



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 2000

Triangle Training

SUMMARY

Triangle Training offers good training in early years care and education. Assessment is frequent and training programmes are well structured. Achievement of qualifications is good, but access to some training resources is poor. Equal opportunities training for staff is effective and minority groups are encouraged to benefit from training. Systematic monitoring in the workplace is insufficient. Trainee support and management of training are satisfactory. Trainees receive good pastoral support and retention is good; however, initial assessment is inadequate. Internal communication is well managed and there are many opportunities for staff development. Quality assurance is good, the company is committed to continuous improvement and takes action rapidly to remedy any weaknesses.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement and retention rates
- ◆ frequent access to assessment
- ◆ effective targeting of trainees from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ effective pastoral support
- ◆ good training and development opportunities for staff
- ◆ good quality assurance of training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment
- ◆ superficiality of progress reviews
- ◆ trainees' lack of awareness of their own rights and responsibilities
- ◆ employer's lack of understanding about responsibilities for on-the-job training

INTRODUCTION

1. Triangle Training is a private training provider based in Southam, Warwickshire. The company was established in 1995 as a development of the children's day nurseries owned by the company. In 1999, the two aspects of the business split, leaving Triangle Training as solely a training company. The company is owned by two partners, one of whom has overall responsibility for the management of the business, the other for recruitment and administration. There are 22 additional members of staff, eight of whom are part time. Triangle Training moved to new premises in 1998 to accommodate expansion. They also rent rooms on a session-by-session basis in city centres throughout the area where training sessions are held.

2. Triangle Training is a specialist training provider offering training in the early years sector and offers national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in early years care and education at levels 2 and 3, playwork, key skills and assessor qualifications. All government-funded trainees are on early years programmes. Currently, 214 trainees are funded through government programmes, 129 are advanced modern apprentices, 48 foundation modern apprentices, eight on other youth training programmes and three on work-based learning for adults programmes. There are nine New Deal clients on the employment and voluntary options and 17 on two European Social Funded programmes for adults. Triangle Training also offers training to approximately 25 early years practitioners on a private basis. All those in training are employed. The company has contracts with four Chambers of Commerce and training and enterprise councils (TECs) in the Northamptonshire, Birmingham, Sandwell and Shropshire areas. Northamptonshire is the co-ordinating chamber of commerce, training and enterprise (CCTE) for this inspection.

3. Trainees work in urban and rural areas across the West and East Midlands. Unemployment rates vary across the region from 6.7 per cent in Birmingham, 6.3 per cent in Sandwell to 2.4 per cent in Shropshire and Northampton compared with a national average of 3.5 per cent. In Northamptonshire and Shropshire the minority ethnic population is low, at 3.6 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively, while in Birmingham and Sandwell, it is relatively high at 17.7 and 14.4 per cent respectively. The national average is 6.2 per cent. In 1999, the proportions of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above were 51.1 per cent in Shropshire, 46.6 in Northamptonshire, 40.9 per cent in Birmingham and 29.7 per cent in Sandwell compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The compilation of the self-assessment report was the responsibility of one of the partners along with the 'quality co-ordinator'. Triangle Training produced its third self-assessment report for inspection. Training for the process was provided by the contracting TECs and CCTEs. All staff were involved in a team day to review current procedures and start the self-assessment process, which was then continued in staff meetings. Feedback from both trainees and employers was used. Staff were aware of the contents of the final report. The report identified a large number of strengths and weaknesses, some of which were considered to be normal practice by inspectors. The inspectors found strengths and weaknesses not identified by the company.

5. Five inspectors spent a total of 20 days with Triangle Training. Inspectors interviewed a total of 59 trainees. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with Triangle Training's staff. Inspectors visited 26 workplaces and interviewed 26 employers and work-based supervisors. They looked at trainees' files and portfolios, TEC contracts, external verifiers' reports, and company policies and procedures. Inspectors observed three training sessions, 13 reviews, 13 assessments and one trainee's induction session.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Health, care & public services		1	2			3
Total	0	1	2	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

6. Triangle Training offers NVQ programmes in early years care and education at levels 2 and 3. There is a total of 214 trainees, all of whom are employed. The trainees follow a variety of programmes; 129 are Advanced Modern Apprentices, 48 are Foundation Modern Apprentices, 11 are on other youth and adult training programmes. In addition, there are nine New Deal clients and 17 adult trainees on a training programme funded by the European Social Fund. Work placements are provided by privately owned day care facilities, after school clubs, pre-school groups, crèches and family centres.

7. Off-the-job training for the NVQ is provided in seven different venues spread across a wide geographical area which includes very rural areas, towns and city centres. Some trainees receive off-the-job training in two day nurseries near their

workplace. Trainees have some off-the-job training in key skills, usually information technology. A workbook is provided for application of number and evidence of competence is assessed in the workplace where possible. Most trainees are not offered day release to attend training sessions, but have the opportunity to attend evening sessions. All assessment is carried out at work placements by either work-based assessors or peripatetic assessors from Triangle Training. The trainers and assessors are occupationally experienced and qualified. The average NVQ achievement across the programmes in 1997-98 was 79 per cent, and in 1998-99 was 65 per cent. Of those who began their training in 1999-2000, 37 per cent have already obtained their qualifications.

8. The self-assessment report identified a large number of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with three of the strengths and one of the weaknesses. Other strengths were found to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that awarded by Triangle Training in its self-assessment report.

Programme	Year	Level 2	Level 3
Advanced modern apprentices	1997-98	87%	75%
	1998-99	70%	72%
	1999-2000	52% to date	23% to date
Foundation modern apprentices	1999-2000	23% to date	N/A
Other work-based learning (adults)	1999-2000	33% to date	N/A
Other work-based learning (youths)	1997-98	50%	N/A
	1998-99	72%	N/A
	1999-2000	40% to date	

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective assessment
- ◆ good rates of achievement of NVQ
- ◆ well-structured training sessions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor use of training resources

9. Support for trainees is very effective. Assessors visit each trainee for one to two hours every three to four weeks. Many trainees report a high level of satisfaction with the assessment process and benefit from frequent contact with assessors. Each assessor, both separately and together with the trainee, carefully plans assessments to ensure that meetings are effective and productive. Many assessments are conducted through observation of workplace practice, which incorporates a wide range of aspects of the NVQ and key skills. Triangle Training also provides employers with key skills workshops. Advantage is taken of naturally occurring evidence by using witness testimony so as not to miss

opportunities for assessment.

10. Over the past three years, trainees' achievement of NVQs has been good, as demonstrated in the table above. Those who started their training in 1999-2000 would not be expected to have completed it yet.

11. Training sessions are carefully planned to inform trainees of what is needed for them to obtain their NVQ. This is reinforced by activities devised to ensure that trainees participate and understand the training provided. Triangle Training provides over 20 sessions each year which are available to all trainees. Trainers draw upon their own occupational experience to ensure that training sessions are relevant. Trainees respond well to the trainers. The trainees speak highly of the training sessions provided. Trainers attend a meeting twice a year to share ideas and decide on the content of the sessions. Trainees' evaluations and suggestions from employers are used to structure these meetings. All training sessions are carefully planned and dates are circulated to trainees well in advance.

12. Triangle Training offers training in the knowledge required to support the trainees' practical experience through a series of workshops held at seven venues. However, the company has recorded poor attendance of some trainees at these sessions. From a random sample of nine trainees from different geographical areas none had attended more than 25 per cent of the training sessions available to them. The training takes place from 7pm until 9pm on 20 evenings each year. Trainees report a variety of reasons for their failure to attend, such as childcare problems, the location of some venues, anxiety about travelling by public transport after dark, tiredness at the end of an eight-hour working day, and the timing of training sessions. The sessions are held in rented rooms, some of which are not suitable. For example, one observed session was held in a church centre in a room which was too small for the number of trainees who attended, with a malfunctioning overhead projector. The session was disturbed by noise from another class and from an organ recital taking place downstairs.

13. Training sessions are the main method of making sure that trainees have the knowledge necessary to acquire an NVQ. No work packs, videos or books are available to the trainees for alternative methods of learning. Triangle Training has identified attendance at training as a weakness and has provided two workshops on a Saturday morning, but they were poorly attended. Dates for Friday-morning training sessions have been circulated to the 16 to 18 years olds and to level 2 trainees. These are due to start in the near future.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. Triangle Training has an equal opportunities policy that meets the requirements of the four TECs and CCTEs with which it has contracts. The policy does not specify how it will be implemented or monitored. Of the 214 trainees, 96

GOOD PRACTICE

A male trainee at a day nursery for babies and young children was subject to suspicion and criticism by parents anxious about his being left to care for young children. The owner of the nursery took firm action to reassure the trainee of her confidence in him. She talked to parents to dispel their fears and introduced the trainee to them individually and anxiety ceased. The trainee now takes part in the full range of care activities associated with his job.

per cent are female and 4 per cent are male. Six per cent are people with disabilities, and people from minority ethnic groups make up 11 per cent of the total. Trainees sign a statement during induction to state that they are aware of equal opportunities, but they do not receive a copy of the policy and are not assessed on their understanding of it. They receive a copy of the grievance procedure, health and safety policy and a full explanation of how these fit into both Triangle Training and the employer's legislative requirements. Employers usually work according to their own policies, which meet the requirements of their local social services. Trainees usually receive a copy of the employer's policy as part of the employer's induction process. The quality co-ordinator is responsible for equal opportunities at Triangle Training and disseminates information to the staff. The inspectors considered that many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were normal practice. They found weaknesses which the organisation had not identified. The grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective targeting of trainees from minority ethnic groups
- ◆ recent, effective staff training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ ignorance among trainees of their rights and responsibilities

POOR PRACTICE

A male trainee working in a day nursery was not allowed to carry out some of his duties unless supervised, owing to anxiety that parents would object. He had already achieved an NVQ at level 2 and female trainees at the same level did not have the same restrictions placed on them. The trainee felt demoralised and undervalued as a result of this and was not able to fully experience many tasks in the nursery.

15. The company's commitment to equal opportunities within the organisation is reflected in the open and equitable attitudes of staff and trainees. Strong lines of communication between the company, the employer and the trainees ensure equality of treatment and opportunity. Much of this is as a result of good practice rather than policy. There is a grievance procedure but the culture of the organisation is such that problems are dealt with swiftly and efficiently and so the procedure has not been tested. Triangle Training has a policy of targeting under-represented groups. This is not as a result of monitoring or analysis which have shown up any weaknesses; rather it is an initiative by staff to improve their training profile. Training sessions have been arranged for specific groups with particular needs, often in response to a direct request by an organisation. An example of this is Sikh women receiving separate NVQ training sessions with a tutor who could give them the extra support they needed in English, as it was not their first language. Triangle Training has eight male trainees and where possible they are used in a high profile way to encourage other men to take up childcare. Achievements by men are celebrated in the local press and through award ceremonies. There are trainees with disabilities in several workplaces and every effort is made to ensure that they have equal access to training, whatever their needs. For example, a blind trainee has been given a dictaphone to record evidence. Triangle Training collaborates with community-based projects which involve people from minority ethnic groups and has attended many workshops and

events where it has been able to publicise its services and encourage new trainees to join.

16. Triangle Training has a policy of continuous improvement. The company acknowledges that one of the consequences of planning for inspection was to make it aware that there was a gap between staff's awareness of and their implementation of the equal opportunities policy. The result has been that several staff have already completed further training in equal opportunities, with the rest to follow. As a direct result of that training one of the assessors has identified a gap in trainees' knowledge of equal opportunities and has put together a proposal to rectify this. It has been discussed with the other staff and the company plans to put it into practice very shortly.

17. Early-years care and education is heavily regulated. This covers health and safety and equal opportunities. Most of the legislation covers the needs of the children not of the staff. Equal opportunities is an area where it is often assumed by Triangle Training's staff that there will be no problems because of the nature of the work and the content of the childcare NVQ, and it is being overlooked in the workplace. Where problems or issues arise with trainees they are dealt with quickly and effectively, but this is a reactive policy towards equal opportunities. There is very little reinforcement of equal opportunities in the workplace by visiting assessors, either with the trainee or with the employer. There is no formal monitoring of equal opportunities and therefore no information on which to base future policy. This has been recognised as an issue and Triangle Training has recently started gathering some statistics concerning achievement and reasons for leaving. These will be used to guide future equal opportunities policy. Triangle Training has also recognised that the relationship between the company, the trainee and the employer must include an awareness of equal opportunities and its impact on the trainee.

18. Trainees lack awareness of how equal opportunities directly relates to them as individuals. There is very little emphasis on equal opportunities during induction. Trainees are asked to tick a box to indicate that they are aware of equal opportunities but a copy of the policy is not included in the induction pack. Most of the trainees who were interviewed had a copy of the employer's policy, which is part of the information pack they received when they started work. Very often the policy related to the children rather than the staff. When questioned about equal opportunities, trainees had a very clear understanding of the rights of the children in their care, but were often vague as to how policy affected them. They knew what the grievance process was but they usually related it to problems with assessment rather than to any wider issues. Progress reviews focused on achievement of the NVQ rather than wider issues which could incorporate equal opportunities. The poor practice box demonstrates not only the lack of awareness by the employer but also the ignorance of the trainee in relation to equal opportunities.

Trainee support

Grade 3

19. All trainees are employed. They work in private day nurseries, schools, playgroups or out of school clubs in urban and rural areas of the West Midlands, Northamptonshire and Shropshire. When they have vacancies for childcare trainees, employers approach Triangle Training. Triangle Training publicises vacancies through the careers service and advertisements in an appropriate local newspaper. Some trainees are referred directly by the careers service. Occasionally an employer will approach Triangle Training to train and assess an existing member of its staff. All applicants are interviewed. At the interview, the company makes an initial assessment of their aptitude and motivation for work with children. In addition, information is collected about applicants' existing skills, educational achievements, qualifications and relevant occupational experience. All trainees have a two-stage induction to the workplace, the training provider and their training programme. A training agreement, which is signed by all parties, gives details of the responsibilities of employers, trainees and the providers of training and assessment. Assessors undertake progress-review sessions every two or three weeks. These are used to check that trainees understand the content of the induction programme and to identify any needs trainees may have for support, advice or guidance. During their training, trainees are offered advice about employment in childcare occupations at local and national level and about how they may improve their employment prospects.

20. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report. They considered some to be normal practice or descriptions of the support provided. The weaknesses identified by inspectors were not identified in the report although they were referred to in the text. The grade at inspection was lower than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective pastoral support
- ◆ good support for trainees with additional needs
- ◆ good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment
- ◆ inadequate progress reviews

21. Triangle Training staff are committed to ensuring that all trainees achieve the objectives of their training programmes and a vocational qualification. Trainees find staff can be approached easily for advice, guidance or support. All staff responsible for reviewing trainees' progress give trainees telephone numbers so that they can directly contact them at any time. All staff work flexibly. They often

undertake extra visits to trainees at their workplace and contact or visit trainees at home when necessary. All trainers and assessors employed by Triangle Training work beyond their contracted hours to give trainees support and guidance.

22. Progress reviews are undertaken every two or three weeks and more frequently if necessary. This exceeds the TEC's contractual requirements. When problems emerge, such as non-attendance at training sessions or poor attendance or motivation at work, Triangle Training's staff respond swiftly. They carefully investigate the circumstances with the trainee and the employer to decide the best way of supporting the trainee to achieve his or her training plan. Arrangements have been made to send one trainee lacking motivation on a special course to improve confidence and commitment to training. The trainee subsequently returned to the programme and progressed successfully. Another trainee was frightened about using public transport to attend her off-the-job training sessions at night. Her assessor initially accompanied the trainee to reduce her anxiety and help her gain confidence. The trainee is now able to travel independently to training sessions.

23. If trainees leave their programme early because of personal circumstances such as domestic problems, pregnancy or illness they are contacted to see if there are ways of keeping them on the programme by varying their completion dates or helping them rejoin the programme at a later date. Some trainees who have moved house or changed employers during training have been assisted to obtain proper accreditation for their progress while registered with Triangle Training. If necessary, Triangle Training refers trainees to other agencies such as social services or the careers service for additional specialist help or guidance.

24. Few trainees have been identified as requiring significant additional support. At initial assessment or in the course of training some trainees have been identified as requiring special support as a result of physical disability such as severe deafness or very poor eyesight. Others have been found to have serious problems in understanding training or assessment documents or in expressing themselves in writing. Triangle Training's staff have responded energetically to provide additional support. They have provided additional help with communication such as a signer and interpreter for a deaf trainee. Warning lights have been included in the workplace. This makes the trainee aware of phones or doorbells ringing. Training and assessment materials in large print have been provided for trainees with poor eyesight. When necessary the company has approached specialists such as disability advisors to see how support needs can be met effectively. As a result trainees with severe disabilities have been assisted to train in a normal working environment and achieve a vocational qualification. None of Triangle Training's training staff have specialist qualifications in working with trainees who need additional support. Both owners, who are very active in the day-to-day work of the training company, have extensive experience and expertise in working with young people with learning difficulties and are available to advise and guide their training staff.

25. Among trainees starting programmes between 1997 and 2000, the number completing their modern apprenticeship or national traineeship has been

consistently high. In 1997-98, 51 modern apprentices and 15 national trainees started their programme. Ten trainees left their programme early without a qualification, giving a retention rate of 81 per cent. In 1998-99, the number of trainees starting increased to 149 and the retention rate was 86 per cent. In 1999-2000, the high retention rates for modern apprentices and national trainees were maintained. Twenty-five trainees started other programmes in 1997-98 and the retention rate achieved was similar to that for modern apprentices and national trainees. Of the 32 trainees starting job-route programmes, 18 completed their individual training plans and 16 of these also achieved an NVQ at level 2 or 3 and started a job.

26. The current procedures for initial assessment were introduced in May 2000. At their initial interview applicants are questioned about their understanding of childcare and their reasons for wishing to train. Interviewers ask questions to assess trainees' aptitude. A questionnaire is used to collect information about trainees' previous education qualifications, occupational experience and achievement of key skills. This information is used to identify any training support needs the trainees may have and determine the workplaces in which they are most likely to be successful.

27. The collection of information at initial assessment lacks rigour. Heavy reliance is placed on intuitive questioning. Information on a trainee's disabilities or learning support needs is entirely dependent on self-reporting by the trainee. There is no system for determining whether self-reported needs or needs identified by employers are based on a reliable and accurate understanding of the trainee's previous training or occupational history. No use is made of relevant objective testing such as a skills scan. No member of Triangle Training's staff has experience or is qualified to use or devise reliable, objective tests. No use is made of external organisations with expertise which may clarify or assist in an accurate initial assessment.

28. Reviews of trainees' progress are frequent. They combine review of trainees' progress towards their NVQ with often brief consideration of other concerns which a trainee may have. Some reviews are rushed. Trainees sometimes find it difficult to find an opportunity to raise issues which are not concerned with immediate training or assessment. Assessors rarely use review sessions to make an overall assessment of a trainee's progress or consider the effectiveness of previous actions designed to assist the trainee or make the trainee more aware of his or her rights and responsibilities. Individual training plans are treated as documents used for audit purposes. They are seldom available to the assessor or trainee during a progress-review session and are not used as working documents to monitor and record action or revisions to the initial training plan. Some employers and supervisors are not involved routinely in the progress-review sessions and have no opportunity to contribute feedback and make observations of their own. During inspection one review took place in a noisy, crowded environment, which made it difficult for all involved to participate effectively.

29. At the beginning of their training, all trainees receive a two-stage induction to the NVQ system, the workplace and grievance procedures. Some attention is given

to equal opportunities. Stage one is undertaken by the recruitment officer and stage two is undertaken at the first progress-review session by the reviewer, who is also the trainees' assessor. All trainees receive a copy of the trainees' information pack, which includes the grievance procedure. At subsequent progress-review sessions the trainees' understanding of the content of their induction is checked through questioning and use of a formal induction checklist. There is little systematic reinforcement of trainees' knowledge and understanding of all of the content of induction. Induction to the NVQ system and portfolio-building is well remembered but trainees rarely recall consideration of equal opportunities as forming part of induction.

Management of training

Grade 2

30. Triangle Training began providing training for its own staff, gaining a contract with Northamptonshire CCTE and Birmingham and Solihull TEC in 1997-98. In the following year, the company gained a contract with Shropshire CCTE. It now provides training in four TEC areas, having gained a contract with Sandwell TEC in the current contract year. The company is owned by two partners, one of whom acts as overall manager of the business. The other is responsible for recruitment and administration. The company employs 14 staff, most of whom work from home. One of these acts as internal verifier and quality manager. Three full-time and six part-time assessors are responsible to one of the partners, through the internal verifier and quality manager. Some of the assessors also undertake training sessions. Four members of staff work in recruitment and administration and are accountable to the other partner. Off-the-job training sessions are held on a weekly basis for all trainees, using privately hired rooms in the different local areas. Triangle Training was accredited as an Investor in People in March 2000.

31. The self-assessment report identified 11 strengths and four weaknesses. Most of the strengths merely described the way in which the company approaches different aspects of the management of training and reflected no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with two strengths. None of the identified weaknesses were agreed with and inspectors identified one additional weakness. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training for new assessors
- ◆ good staff-development opportunities
- ◆ effective internal communications
- ◆ good use of data to manage programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of clarity among employers about responsibilities for on-the-job training

32. Staff-recruitment procedures comply with legislation. Staff have appropriate qualifications in their occupational area and some also have training qualifications. Staff induction includes an explanation of the company's policies and procedures. All staff understand these and use them consistently. Assessors continue their induction with a two-week programme when they shadow more experienced colleagues, gaining knowledge and experience of how assessment is provided. During this time, the experienced assessor reports, each day, to the internal verifier on the new member of staff's performance. The internal verifier then gives daily feedback to the new assessors to help them improve their practice.

33. All staff are appraised twice every year. The appraisal reviews their progress against agreed performance targets and identifies training needs. Timescales are set, and met, for actions arising from the appraisal. A wide range of training and development opportunities is available for staff, including administrators. These include computer training, assessor and training qualifications and courses aimed at helping staff to support trainees with special training needs and those with problems of motivation. New staff attend the training sessions provided for trainees, which are also available, without charge, to employers and other staff from the nurseries.

34. Internal communications are good. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and how their jobs are linked to those of other colleagues. There are monthly assessors' meetings and recruitment officers' meetings. The assessors' meetings are used to monitor individual trainees' progress and to discuss any identified problems. Both meetings look at progress towards individual staff's targets and the TEC's targets. In addition, all staff regularly meet together, when information is shared about trainees' progress, changes in policies and procedures and any new developments. All meetings are minuted and staff receive copies. Trainers meet twice each year to discuss and plan the company's training sessions. They amend these in the light of their own experience and comments received from trainees. Meetings are well attended and staff feel that their contributions are valued. Success is celebrated, with social evenings and other rewards, paid for by Triangle Training. There are effective systems to ensure that staff in all geographical areas receive up-to-date information. Managers are available by telephone and all staff report that requests for information and support are met speedily. Changes to procedures are sent out to staff, to ensure that they all have up-to-date information and are using the correct documents. Memoranda are used to keep staff informed of changes and urgent matters which arise between meetings.

35. A wide range of data is collected and collated. Management information is used to identify problems, for example in trainees' retention or the quality of particular training sessions. Where this occurs, prompt action is taken to investigate the problems and, if possible, resolve them.

36. Employers sign a training agreement, which stipulates that they must allow trainees adequate time for training and assessment. This requirement is normally observed in respect of assessment, although some managers have reported that

they will not be able to release staff for daytime training sessions, which are due to start shortly. The training agreement does not specify the employer's responsibilities in relation to training in the workplace. The lack of involvement by employers in trainees' progress reviews means that opportunities are missed to reinforce the extent of their responsibility. Most employers do not provide on-the-job training, other than sessions on first aid, fire prevention and manual handling, which are required by regulatory authorities. Each employer receives a file from Triangle Training, which includes information on the NVQ process and the different programmes which trainees are undertaking. Newsletters to employers have recently been introduced, supplying similar information and also giving details of the key skills qualification. However, many employers do not recall the content of these documents. They do not have a good understanding of the programme which their trainees are following. Where new managers are appointed in nurseries which already have trainees, they do not always receive an individual induction into their responsibilities for on-the-job training.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

37. Triangle has a comprehensive quality assurance folder which includes policy statements, procedures relating to trainees, training and assessment, and administration. The folder includes standard documents for all the activities of the company. The system is reviewed as and when needed, at least annually, and changes made as necessary. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with one of the partners, assisted by the quality assurance co-ordinator, who oversees the quality assurance of training and assessment. Triangle Training complies with the requirements of both the awarding body, the TECs and CCTEs. The self-assessment report identified many strengths and four weaknesses. Many of the strengths were seen as no more than normal practice and most of the weaknesses had been remedied before inspection. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of well-documented policies and procedures
- ◆ strong commitment to quality assurance
- ◆ good use of feedback and observation to improve training
- ◆ prompt action to remedy weaknesses

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate use of data to measure trends
- ◆ lack of verification until completion of portfolios

38. The company's policies and procedures are detailed in a manual stored at the head office. Each member of staff has a smaller version of the manual, with

documents relevant to their work role. Each procedure is signed and dated by a partner and issue numbers indicate that a series of reviews has taken place. Many procedures include measurable targets for when and how often activities will take place. Staff all took part in the writing of the manual three years before inspection and participate in the regular updating. Staff use the procedures regularly and are familiar with how the internal auditing procedure operates. Monitoring sheets are used to record the results of monitoring visits and interviews with trainees, to ensure that staff are working to company procedures. New members of staff are introduced to the quality assurance systems and are clear on the aspects which apply to their job roles. Changes are communicated to staff through memoranda.

39. There is a strong commitment in the company to ensuring that training is good and that trainees are provided with a good and steadily improving service. Quality assurance systems have been in place since the company was established. Quality assurance is a standing agenda item at the three-weekly staff meetings and minutes show that discussion is regular and action taken. The company is self-critical and weaknesses identified have resulted in innovative projects to remedy them; for example, the company provides workshops to inform and involve employers in the assessment of key skills in the workplace. There is a culture of openness in the company and individuals are confident to raise and deal with shortcomings without fear of reprisal or ridicule. All staff were involved in the compilation of the self-assessment report through team days and commenting on the final draft. The report was discussed at each staff meeting until completion and then the action plan was discussed at a meeting. The self-assessment report was largely accurate in the grades given. Inspectors agreed with all the grades except one, which was lower. Trainees' and employers' evaluations are collected by post twice yearly, in March and September. In addition, questionnaires are sent out when trainees leave and trainees evaluate each training session. Both parties are encouraged and reminded to return these and rates of return are good. Information is responded to on an individual basis and responses are collated and discussed at meetings.

40. Training sessions are observed twice a year by the quality co-ordinator. The programme of observations ensures that each trainer is observed and that each of the programmes of 20 sessions is also observed. Written and verbal feedback is given to staff and the feedback discussed with the manager responsible for quality. Feedback from trainees is gathered at the end of each training session and the results collated. Trainers meet every six months specifically to review and make improvements to the existing programme. Data are kept on attendance at each session. The results of monitoring, attendance and feedback forms the agenda for the meetings. An action plan is produced and changes made to training in time for the next programme. This has resulted in the use of more innovative teaching methods and content of sessions, and updating of training materials. It also facilitates the sharing of good practice

41. Prompt action is taken to remedy weaknesses. Employers evaluate the programmes twice each year. Evaluation sheets are read immediately by the quality co-ordinator. Any negative comments are responded to by telephone within a week and if necessary a visit is made to the employer to discuss and resolve the issues. Following visits from the external verifier an action plan is produced and

sent to each assessor. The quality co-ordinator immediately includes the action points in the monitoring visits. Complaints are dealt with swiftly and recorded effectively. Employers and trainees both speak of the rapidity with which issues are dealt and the good access to staff through visits or telephone. Those trainees who leave early are followed up through questionnaire and by telephone. This immediate response has resulted in some trainees continuing on the programmes rather than leaving.

42. Triangle Training has in recent months started to collect comprehensive data on trainees' achievement, retention and destination. Information is currently held for individual trainees and has not been used to identify trends in achievement and retention, which could then be used to improve the training provision. The company has plans to do this. Internal verification is the responsibility of the quality co-ordinator. Observation of assessors and complete portfolio verification are thorough and regular. Good records are kept and the company meets the awarding body's requirements. However, very few portfolios are regularly sampled and most are verified only on completion. The company now has a plan to verify portfolios after every two units.