the industry-devised skills test or its approved equivalent. Most trainees are keen to gain full registration. Within the industry, electricians who are registered can have advantageous rates of pay and benefits within the context of industrial relations.

3. The two counties of Devon and Cornwall are predominantly rural with a long coastal perimeter of 800 kilometres and a population of just over 1.5 million with a density of 151 people per square kilometre. Less than 1 per cent of businesses employ over 200 employees and 70 per cent are very small units employing fewer than five staff. Construction activity accounts for 12 per cent of all business in Devon and Cornwall compared with 77 per cent for service industries, which are mostly related to tourism. Manufacturing businesses are suffering from skill shortages particularly in engineering. The unemployment rate in the area ranges from 2.5 per cent in Devon to 4.1 per cent in Cornwall, compared with a national



average of 3.8 per cent. Average earnings are 19 per cent below national averages. Fifty-six per cent of the workforce are men and no change has been recorded in occupational trends between men and women during the last decade. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grades C and above in Devon was 48.4 per cent and in Cornwall is 51.6 per cent, which are both slightly above the national average of 47.9 per cent. Most newly recruited electrical installation trainees are required to have at least three passes in GCSE subjects at grade C or above. One trainee is from a minority ethnic group and none are women. The proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in the region is less than 1 per cent. Across the area, 77 per cent of female students and 68 per cent of male students stay on in full-time education after completing compulsory schooling.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. When writing the self-assessment report, staff did not necessarily follow the guidance given in *Raising the Standard*. The TEC had little involvement with the development of the report. Instead of giving one grade for the occupational area, staff gave three separate grades for the components within it. Judgements were supported by appropriate evidence. The self-assessment report was supplemented by an action plan for rectifying weaknesses. With one exception, inspectors awarded lower grades than those given in the self-assessment report.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days with DCET during May 2000. Three directors met with inspectors and all staff were interviewed formally. Inspectors also held many informal conversations with staff as they travelled with them to work placements. Inspectors visited five colleges of further education, meeting 43 trainees and several members of teaching staff. They visited 22 trainees in 17 workplaces and had discussions with 19 supervisors. Inspectors looked at a range of documents, including files on trainees, records of assessment and internal verification, trainees' portfolios, records of meetings, and files of correspondence.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

6. The variety of programmes being followed reflects the numerous changes that have been introduced over the last five years in the occupational area. The current NVQ at level 3 started in February 1999 while the corresponding NVQ at level 2 was only accredited in Autumn 1999 and did not become part of the modern apprenticeship framework until January 2000. Trainees are involved in the design, commissioning and maintenance of all forms of electrical installation and most attend their local college for one day a week to gain basic knowledge. The remainder of their time is spent in the workplace. Employers using the services of DCET include large national electrical contractors, local medium-sized companies, and sole traders. Accredited assessors carry out continuous assessment at college and they assess the trainees under simulated workplace conditions. Increasingly, trainees collect evidence of their work-based competencies to meet the criteria of recently introduced awards. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified other weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

Table 1 indicates the numbers of modern apprentices being trained in electrical installation

Level	Award Title	Number of apprentices
NVQ 2	Installing electrical systems equipment	26
NVQ 3	Installing and commissioning electrical systems and equipment	41
NVQ 2 (new)	Installing electrotechnical systems	1
NVQ 3 (new)	Installing and commissioning electrotechnical systems and equipment	39

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements for trainees
- ◆ well-developed off-the-job training schemes
- ◆ trainees' good achievement rates for NVQs at level 2
- ◆ good use of diaries for recording evidence of trainees' work-based achievements
- ◆ good monitoring of health and safety practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some trainees' slow progress towards achievement of NVQs at level 3
- ◆ employers' poor understanding of NVQ requirements
- ◆ no routine testing of trainees' colour perception
- ◆ inflexible start times for training

7. Most trainees have placements that provide them with a varied work experience and good opportunities to develop a broad range of skills. Most employers help and support the trainees. They are responsive to their training needs and help them to gain confidence quickly and become useful members of a team. When trainees have a work placement that does not afford them the opportunity to develop a particular skill, they are moved temporarily to another work placement in order that they may demonstrate competency in all the skills they need in order to obtain their NVQ. Trainees are given responsibilities at work to complete tasks on their own and are well supervised. Many employers are not aware of the activities trainees undertake at college and do not provide complementary experiences for trainees are at work. There is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Some trainees make slow progress towards achieving their qualification. During their progress reviews, trainees do not engage in short-term action planning to accelerate their progress if they are falling behind in their work. Between 1994 and 1997, the trainees' average achievement rate for NVQ level 2 was 86 per cent. Of those who commenced training in 1998, 27 per cent have already achieved the award. Four-fifths of those who started training last year

are still on the programme. Half of those who began their training during 1994 and 1995 have achieved NVQs at level 3 but none of those who started later has completed the programme yet. There is a lack of flexibility in the way programmes are arranged. Normally, trainees can only begin their programmes at the start of the academic year. Some trainees who join at other times find it hard to catch up on the work they have missed.

8. Training provided by most subcontracted colleges is effectively planned. Standards are clearly specified and trainees have good learning opportunities. Many of the trainees' teachers at college are not aware of what the trainees are doing in the workplace. They do not help trainees to identify opportunities in the workplace for gathering evidence of their acquisition of work-based skills. In general, college resources are good and used effectively to help the trainees. In one college, however, equipment is old and does not meet current industrial standards. Workshops are cluttered. Trainees cannot work continuously on their portfolios. They only have access to their portfolios during their day at college. Key skills training is an integral part of the trainees' programme. Trainees working towards NVQs at level 3 make good use of diaries for recording the tasks they have carried out in the workplace. Many portfolios contain authenticated photographic evidence of work trainees have completed. On all programmes, trainees are made aware of the importance of health and safety. Employers are well versed in health and safety matters. Trainees are asked questions about their colour perception before beginning training, but no medical validation of this is sought.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

9. The organisation has recently reviewed its policy and declares itself to be an equal opportunities employer. A policy statement applies to staff and trainees. It lists examples of behaviour that the organisation will not tolerate. The policy statement is shared with trainees at induction but their understanding of it is not strengthened during their progress reviews. There are written procedures on how to deal with a range of situations relating to the upholding of equality of opportunity. The self-assessment report stated one strength and one weakness. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses the organisation had not identified. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ fair selection, testing and assessment for all applicants
- ◆ effective arrangements to ensure prompt response to trainees' complaints

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no effective action to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ no formal procedures for dealing with complaints and harassment
- ◆ no monitoring or review of subcontractors and employers' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ stereotypical images of employees in the industry
- ◆ no training for staff on equal opportunities

10. Applications are received from potential trainees through careers advisers or directly from those being considered for recruitment by employers. The company invites all applicants to attend for aptitude testing and the results of this are fed back promptly to them. All applicants are treated fairly. Very few applications are received from women or from those in minority ethnic groups. Enquiries about applicants' medical history are sensitively handled. Trainees are scattered throughout Devon and Cornwall, but the company provides them with mobile telephone contact numbers so that they can raise any matters of concern easily. Staff respond quickly to issues raised and often drive many miles to meet the trainee and provide appropriate solutions. Other parties help to resolve problems where necessary.

11. Trainees have a poor understanding of the organisation's policy statement on equal opportunities. The organisation does not take specific action to ensure the policy is put into practice. Staff have not receive any training related to the promotion of equal opportunities. Some staff, however, will attend a seminar on equal opportunities to be run by the TEC. Some employers are reluctant to accept trainees from groups under-represented on training programmes or in employment in the industry. The organisation has produced no publicity materials that promote equality of opportunity or counter the traditional stereotypical images of workers in the industry. It has taken no specific action to reach out to and attract persons from groups under-represented in this occupational area. The policy statement is complemented by written procedures but these do not explain how trainees can register formal complaints or what they should do if they experience harassment. The organisation does not check that the many employers providing placements and subcontractors who carry out off-the-job training have an equal opportunities policy that it is compatible with its own.

Trainee support

Grade 3

12. Trainees are referred to DCET through a variety of sources such as schools, the careers service, employers and personal recommendation. Most applicants complete an initial aptitude assessment and are given a general overview of the industry. Trainees without employment are recommended to employers who carry out their own selection interviews before trainees are offered a place on the

scheme. Trainees receive an induction from the DCET chairman and another when they start college. Throughout their training, staff visit trainees to carry out assessment and progress reviews. The self-assessment report identified no weaknesses and the statements of strengths were descriptive rather than judgmental. Inspectors found strengths and weaknesses that the organisation had not identified. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good vocational and pastoral advice for trainees
- ◆ effective support for trainees throughout the training programme
- ◆ good additional learning support for trainees
- ◆ good arrangements for providing individual help to dyslexic trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to take trainees' initial assessment results into account in training plans
- ◆ inadequate induction process
- ◆ no systematic links between progress reviews in college and those in the workplace
- ◆ failure to set trainees' targets during progress reviews
- ◆ trainees' uncertainty about their target qualification and the role of DCET

13. The chairman has a personal commitment to ensuring that trainees receive good vocational and pastoral guidance. First-year trainees have only met with DCET's staff on one or two occasions and generally lack the confidence to contact them readily using the numbers they are given at induction. As their confidence grows, trainees contact staff more. One trainee, a young father-of-two, has received considerable help and is grateful to the company, saying that he could not have continued with his training without the support given. Many trainees have to travel considerable distances to attend off-the-job training. They receive assistance with transport costs. In one case, a taxi is provided for a trainee to get home from college as the last bus leaves before the college day ends. Initial assessment is used to determine trainees' suitability for the industry and mathematical ability. Initial assessment is not used as a means of identifying trainees' needs for additional learning support. Such support is given promptly, however, when trainees ask for it. Arrangements have been made for a self-declared dyslexic trainee to have a reader available to help him complete the initial aptitude test. Another trainee was making poor progress and DCET staff established that he was dyslexic. A reader was provided for all his future assessments. Most of the subcontractors providing off-the-job training have facilities for additional learning support, particularly for those who have weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. Trainees may use these facilities if they wish to and at one college, 43 per cent of the trainees do so.

14. There is no set procedure for recruitment interviews. All applicants receive an initial assessment of their aptitude. The results of this assessment are not taken into account when drawing up the trainees' training plans. These are basically the same for all trainees, irrespective of their background and previous experience. However, some more able trainees have completed their work-based projects more quickly than staff initially expected. Where trainees' support needs are identified during training, they are not recorded on the training plan or in records of progress reviews. There are no arrangements for accrediting trainees' prior learning and experience.

15. Trainees usually receive an induction to the workplace on the employer's premises. A clear checklist of the content covered is held in individual files but trainees do not have any written materials to refer to later. There is no formal induction framework and no check is made on whether trainees understand the organisation's values and policies, equal opportunities, and the programme of study to be followed. Many trainees are confused about the role of DCET and what qualifications they have to achieve in order to complete a modern apprenticeship. At the start of each year, dates are set for each trainee to receive four progress reviews, two in college and two in the workplace. Those that occur in the workplace concentrate mainly on health and safety. The staff who carry out progress reviews in college are not the same staff as those who carry out the reviews in the workplace. The staff involved seldom liaise with one another to ensure that they are not giving trainees conflicting advice. Training plans are not referred to during reviews and trainees are not set targets to motivate them and spur them on. Some workplace supervisors are involved in trainees' progress reviews. Staff do not use the reviews to help trainees identify links between their on- and off-the-job training. Trainees are not given a copy of the record of any of their reviews.

Management of training

Grade 3

16. DCET is managed solely by the company chairman who is also managing director. Two operational directors are involved in strategic planning and six non-operational directors represent the industry that the organisation serves. Until recently, DCET was not accredited to carry out assessment for NVQs in electrical installation. This was subcontracted to a national provider of electrical installation training, and to six local colleges of further education. Dissatisfaction with this arrangement led DCET to seek and gain accreditation as an assessment centre. The organisation employs a personal assistant to the director, and two training officers. A systems consultant is engaged for three days each week to set up the assessment procedures previously carried out by subcontractors. Weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been rectified prior to inspection. Inspectors considered the strengths identified to be no more than normal practice. They identified further strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective action on poor practice by subcontractors
- ◆ comprehensive staff induction programme
- ◆ well-planned and clearly written training programmes
- ◆ extensive links with employers
- ◆ effective management of change

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective communication with some trainees and employers
- ◆ lack of service level agreements
- ◆ poor co-ordination of visits to trainees at college and in the workplace
- ◆ incomplete management procedures and processes

17. The organisation is owned and operated by local industry for their collective benefit. The directors are local electrical contractors with little expertise in training. The organisation maintains close links with industry to ensure that suitable applicants are found employment. Companies who cannot provide the full range of experience trainees require to achieve an NVQ often arrange alternative placements for them. They work closely together to provide trainees with periods of site experience which enable them to build up their portfolios. Following changes in the NVQs for the industry, DCET has to manage four different training schemes for its 107 trainees and it does so effectively. Furthermore, following the requirement for trainees to gather more evidence of their acquisition of competencies in the workplace, and DCET's dissatisfaction with some subcontractors, the organisation has decided to take more direct control of the training process. A systems consultant has introduced good training programmes for the new NVQ level 2 and 3 schemes. The programmes are well planned and clearly written. DCET has taken effective action over poor performance by some subcontractors. Trainees at one college expressed dissatisfaction with their progress and DCET staff intervened and discussed the problem with college management. When the situation did not improve, DCET invited employers to discuss the situation further with the college management. There was no improvement so, as a last resort, DCET agreed with employers and trainees to move the programmes to another college. All trainees expressed satisfaction with the move and with the way that it had been handled by the company. The organisation has recently been awarded the Investors in People standard and it has used the Investors in People criteria to develop systems and processes to improve operational effectiveness, facilitate continuing changes and strengthen its small team.

18. Many of the management processes and procedures used are incomplete. The business plan has not been updated to account for the current changes taking place

within the organisation. The directors are well aware that DCET trainees have the fourth highest NVQ achievement rate in the TEC area. Such data, however, are not always taken into consideration when management makes decisions about action required of staff. Staff are clear about their role in the organisation. Their job descriptions, however, have not been updated to reflect their changing roles. They are not set personal targets at appraisal. The appraisal process failed to identify that staff had a poor understanding of equal opportunities issues. Staff training on equal opportunities has now taken place but its effectiveness has not been evaluated. The organisation has contracts with trainees' employers, but these are primarily to meet TEC contractual requirements. They do not specify the training required for trainees to complete a modern apprenticeship. Agreements with subcontractors do not include clauses relating to quality assurance the required rate of trainees' progress. Trainees are unsure of the role played by DECT in their training. All could name the individuals who visit them in college or on site. Many were not aware that they were DCET trainees. Most employers and trainees interviewed are confused by the changes that have taken place in the modern apprenticeship framework. Letters to non-operational directors and employers informing them of these changes have lacked clarity, leaving employers puzzled and unable to describe these changes to their trainees. Visits to trainees at college and in the workplace are poorly co-ordinated. Until the recent appointment of a new training officer, all visits to the workplace were carried out by a part-time training officer and the organisation's chairman visited trainees at college. Trainees do not see any link between the visits. Staff meetings are regular and informal. Records of decisions taken at these are not always kept.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

19. The organisation meets the requirements of the TEC contract and those of the awarding body. A quality assurance manual is being developed and some formal quality assurance procedures are in operation. The company has started to gather feedback from trainees and employers on the quality of training, through questionnaires. Quality assurance systems are at a very early stage of development and many comply with the requirements of relevant external bodies. Inspectors considered that the strengths stated in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice or contractual compliance. They found weaknesses the organisation had not identified. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and comprehensive assessment and internal verification procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no coherent and comprehensive quality assurance system
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of training

◆ insufficient monitoring of subcontractors

20. An assessment procedure for level 2 and 3 trainees has been implemented and this is proving effective. It covers assessment and internal verification in detail and involves the use of a checklist for internal verification. It necessitates oral and written questioning of trainees. Evidence of trainees' knowledge and competencies has to be recorded carefully. Assessment in the workplace involves the use of special assessment sheets and scrutiny of the trainees' workplace diary. The organisation aims to ensure consistency and reliability in assessment and verification practices through the use of this process. Since the organisation became an independent training provider it has begun to develop and formalise its quality assurance arrangements but these have not yet been implemented fully. The organisation reacts quickly to resolve problems. It does not, however, yet have quality assurance arrangements that enable it to anticipate and prevent problems related to the quality of training. Nevertheless, the organisation took effective action to improve the quality of one subcontractor's training programme considerably.

21. The organisation has many disparate documents relating to quality assurance. These specify procedures and the circumstances under which they are to be used. Some are established procedures and others are new. They have not been brought together to form a coherent, clearly specified and complete quality assurance system. The procedures do not yet cover trainees' induction, initial assessment or progress reviews. The absence of such procedures means that standards have not been set for these aspects of provision. Staff monitor trainees' NVQ achievement rates closely. Trainees' retention rates are mostly satisfactory. Trainees in most areas say that they are well satisfied with their training. There is, however, no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of training. The feedback collected from trainees and employers is superficial. Questionnaires have been issued to trainees and employers but responses to these have not been collated and summarised.

22. The quality assurance arrangements do not cover the quality of training. The organisation has not carried out audits of the quality and effectiveness of its training programmes. It has no procedures for planning and implementing the continuous improvement of training. There is no systematic observation or monitoring of the training that subcontractors provide. The organisation has not carried out continuous self-assessment but it now recognises that it needs to do so.