



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 1999

REINSPECTION MAY 2000

# Sandra Robinson Group Limited

## SUMMARY

The Sandra Robinson Group offers satisfactory foundation for work training to adult trainees. Training programmes are well structured. Trainees make good progress towards their qualifications and achievement rates are high. The company also offers business administration and information technology training. At the first inspection, this training was unsatisfactory, with few work-placement opportunities and with assessment being unplanned and infrequent. Since then, the Sandra Robinson Group has overhauled its arrangements for administration and information technology, and workplace arrangements are now extremely good. However, as yet, few trainees have achieved qualifications in administration. All trainees undertake a rigorous initial assessment and begin their language training at an appropriate level. Trainees, many of whom have had their careers interrupted by major disasters, such as war, are well supported by trainers. Managers observe staff every eight weeks in order to identify ways of improving their performance as trainers. The company's quality assurance policies lack clear procedures for their operation.

**As a result of the reinspection of the Sandra Robinson Group, the original published report text for business administration has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings section 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
Business administration	4
Foundation for work	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Business administration	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed classroom teaching
- ◆ good progression opportunities for trainees on language programmes
- ◆ well-motivated and highly conscientious trainees
- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates for wordpower qualifications
- ◆ good level of pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ rigorous initial assessment of trainees' language skills
- ◆ excellent arrangements for work placements
- ◆ wide range of real work in subsidiary company



### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ failure to tailor language training to meet trainees' needs in employment
- ◆ training materials' lack of relevance to the trainees' ethnicity and social and work environment
- ◆ insufficient job-search guidance for ESOL trainees
- ◆ low achievement of administration qualifications

## INTRODUCTION

1. Sandra Robinson Group (SRG) was established in 1989. The company originally offered training to trainees in Ilford, in the London Borough of Redbridge in east London. The company specialises in offering English language training to unemployed adults, whose first language is not English, through a contract for work-based learning for adults with London East Training and Enterprise Council (LETEC). SRG opened a second training centre in Walthamstow to meet the local demand for English language training and to improve the employability of those who seek training. In 1998, SRG added business administration and information technology training as a progression route for trainees who had completed their language training. The Ilford centre includes well-furnished and suitably equipped training rooms and a computer suite. It also houses a subsidiary company which provides office services for local businesses. Trainees play a significant role in this company. The centre in Walthamstow has three training rooms and a staff area. All the administration for the training programmes is dealt with centrally, through the Ilford office. The company has a managing director who is fully involved in the day-to-day running of the company. At the time of the first inspection, SRG employed 11 staff. There are now 15 staff, including full- and part-time tutors, assessors and administrative staff and a placement officer. At the time of the first inspection, there were 108 trainees. There are now 172 trainees, including 156 on English language training programmes.

2. SRG also offers language training in a commercial context, as well as training in human resource development and Investors in People assessment. The company is involved in local community initiatives and the managing director is vice-chairperson of a local business forum, a director of a business education partnership and participates in the strategic forum of LETEC.

3. Redbridge's population is around 230,000. The unemployment rate was 5.5 per cent in February 2000, somewhat higher than the London average rate of 4.5 per cent, and the national average of 3.9 per cent. In the neighbouring boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest, the unemployment rate stood at 6.9 and 10.4 per cent respectively in February. These average figures disguise, to some extent, the variation within the London boroughs. In some wards in Tower Hamlets, the rate of unemployment is twice as high as the borough's average. People from minority ethnic groups are twice as likely to be unemployed as their white counterparts. Many of SRG's clients are refugees or asylum seekers, among whom unemployment is particularly high. Virtually all trainees were born outside the UK in non-English speaking countries. Three-quarters are either from Kosovo, the Indian sub-continent or Africa. Since last year, the proportion from Kosovo has greatly increased. There has been a considerable change in the client group in the past year. A large number of trainees, particularly those recently arrived from war-torn parts of the former Yugoslavia, require counselling and advice. There are now

more long-term unemployed trainees with no work records or references.

4. Over 90 per cent of businesses in Redbridge and Waltham Forest employ fewer than 10 people. Large establishments employing over 200 people comprise only 1 per cent of all firms. In both boroughs, there is a high concentration of businesses concerned with wholesale and retail and financial and business services.

5. In 1999, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 36.6 per cent in Waltham Forest, far lower than the 54.7 per cent in neighbouring Redbridge. The national average in England was 47.9 per cent. Few trainees attended school locally. Some have no qualifications from their country of origin; others have higher and professional qualifications.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. SRG produced its first self-assessment report for the pilot inspection in 1998. This was accompanied by an action plan to rectify weaknesses identified through self-assessment. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process and a consultation paper was circulated by the company director in October 1998. The existing report was updated. SRG has offered business administration training since 1998 and was advised by the TEC to include it in its foundation for work programme. SRG added a section to its self-assessment report covering this occupational area. After the first inspection, SRG produced a concise and clear action plan. It updated this frequently, as objectives were achieved and new ones set. It re-organised its business administration training, and founded a subsidiary company to enable trainees to undertake real work. It wrote a self-assessment report shortly before the reinspection but did not give a grade for business administration.

7. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 12 days at SRG during March 1999. Inspectors examined company records, trainees' files, assessment and internal verification records, awarding body reports, TEC contracts and placement agreements. Inspectors met staff and employers, visited three workplaces, interviewed 51 trainees and observed and graded eight off-the-job training sessions. The grades are given in the following table.

8. A team of two inspectors spent a total of four days at SRG in May 2000. They spoke with 11 of the 16 business administration trainees, and visited the in-house subsidiary company and five other work placements, where they spoke to seven supervisors and observed SRG's staff reviewing and assessing three trainees. They spoke with eight of the 15 staff, and examined a wide range of paperwork, including trainees' files and portfolios, new procedures and policies, a handbook specially written for employers, the trainees' handbook, and reports from the awarding body. They interrogated company databases containing records of trainees' achievements.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration			2			2
Foundation for work		2	4			6
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 3

9. This table shows the number of SRG's trainees and former trainees, and the qualifications they are aiming to achieve. Most are working towards an NVQ in information technology at level 1, and an NVQ in administration at either level 1 or 2.

	Number of trainees	Information technology NVQ 1	Administration NVQ 1	Administration NVQ 2	Total NVQs aimed for
Current trainees	11	11	6	5	22
Former trainees	5	4	1	3	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>30</b>

10. Of the five former TEC-funded trainees, one is employed by SRG, two are employed elsewhere and two continue to receive support in finding a job. These five are expected to complete their qualifications within the next three months. Most trainees progressed from SRG's foundation programme. All trainees attend a four-week work preparation course in the training centre. This comprises a skills training programme in information technology, job-search activities, personal development and health and safety. Trainees then progress to work placements for up to six months. The assessors visit every two to three weeks, each visit lasting at least an hour. Trainees have an opportunity to return to the training centre once a week for help and advice with their evidence gathering, advice on maintaining a portfolio or one-to-one instruction. Trainees are placed across a range of businesses including local courts, refugee advice centres and other training providers.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ unplanned, infrequent and haphazard assessment
- ◆ inadequate recording of assessments
- ◆ ineffective tracking of trainees' progress
- ◆ poor internal verification
- ◆ lack of work placements

11. SRG's action plan produced for the reinspection did not give a revised grade for the occupational area. It noted the progress made in implementing the action plan to rectify weaknesses, especially in assessment. Inspectors agreed and identified further strengths regarding the management of work placements. Inspectors drew attention to the low achievement of NVQs in administration, which was not given prominence in the action plan. The table below shows trainees' achievements over the past year.

Apr '99 - March 2000		Achievements				
Qualifications registered	Number of entries	Information technology & administration	Administration only	Information technology level 1	Working towards	None
Administration and information technology	22	4		6	9	3
Administration only	3					3
Information technology only	5			2		3
Total	30	4	0	8	9	9

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed work placements
- ◆ wide range of work experience in subsidiary company
- ◆ effective introductory training programme
- ◆ swift response by staff to trainees' individual learning needs
- ◆ up-to-date computing equipment

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low achievement of NVQs in administration
- ◆ some repetitive methods of assessment
- ◆ excessive paper-based evidence in trainees' folders

#### GOOD PRACTICE

Assessors visit trainees at their work placements every two to three weeks. Visits are booked six months in advance and are mutually agreed on with the employer, the trainee and the assessor. The assessor confirms the visit in writing, notifying the employer and the trainee of what will be observed during the visit. Employers are clear about the purpose of the visit and when it will take place. SRG guarantees not to change appointments.

11. Since the first inspection, SRG has made a number of changes to the operation of its business administration programmes. All trainees now have work placements. The managing director personally visits each potential work placement to vet its suitability, brief managers and supervisors on their responsibilities, and to develop a working partnership. A pack has been introduced to provide employers with clear information about their responsibilities to provide a secure learning environment. Employers understand the training process and are better informed about the qualification. They know how they can help their trainees to gain evidence to demonstrate their competence. Most employers offer trainees good opportunities to obtain evidence for the purposes of assessment. Trainees in work placements steadily acquire new skills and some receive coaching from work-based supervisors. Trainees also develop new skills by frequent coaching from the trainer/assessor. Employers find the pack helpful and several use it as a reference document.

12. SRG has established a subsidiary company to provide office services for local businesses. This provides separate and real work for trainees who are unable to fulfil the range of tasks required by their qualifications at their work placements. Trainees are involved in marketing the facilities, managing the daily activities and



prioritising bookings. They liaise with customers and produce the work required, including designing and producing company letterheads.

13. Since the first inspection, SRG has revised the whole programme. Trainees are now carefully assessed on entry to the programme, to ensure that they have the language skills and understanding to cope with the level of the qualification. All trainees then receive a four-week training programme to raise their awareness of the skills required by employers to work in an administration environment. Trainees are taught computer skills in preparation for an NVQ at level 1; and they are also encouraged to identify their own development needs. Trainees are introduced to the concept of evidence collection and instructed on how to write clear, meaningful personal statements. Trainees develop information technology skills using up-to-date computers. They have access to the Internet and to good-quality laser printers. They learn to work safely and unsupervised in a computerised environment. Trainees also complete curricula vitae in preparation for their applications to work placements and as part of their job-search activities.

14. Trainees and employers receive good support from the staff at SRG. Staff contact each trainee at least once a week, once they are on their work placements, to check on their welfare and to help resolve any difficulties which may have arisen. Two trainees recently had problems at their work placements. In both cases, staff referred the difficulties to the managing director. In one case, the trainee was moved from the work placement and transferred to SRG's own subsidiary office, to enable him to continue to learn in a supportive environment and generate evidence for his vocational qualification. SRG decided to cease using the company for work placements. In the other case, following a visit by the managing director, the work-placement provider changed the practices which were causing difficulties for the trainee. This trainee recently became employed by the company.

15. Since April 1999, of the 25 trainees who were entered for administration qualifications, nine are still working towards them. Only four of the other 16 have achieved their targeted qualification. Achievement figures for information technology are higher. Of 27 trainees, nine are still working towards the NVQ, and 12 of the other 18 have gained the qualification. One trainee who left the programme early has since gained employment, but the destination of the other five is not known. The reasons for low achievement are unclear. SRG is reconsidering whether this NVQ is a suitable programme for the trainees it accepts.

16. On administration programmes, there are nine different assessors, of whom only three are qualified. Two of the qualified assessors are also internal verifiers. Internal verification is now thorough, and trainee assessors are carefully monitored. Of the six who are not qualified, four are expected to complete their assessor awards in August 2000. The other two have been granted extensions to their deadline for achievement as they have exceeded the usual 18-month maximum allowed, and have a target date for June 2000. One of these does all the information technology assessment. The others assess administration skills at levels 1 and 2. Assessors take responsibility for structuring and monitoring

evidence for their trainees. As assessors are still unfamiliar with the new standards introduced for certain business administration programmes, they assess element by element. They use too much product evidence in addition to observations, and use witness statements for each element. This is unnecessarily time-consuming. Evidence of trainees' competence is collected through observations of performance on each NVQ element, and is supplemented by one-to-one questioning. This results in excessive amounts of paper in trainees' folders, which are used to prepare portfolios. Although trainees are advised on how to cross-reference evidence, many remain unclear on how to put this into practice. For most trainees, the concept of continuous assessment and evidence collection is alien, owing to different educational approaches in their countries of origin. Little use is made of cross-referencing evidence.

### Foundation for work (ESOL)

### Grade 3

17. There are 92 adult trainees following English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) prevocational training programmes. Thirty-six trainees have been assessed as below wordpower foundation level training and are following a six-month programme in basic language development. This is a new programme and is being delivered at the company's Walthamstow and Ilford training centres. Fifty-six trainees are following an eight-week course leading to wordpower qualifications either at foundation or level 1. Trainees attend the training centres every day, either in the mornings or afternoons. Twelve trainees with additional numeracy support needs also attend numberpower sessions which are timetabled across the middle of the day. Assessment and internal verification are detailed and regular. Trainees' portfolios are clearly structured. There are no work tasters or work experience options available to trainees within the foundation for work programme. Trainees are encouraged to progress through the ESOL levels and to an NVQ programme in information technology and business administration with language support. The company plans to develop a vocational access certificate programme including level 1 wordpower and basic information technology skills to support progression into occupational areas. All trainees are initially assessed to identify their level of oral and written English before commencing training.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to progress through ESOL levels
- ◆ trainees' good attendance and punctuality
- ◆ success of a high percentage of trainees in gaining a qualification
- ◆ well managed classroom teaching

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to tailor training to meet individual students' language learning needs
- ◆ absence of target-setting in action planning

- ◆ some inappropriate learning and assessment materials on the ESOL programme

18. Trainees are able to enter the training programmes at one of three levels, according to their language ability. Trainees can also progress in stages towards achievement of wordpower at level 1. Half of the trainees in the highest level language group had progressed through the foundation stages. Through this continuous training, trainees develop their language skills until they reach the requisite level to enable them to cope with the demands of employment in an occupational area.

19. Trainees attend training regularly and arrive punctually for their classes. Trainees respond well to a system where those who are over ten minutes late are sent home, recognising they are developing good discipline for studying on a short-term course and for future work. Tutors promptly follow up non-attendance the same day. A high proportion of trainees who start the programme complete their training. In each of the last two years, the proportion of trainees achieving the wordpower qualification was 84 per cent and 68 per cent, respectively. To date, in the current year, 84 per cent of trainees who started the programme have obtained wordpower, 54 per cent have obtained numberpower and only 20 out of 258 trainees have left without achieving any qualification. These figures significantly exceed targets for the programme.

20. Trainees are taught in groups in the training centres. Teaching sessions are well managed and good teamwork among tutors ensures a smooth transition for trainees progressing from one level to another. Trainers give trainees clear directions, question them effectively and check trainees understanding of work thoroughly to find out whether their teaching methods are proving effective. The teaching of language and number skills is integrated effectively on numberpower programmes. By the fifth week of their programme, trainees have acquired self-confidence and they can work collaboratively on some tasks. Trainees work hard, do homework regularly and are able to demonstrate progress in their use of English language.

21. Following initial assessment, trainees are placed on programmes which are appropriate for them in terms of broad levels of language skills. Thereafter, however, there is no further diagnostic process to identify the extent of trainees' individual skills and knowledge and to determine trainees' learning priorities. Trainees are not given personal language learning targets against which their language accomplishment can be systematically tracked and measured. Between them, trainees in each group have widely varying abilities in language, a diversity of work experience and differing aspirations. The training programme is not tailored, however, to meet the needs of individual trainees. All trainees follow the same, highly structured programme. Irrespective of their aptitude and previous experience, all trainees are required to carry out the same activities and they are set the same goals. They all have to complete the same assignments in order to produce evidence of their competence for assessment purposes. They are not encouraged to produce evidence as a result of their own initiative or through

drawing on their prior learning and experience.

22. Trainers have an over reliance on worksheets. Some learning materials are out of date. Some learning materials used on the ESOL programme were originally designed for English as a foreign language (EFL) courses. Staff have not adapted these materials for use on ESOL programmes. The ESOL training programme has something of an EFL bias.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

23. SRG has a strong culture of support for equal opportunities, as well as a clear and comprehensive equal opportunities policy and complaints procedure. The policy is updated annually with full staff involvement. The policy includes current legislation and it defines the responsibilities of trainees and staff. The company has also developed an equal opportunities action plan. There is a formal complaints procedure and incident book which records all disputes and the action taken to resolve issues. The complaints procedure is clearly displayed on walls throughout the training centres. Fourteen per cent of trainees on programme have learning difficulties and disabilities. Sixty-five per cent of trainees are male and 35 per cent female. In general terms, the staff are representative of the local community. Five staff are former trainees of SRG, two of whom are now trainers.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ company's strong commitment to equality of opportunity
- ◆ annual review of the comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ effective and rigorous complaints procedure

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no analysis of data on trainees
- ◆ failure to promote equality of opportunity consistently with employers
- ◆ failure of training materials to relate to the trainees' ethnicity and social and work environment

24. Trainees are respected and protected from harassment. Tutors take appropriate action to address equal opportunities issues that arise. All staff are aware of the company's policy and commitment to equality of opportunity. Tutors demonstrate sensitivity and a high level of understanding and skill in dealing with trainees from diverse backgrounds. Many trainees have had career aspirations interrupted by war or natural disasters, some have had little formal education and have spent long periods of time unemployed. The company's complaints procedure is effective. All tutors support action taken on complaints and fully record any issues or problems that arise. Where complaints have been received tutors have acted promptly on

them. All complaints are investigated and, if necessary, trainees whose behaviour is unacceptable towards other trainees or staff are at risk of having their training programme terminated.

25. SRG does not systematically analyse data on trainees. The company has a good understanding of the profile of the local population but it does not use this to plan initiatives for recruiting trainees from groups under-represented on its training programmes. Employers have a low awareness of the company's commitment to equality of opportunity. Although the employers' contracts makes reference to disability, race and sex discrimination legislation there is no continuous monitoring of employers' upholding of equality of opportunity in the trainees' workplace. The company has already developed an action plan to rectify this weakness.

26. Training materials seldom reflect the multicultural aspects and the social context of life and work in East London. Some materials, such as exercises and worksheets, contain stereotypical images and language.

## Trainee support

## Grade 3

### GOOD PRACTICE

SRG arranged an assessment for a trainee with impaired vision with Action for Blind People. Following this assessment, the organisation identified the computer equipment the trainee would need to enable him to follow the business administration training programme. Support was then provided to meet his individual needs, and to help him to succeed.

27. SRG has a clear commitment to provide English language training for unemployed members of the community disadvantaged in the labour market by their poor command of written or spoken English. All trainees are referred by the employment service. Potential trainees are interviewed individually and undertake a rigorous language assessment to determine the level of support they need. There is a through induction programme which ensures trainees understand the type of training they are undertaking and progression opportunities open to them. Significant emphasis is placed on the importance of punctuality and daily attendance. Daily attendance at the training centre provides trainees with the opportunity to have frequent contact with training and other support staff for up to 24 weeks.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic and rigorous initial assessment
- ◆ provision of well-structured numeracy support
- ◆ high level of practical advice and support for trainees

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of detail in trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ failure to tailor trainees' training plans to meet individual needs
- ◆ insufficient training in job search skills for some trainees

28. SRG assesses and interviews all potential trainees and ascertains their individual needs and aspirations in a thorough but thoughtful way. Initial

assessment is available twice weekly to give potential trainees ample opportunity to attend. A potential trainee's performance in this assessment broadly determines whether the trainee is suitable for any of the courses and if he or she is, the level of support he or she will require. This process is thorough and the majority of trainees are assigned to the right level. The progress of new trainees is carefully monitored and if it is evident that trainees have been assigned to a level that is either too high or too low, then they are quickly transferred to another class. The level of language which trainees need is not recorded in their action plans. All trainees in the same group follow an identical programme irrespective of whether their particular language need relates to speech, oral comprehension, reading or writing. They all aim to attain the same goals, irrespective of their individual needs and previous experience. They are encouraged to aim to achieve individual goals such as the acquisition of telephone technique, successful completion of application forms, improvement in letter-writing skills and in personal appearance.

29. Trainees' progress reviews are carried out regularly. Decisions made at them are recorded and trainees' personal support needs are noted. The reviews do not, however, always focus on the trainees' progress towards attaining their target qualification or their acquisition of specific language skills. Trainees are not set short-term and long-term goals. Trainees are not always aware of how much progress they have made.

30. The relationship between staff and trainees is open, and is based on mutual respect. Trainees understand and accept their responsibilities and are clear about the support that SRG can provide for them. Staff are particularly aware of the issues that are important to speakers of other languages. These include assistance with claiming benefits, guidance on specialist sources of assistance, advice regarding refugee and asylum seeker status and entitlements. Staff who are themselves from minority ethnic groups, have a good understanding of the cultural background of many of the trainees and also help them with problems of communication. Trainees with disabilities are provided with effective advice and support and where appropriate, are referred to specialist organisations.

31. The provision of numeracy support for trainees is well organised and effective. Trainees who are identified as being in need of numeracy support, attend the training centre for an additional five hours per week spread over four days. If further support is required the trainer gives additional individual tuition. Training materials are designed to ensure that the skills taught are relevant to daily life as well as the trainees' job aspirations.

32. Two thirds of all trainees leave at the end of the initial 16-week English language programme. Progression opportunities for many of these trainees remain severely limited as many do not have recent relevant work experience or sufficient English language skills to enable them to obtain employment or take up occupational training provision. Trainees are not offered the opportunity of work placements. The job search programme is not well co-ordinated. Very few trainees gain employment on leaving at this stage. For the 20 per cent who progress to business administration and information technology training programmes, a



particular emphasis is placed on job search skills and on finding them a work placement. These trainees receive a structured job search programme delivered by the placement officer one afternoon per week over eight weeks. Other trainees do not benefit from this high level of support even though the stated aims of programmes are to help trainees to find jobs and to make them more employable.

## Management of training

## Grade 3

33. SRG's director has a high level of involvement and 'hands on' approach to the management of the company. Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and each member of the team has a job and role description. Staff contribute to the development of the company by taking on additional responsibilities. For example, one key person is responsible for staff development, another for the induction and mentoring of new staff while another member of staff is the quality assurance and health and safety officer. All staff are line managed by the director. The company has identified its operating objectives through its business planning. The company reviews its strategic aims annually and has clear plans to develop other NVQ training in more occupational areas to increase trainees' opportunities for progression. All staff attend regular staff meetings. Four staff have assessor qualifications, six are working towards assessor awards and seven staff have teaching qualifications. There are regular team meetings where staff openly discuss training issues and programmes.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive recruitment procedures
- ◆ well-managed appraisal and good staff development programme
- ◆ effective team working by staff

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ ineffective co-ordination of training programmes
- ◆ poor use of management information
- ◆ little involvement of employers in the NVQ process

34. The management goes to great lengths to ensure that prospective employees fully understand the company's ethos and priorities. Recruitment is carried out carefully. All applicants are invited to the company's premises to join a training session and have an informal talk with trainers and staff. All suitable applicants are invited for interview and are asked to prepare a lesson plan and deliver a training session. The tutor responsible for staff development observes the lesson and completes a feedback sheet. Even applicants not shortlisted are given the opportunity of reading the feedback and they receive oral feedback from the director on their performance. Two members of staff carry out interviews. Once employed, all staff receive a comprehensive and well-documented staff handbook and are supported by the mentor. Induction takes place over an eight-week period

and covers all aspects of trainees' training programme and administrative procedures, trainee reviews and end-of-course procedures.

35. The training needs of individual members of staff are identified through the six-monthly staff appraisal system. The company has allocated responsibility for staff development to a key member of the training team. A training budget is set for the year and once all the staff development needs have been identified, a cost analysis is carried out. All staff development is formally reviewed and information about it is disseminated at the regular team meetings. An annual training plan with timescales is devised and implemented. Internal staff development focuses on issues identified through the observation of training. All staff work together to produce course material, share good practice and support each other in the development and delivery of the training programmes. There is a good team spirit and shared commitment by staff to support each other and to help the trainees to achieve their full potential.

36. There is a clear line management structure but no member of staff is given responsibility for directing training programmes. Although staff work together to design and produce learning materials, there is no formal structure for training programmes and they are not systematically co-ordinated. For example, the new ESOL programme was largely unplanned and trainers had to use their own initiative in shaping its content. On NVQ programmes, it is not clear who has responsibility for some aspects of training and assessment. Similarly, there is uncertainty over the division of responsibilities between tutors and the work placement officer on the job search programme.

37. Management information is used to compare actual trainee recruitment with contractual targets but is not used to identify trends or inform management decisions regarding early leavers, trainees' achievements and attendance patterns of individuals and groups. There is an over reliance on informal information and insufficient use is made of quantitative data. Employers offering work placements have little knowledge or understanding of NVQs. Employers do not understand how they can contribute to the trainees training programme. SRG has no influence over the quality or quantity of training trainees receive whilst at work. Training in the workplace is dependent upon the efforts of individual supervisors and employers.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

38. SRG has quality assurance policies and procedures for all its activities. The managerial responsibility for quality assurance arrangements has been clearly defined. The company has a quality manager who has specific responsibility for the company's quality assurance arrangements relating to training and assessment. The policies and procedures are fairly new and were only introduced in November 1997. Staff are encouraged to be involved in reviewing and recommending amendments to the quality assurance system. Quality assurance is a standing agenda item on the bi-monthly staff meetings. Policies and procedures are



reviewed annually. Staff are observed delivering teaching and training sessions by an appropriate member of staff every eight weeks. Trainees review their induction and then the training programme after five weeks. Staff review all training programmes at the end of each programme. Inspectors agreed with three of the grades in the self-assessment report but the grades which they awarded for business administration, trainee support and the management of training were one grade lower than those given by the company. The inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses cited in the self-assessment report but they considered that a significant number of weaknesses related to the external business environment than the company's management of provision. The report did not include the company's action plan for making improvements.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent monitoring of teaching and training
- ◆ regular evaluation of training programmes by staff and trainees

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no auditing of quality assurance policies and procedures
- ◆ some policies' lack of detail and clear operating procedures

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Written feedback to a tutor following an observation of a language session not only detailed the impact the teaching had on the trainees but also suggested ways the trainer could make some aspects of the training clearer. Helpful diagrams were included on the feedback sheet.*

39. The quality manager, or a designated key member of the training team, carries out observations of teaching staff every eight weeks. Judgements and feedback are recorded. Individual staff receive detailed individual feedback and guidance on all aspects of their teaching and appropriate guidance on how to improve their training. The observations also include a check on trainees' progress as a measure of the effectiveness of the training. This system of observations has been in operation over the last two years and has led to improvement in teaching.

40. All trainees complete evaluation forms on their induction and training programmes. The company director reads all the comments made. Salient points are noted and discussed with the staff team at the regular staff meetings. Feedback from trainees and staff is taken seriously and where appropriate, changes are made to improve the training provision in response to the comments and views expressed. However, development and improvements are focused on improving the skills of individual trainees. Quantitative data and information are not used to identify ways of improving the work and performance of staff.

41. The company director and staff appreciate the need for continuous improvement. Much of the quality assurance activity focuses on key aspects of the trainees' experiences and the training process. While the company's policies and procedures cover all operations, only a few indicate how quality assurance will be carried out. Many of the statements in the quality assurance policy are derived from those laid down by the Training Standards Council in 'Raising the Standard'. For example, in the policy under assessment and review of progress and achievement, the policy states that 'assessments are rigorous and fair and clearly explained to trainees. The assessments are fully documented'. However, there is



no reference to the process by which this will be made to happen. The company does not monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of its quality assurance procedures. The lack of monitoring of the work of assessors on the business administration programme has adversely affected the monitoring of trainees' progress.