



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 2000

West Anglia Training Association Limited

SUMMARY

West Anglia Training Association is a group training association providing youth training for over 175 member companies. Training in engineering is good with good retention and achievement rates. Training in business administration is satisfactory, although retention is low. There is well-co-ordinated on- and off-the job training but some missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace. All four of the generic aspects of the training are good. There is frequent monitoring of employers for equal opportunities. However, promotional material provides few positive images of trainees from under-represented groups. Trainees receive effective inductions to their training and the workplace. There is a good staff-development programme. Management and quality assurance information are collected and effectively analysed. Internal verification does not comply with recognised good practice. Self-assessment is an integral part of the company's quality assurance system and has led to many improvements.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention and achievement rates in engineering
- ◆ strong emphasis on health and safety
- ◆ thorough and effective progress reviews
- ◆ frequent monitoring of employers for equality of opportunity
- ◆ good inductions to training and the workplace
- ◆ good staff-development programme
- ◆ effective corrective action to address quality issues
- ◆ self-assessment leading to continuing improvements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some assessments lack rigour
- ◆ low retention rates in business administration
- ◆ few positive images of under-represented groups in promotional material
- ◆ weak initial assessment in business administration
- ◆ some weak internal verification practice
- ◆ few performance targets set

INTRODUCTION

1. West Anglia Training Association Limited (WATA) was formed in 1977 by the amalgamation of two group training associations. It is a non-profit making company and is a registered charity. The company was based in St Neots in Cambridgeshire before moving to premises in Bedfordshire. It then moved to its current premises in Huntingdon. The premises include training rooms, workshops and offices. The company employs 22 full-time and three part-time staff. The youth training section consists of four full-time staff. Two other full-time staff from another section within the company act as assessors and internal verifiers for youth training. As a group training association, the company has over 175 member companies. Youth training accounts for around 14 per cent of turnover. The majority of the company's income comes from providing a variety of training courses to member companies. WATA specialises in health and safety, technical and engineering skills and management training.

2. The company has contracts with Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (GPCCTE), Cambridgeshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Hertfordshire TEC to provide modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training in engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service for young people. The company also has a contract with another training provider to train a small number of modern apprentices in engineering under the other provider's contract with Norfolk and Waveney TEC. There are 128 trainees, of whom 111 are modern apprentices, including six subcontracted from another provider, four are on national traineeships and 13 are on other training programmes. The inspection covered the training provided in engineering and business administration. Trainees are employed by 43 member companies, located throughout eastern England. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to 21 further education colleges and two private training providers, one of which specialises in trainees with disabilities. The Training Standards Council (TSC) has inspected four of the subcontractors used by WATA for off-the-job training within the last year. Satisfactory grades or better were awarded for the occupational areas at all four subcontractors in which WATA places trainees. These subcontractors train almost half WATA's trainees.

3. Cambridge, a short distance to the east of WATA's premises, is a centre for high-technology industry, particularly electronics and information technology. Peterborough, a similar distance to the north, is a centre for manufacturing and distribution. Many of the businesses in the area are very small. Seventy per cent of all those employed work for businesses with fewer than five employees and 29 per cent for small to medium sized companies with fewer than 200 employees. Unemployment in Cambridgeshire is 2.1 per cent and in Hertfordshire it is 1.8 per cent. These are much lower than the national average of 4.1 per cent. In Cambridgeshire, 2.3 per cent of the population are from an ethnic minority



background and in the eastern region of England it is 3.2 per cent. In Cambridgeshire, 52.3 per cent of 16-year-olds achieve five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above. In Peterborough it is 41.1 per cent. The average for England is 47.9 per cent. The proportion of those aged 16 and 17 who enter government-sponsored training in eastern England is around three-quarters of the average for England as a whole.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. WATA produced its third self-assessment report prior to the inspection. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process. Staff have attended three training workshops on self-assessment. Evidence forming the basis of the judgements in the self-assessment report has been gathered directly from staff, trainees, employers and subcontractors, as well as from written sources. The self-assessment process is rigorous and the report provides a thorough description of the company's training programmes. The inspectors found many weaknesses that were not identified in the self-assessment report. Despite this, the inspectors awarded a number of grades higher than those in the report and only one grade lower.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 14 days inspecting the training at WATA. The inspectors interviewed 45 trainees and six staff from WATA. They visited 17 employers and five subcontractors and interviewed 15 workplace supervisors and nine of the subcontractors' staff. Inspectors examined trainees' files, portfolios of evidence, quality assurance and management records including the minutes of meetings, assessment reports, internal and external verification reports and other management files. Inspectors observed eight progress reviews, one assessment, two internal verification visits to employers and one training session.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

6. WATA offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training programmes in engineering. The company is an approved centre for the award of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering manufacture at level 4, engineering production, engineering maintenance, engineering installation and commissioning and technical services at levels 2 and 3 and engineering manufacture (foundation) at level 2. There are 120 trainees, of whom 114 are on government funded programmes with WATA. Of the latter, 100 are modern apprentices, four are on national traineeships and 10 are on other training programmes. The other six trainees are modern apprentices being trained for another training provider on a subcontracted basis. Sixty-seven trainees are on mechanical engineering programmes, 42 on electrical engineering and five on technical services programmes. There are also six modern apprentices being trained on a subcontract basis from a further education college that has its own TEC contract. Five are working towards qualifications in electrical engineering, while the sixth is on a mechanical engineering programme.

7. All trainees are employed by companies in the east of England. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to 21 further education colleges. Trainees working towards level 2 qualifications attend college full time for a period that ranges from 16 to 36 weeks depending on the qualification. Most trainees working towards qualifications at levels 3 and 4 attend college for one day per week. The training provided by the colleges includes theory and practical workshop sessions. At college, trainees work towards a number of examination-based vocational qualifications including national and higher national certificates. Assessment and internal verification of NVQs at level 2 is subcontracted to the colleges. The TSC has inspected three of the colleges used by WATA within the last year. Engineering was good in one of the colleges and satisfactory in the other two. Thirty-six per cent of trainees attend these three colleges. Three staff from WATA carry out assessment and internal verification of NVQs at levels 3 and 4. They are qualified as assessors and internal verifiers. They are also occupationally qualified and experienced. In the last three years, 73 per cent of trainees left, having completed their training programme. The inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and found others. A number of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report refer to generic rather than occupational aspects of the training. Inspectors awarded the same grade as the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good subcontractor resources
- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ strong emphasis on health and safety
- ◆ effective integration of key skills into NVQ

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some assessment practice lacks rigour
- ◆ slow progress for some trainees

8. Subcontractors have well-equipped workshops, and a wide range of modern equipment. Good learning support materials, including learning packs, are used effectively to help trainees learn at their own pace. Trainees are able to work on their own initiative using modern, computerised training systems. These also allow trainees to carry out self-assessment of their own progress. Achievement and retention rates are high. Most trainees have training plans covering three or more years. Seventy-three per cent of trainees left over the last three years having completed their training, and 81 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ at level 2. Fifteen per cent of trainees who started training within the last three years left before completing their programmes. Ninety-eight per cent of the trainees who started training in the last twelve months are still with WATA. Trainees are visited frequently in the workplace by staff from WATA, in most cases every eight weeks. Trainees acknowledge the value of frequent contact with training officers as a

motivating factor. Trainees' portfolios of evidence are compiled to a high standard. The range and standard of evidence are good. Most work placements offer a wide variety of engineering skills for trainees. The wide range of tasks available in the workplace exceeds those required to meet the qualification requirements. Where employers are not able to offer sufficient breadth of experience, trainees acquire the additional necessary evidence either at college or by working on a temporary basis with another employer. Trainees have work-based mentors who work with the trainee and WATA to help the trainee identify and record as much evidence as possible. Most trainees have a period of working time set aside to work on their portfolios.

9. Health and safety is emphasised at all stages of training. The provider sets high standards and makes sure that trainees are kept well informed about health and safety regulations. Trainees carry out their own risk assessments. They are very conscious of health and safety issues and have a good understanding of the appropriate health and safety practices in their place of work. The review process includes a health and safety questionnaire, which covers a variety of topics. The answers are recorded and used as evidence of competence for units of the NVQ. Key skills are well integrated with the NVQs. Good use is made of evidence derived from jobs carried out in the workplace. Opportunities to integrate key skills into workplace activity are frequently discussed with trainees and employers. Employers arrange additional tasks for trainees to increase the opportunities for gathering evidence of key skills. One employer has arranged team-building programmes at weekends to build confidence and improve communication skills. The importance of key skills is emphasised to trainees. Four members of WATA's staff have received training in key skills.

10. There is a lack of rigour in workplace assessments. The amount of assessment by direct observation of trainees in the workplace varies significantly. Some assessments are almost entirely based on witness testimony by mentors or workplace supervisors who are not qualified assessors. Some evidence has been assessed without having been appropriately signed by a competent person. In most cases, formal assessment does not occur until all units are completed. Trainees are not set demanding targets at reviews. Some trainees are taking considerably longer to complete their qualifications than the time identified in their training plan. Review documentation lacks emphasis on short-term target setting. Some trainees require an extra two years to gather the necessary evidence.

Business administration

Grade 3

11. WATA offers modern apprenticeships and other training programmes in administration and information technology, leading to qualifications in administration at levels 2 and 3, use of information technology at level 2 and use and support of information technology at level 3. There are six trainees. Four are modern apprentices in business administration, one is a modern apprentice in information technology and one is working towards an NVQ in administration at level 2.

Trainees attend off-the-job training at one of two further education colleges or a private training provider for one day per week. The TSC has inspected the two colleges and the private training provider within the last year. Business administration was good at one of the colleges and satisfactory at the other and at the private training provider. One of the modern apprentices is working towards a qualification in personnel practice, one is working towards a national certificate in laboratory science administration and one is working towards a higher national certificate in computer science alongside their NVQ qualifications. All trainees are employed by a variety of employers ranging from large national organisations to small companies. One trainee is assessed in the workplace by a training officer from WATA who is a qualified assessor. All other assessment is subcontracted to the providers of the off-the-job training. All subcontracted assessors hold appropriate qualifications. Trainees provide written evidence from the workplace supplemented by some direct-observation evidence from the training officer. All internal verification is subcontracted. Trainees receive regular visits in the workplace from the WATA assessor who also carries out trainees' quarterly progress reviews. Of the trainees who started training in the last three years, 47 per cent are still with WATA. The remainder left before completing their training. A total of 28 trainees has left in the last three years, some of whom started before March 1997. One completed a modern apprenticeship. Trainees have achieved a further seven NVQs at level 3 and four at level 2. The inspectors did not agree with the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade.

POOR PRACTICE

Some of the sheets referring evidence of a trainees' competence to the appropriate NVQ requirement are completed in pencil by the trainee and have been assessed and signed by the assessor, internal verifier and in some cases the external verifier without any comment being made. In one instance, the trainee had also signed the evidence reference sheet in pencil. The sheet had been assessed and verified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good portfolios of evidence
- ◆ wide range of off-the-job training
- ◆ regular unit accreditation
- ◆ well-planned and co-ordinated training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient learning opportunities at some employers
- ◆ low retention rates

12. Most trainees' portfolios contain a variety of good evidence. They are well presented with each unit set out in a professional manner. Where appropriate, all work is typed using a word processor. There is clear and detailed referencing of evidence. Trainees are encouraged to set out their personal statements in report format with the use of images and emphasis to display information. Good use is made of cross-referenced evidence from various units of the NVQ. As soon as a trainee considers they are ready, they submit their unit evidence for assessment. Assessors provide the trainee with thorough and detailed comments on the work

POOR PRACTICE

This is an example of poor utilisation of work-based evidence. A modern apprentice has achieved a level 3 NVQ but still needs to complete the necessary key skills units. The trainee is still working towards a higher national certificate. The action plan for this trainee requires the remaining key skills evidence to be gathered from the work done off the job towards the higher national certificate rather than from the workplace. Assessment for the key skills is also to be done off the job.

that has been assessed. All trainees receive a wide range of off-the-job training which goes beyond that required to complete their training programmes. In many cases, the training leads to additional occupational qualifications at various levels in areas such as text processing, including audio word processing, and the use of spreadsheets. There is a wide choice of options for additional training and there is no restriction on the number of additional qualifications a trainee may obtain. Trainees work at their own pace. Some trainees receive additional training in the use of industry-standard computer software and first aid from their employers. Trainees are assessed throughout their training and are motivated by the receipt of certificates issued by the awarding body as each unit of the NVQ is completed. Training is well planned and co-ordinated. Most trainees have on-the-job training plans closely related to the NVQ content. Before trainees start each unit of their NVQ, they receive a guide which comprehensively explains the requirements of the unit. They then agree an action plan with their assessor. This is based on the types of evidence they expect to get from the workplace. Action plans are updated as trainees progress. Trainees' duties in the workplace are generally determined by the requirements of the NVQ. Off-the-job training is changed to reflect any change in trainees' duties and any gaps in the evidence available from the workplace. This is co-ordinated through the review process. Trainees, employers and subcontractors are clear about the short-term achievement targets set.

13. Opportunities for trainees to have their competence assessed in the workplace are not taken. Trainees undertake a variety of tasks that provide good evidence for their NVQ and key skills units but these activities are missed. Trainees have regular reviews in the workplace by the training officer but there is no assessment during these visits. The training officer observes trainees carrying out various tasks but this evidence is recorded only as witness testimony. The subcontracted assessor does not carry out assessments in the workplace. The majority of evidence is drawn from employers' witnessing a trainee's performance. This applies both to the NVQ and to the key skills units. There are insufficient learning opportunities in some workplaces. Some trainees' jobs do not offer them sufficient opportunity to gain the skills required to complete their NVQ. For example, one modern apprentice in information technology works in a laboratory and needs to achieve a level 3 NVQ to meet the requirements of the modern apprenticeship. The information technology content of the trainees' job is extremely limited and the trainee is having difficulty in producing sufficient evidence for an NVQ at level 2. The trainee has only achieved two units in eighteen months. Another trainee is working towards an NVQ at level 3 in administration. This qualification includes a supervisory component. The trainees' current role does not allow this component of the qualification to be achieved. Retention rates are low. Of those trainees who started training in the last three years, 53 per cent left before completing their training. One trainee has not done any work towards achieving the NVQ for over eight months in order to concentrate on a higher national certificate.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

14. WATA has an equal opportunities policy and procedures and staff are required to sign a form indicating that they have read and understood them. The list of signatures is kept with the master copy of the policy. The company's managing director is responsible for equal opportunities. Trainees are introduced to equal opportunities during their induction. The induction also covers the company's complaints and disciplinary procedures. Staff in the youth training department have had training in equal opportunities. WATA requires all employers and subcontractors to have an equal opportunities policy. This is checked during the company's pre-placement audit visit. The training centre is in a single storey building and provides access and washroom facilities for people with disabilities. The availability of facilities for those with disabilities is made clear on course-booking forms. Six per cent of engineering trainees are women and 2.6 per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic backgrounds. In Cambridgeshire, the proportion of the population from minority ethnic backgrounds is 2.3 per cent and in the government office for the eastern region it is 3.2 per cent. The self-assessment report clearly describes the company's approach to equal opportunities. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths in the self-assessment report but not the weakness, which had been addressed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is higher than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular evaluation of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy
- ◆ effective complaints procedure
- ◆ frequent monitoring of employers in terms of equal opportunities
- ◆ staff training in equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few positive images of under-represented groups in promotional material
- ◆ little coverage of equal opportunities in staff induction

15. The equal opportunities policy is reviewed twice a year and updated as necessary. There is frequent evaluation of the policy and its implementation. Trainees are questioned on equal opportunities issues during their progress reviews. There is an equal opportunities action plan. All learning materials are checked for compliance with the equal opportunities policy before they can be used. The results are recorded. Subcontractors are required to submit their equal opportunities policies and action plans to WATA. The implementation of the action plan is monitored during the regular meetings with subcontractors. There is an effective

GOOD PRACTICE

WATA carry out a risk assessment for trainees with a disability. In one case this has led to the provision of a specially designed desk and chair for the trainee at work and improvements in facilities for wheelchair users at the training centre.

complaints procedure. Trainees are aware of the procedure and feel that they would use it should the need arise. On the few occasions when problems have arisen, they have been dealt with swiftly and fairly. Employers' implementation of equal opportunities is regularly monitored. When employers recruit trainees they send WATA details of applicants, those selected for interview, those attending interview and those selected. WATA then analyse the information to check that there is no discrimination apparent in employers' recruitment processes. The company carries out the same procedure on its own recruitment data. Trainees are questioned on equal opportunities at their employer's during reviews. Supervisors are questioned and training officers make observations in the workplace. The company keeps records of equal opportunities monitoring visits to employers. When issues are raised the company's corrective action procedure is used to resolve the problem swiftly and fairly. The company carries out risk assessments for trainees with a disability. All staff in the youth training section have had training in equal opportunities. Refresher training is included in their training and development plans.

16. Some promotional literature does not promote positive images of under-represented groups. For example, the front cover of one brochure shows a group of men and women from different ethnic backgrounds yet shows mainly stereotypical images inside. The company's web site also lacks positive images of under-represented groups. The staff induction programme contains little coverage of equal opportunities issues although staff are required to sign the equal opportunities policy. New staff are trained in equal opportunities but there is a period of time between their induction and the training when staff have not had a thorough introduction to equal opportunities from the company.

Trainee support**Grade 2**

17. Trainees are recruited through referrals from the careers service, advertisements in the press, careers fairs organised by schools and local companies. All applicants have an interview with a member of WATA's staff who has been trained in interviewing techniques. Applicants complete a self-assessment questionnaire on their requirements for additional learning support. Engineering applicants then take a basic skills assessment test. Trainees receive an induction to their training programme. This includes the preparation of an individual training plan. Three of WATA's staff are qualified in the accreditation of prior achievement. Employers also provide trainees with an induction to the workplace. Health and safety forms a significant part of both induction sessions. Training officers visit trainees at their workplace within three weeks of the start of training. Health and safety issues raised during the trainees' induction are highlighted during this visit. Other aspects of the induction are also covered. Subsequent visits are made at intervals determined by the needs of the trainees. A formal progress review is held at least every 10 weeks. Training officers also visit trainees at the further education colleges that provide the off-the-job training. All trainees are given a list of contact numbers during their induction for use outside normal working hours. The youth

training manager has been trained in counselling techniques. A second member of staff is undertaking similar training. The training centre is a designated local resource centre by one of the awarding bodies and holds a large library of information on engineering qualifications, training and assessment. The inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and the one weakness in the self-assessment report. Inspectors identified a further strength and weakness and awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent, well-structured reviews
- ◆ swift identification and resolution of trainees' problems
- ◆ good induction to training and workplace
- ◆ all trainees employed

WEAKNESS

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees and employers are shown examples of recruitment advertisements taken from newspapers in which specific requirements of the job being advertised are highlighted. The highlighted portions are those that relate directly to key skills, such as: "must be able to work as part of a team" or "must be capable of dealing with members of the public". This emphasises the need for key skills in a wide range of employment opportunities to both trainees and employers.

18. Trainees receive well-structured progress reviews at least every 10 weeks. The interval between reviews is adjusted to meet the needs of the trainee. Trainees who are starting training or who are experiencing particular difficulties are reviewed more frequently. A report giving the date of each trainee's next review is given regularly to training officers. The reviews are thorough and take place in the workplace and in the subcontract colleges. Informal reviews are carried out when a training officer visits the trainee. Accurate records of reviews are kept. Employers and subcontractors are well informed on trainees' progress, although in engineering, employers do not attend every review. In business administration, employers are always present. Workplace reviews result in detailed targets that the trainee and employer have agreed. The subcontracted assessor is told of the targets. The trainees' individual training plans are updated if necessary. In engineering, trainees are questioned on health and safety issues at every review.

19. Problems identified during reviews or on other occasions are always promptly addressed. Staff are available to assist trainees at all times. Trainees are given a list of contacts for them to use out of normal hours if they require help. Trainees are aware of the contact numbers and make use of them. Trainees can contact their training officer whenever they have a problem and get immediate support. One trainee who uses a wheelchair has received considerable support. Office furniture has been specially purchased and adapted for the trainee. A voice-activated module has been added to the trainees' computer. This allows the trainee to dictate text into the computer as an alternative to using the keyboard, which the trainee finds difficult. Trainees receive a thorough induction both to their training and to their workplace. They receive a booklet that covers all the necessary information the trainee requires in detail. The aspects covered during induction are regularly reinforced during subsequent reviews. Trainees have good recall of their induction,

particularly the elements relating to health and safety and the complaints and disciplinary procedures. All trainees are employed. WATA works closely with its members to get trainees into employment. If trainees lose their jobs through no fault of their own, WATA is usually able to help them gain employment elsewhere.

20. There is inadequate initial assessment. Engineering trainees complete a basic skills assessment but the results are not used in the development of the individual's training plan. Business administration trainees are not initially assessed for basic skills. There is an initial assessment of key skills but this is not always used as a basis for the training plan even though 96 per cent of trainees are modern apprentices or on national traineeships.

Management of training

Grade 2

21. WATA has a business plan that is reviewed and updated regularly. There is a clear management structure within the company. Youth training is the responsibility of the youth training manager who reports to the managing director. A further five staff are involved in youth training. Three are full-time employees and they report to the youth training manager. The two others are part time, their main responsibilities being within other areas of WATA's operations. All staff have a job description. Four of the six staff working with trainees are qualified as assessors. Three are qualified as internal verifiers while a fourth is waiting for confirmation of the qualification from the awarding body. Three staff are qualified in the accreditation of prior achievement. No staff are qualified as trainers but four are currently working towards achieving training qualifications. All staff have an annual appraisal, which is used as a basis for their development and training plan. There is a formal meeting of youth training staff every three months. One of the two staff with a part-time role in youth training is a senior manager of the company and represents youth training on the senior management committee, which meets monthly. Minutes of management and staff meetings are kept and distributed to staff. Training staff visit employers and subcontractors regularly. All the company's staff meet once a year. There are procedures for staff recruitment and induction. The company has a computerised management information system. The inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report and found other strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a grade higher than that in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good communications with staff, subcontractors and employers
- ◆ effective staff development programme
- ◆ good use of management information

WEAKNESS

- ◆ some ineffective management of on-the-job training

22. WATA maintains good communications with employers and subcontractors. All parties are clear about their responsibilities for trainees' progress. Open discussion is encouraged at staff meetings. Actions are identified at these meetings. All training officers have mobile phones and there is a computerised messaging service for training officers. The system is monitored to make sure that messages have been picked up and action swiftly taken. Employers have regular communication with WATA concerning trainees' progress and achievements. Where problems are identified, they are acted on. For example, one employer has arranged for trainees to spend some time at another company to gain experience the employer is not able to provide. Subcontractors send a report to employers on their trainees every term. There are regular meetings with subcontractors at which the progress of each trainee is discussed. Detailed records of these meetings are kept.

23. There is an effective staff-development programme. Most staff are qualified as assessors, verifiers and in the accreditation of prior learning. Staff have long experience in training and are being trained as trainers. A member of staff has been trained in counselling skills and has gained the key skills practitioner award. The youth training manager is qualified in health and safety and is currently attending two courses to enhance his occupational skills. WATA make good use of their management information. Data are collected on trainees' achievements and progress from a variety of sources. Qualitative information on trainees is regularly collected from employers and subcontractors. Training officers use the information to monitor trainees, their training and assessment. Training officers are given lists of forthcoming review dates to allow them to plan their visits to trainees.

24. Managers take insufficient responsibility for the management of on-the-job training of some trainees. For these trainees, on-the-job training is mainly managed by their employer. Some trainees spend long periods on similar jobs. Other trainees spend some of their time at work on tasks that have little benefit to their NVQ. Training officers regularly monitor the training received for all trainees and identify gaps where there is insufficient evidence for the NVQ. Employers are informed of the gaps and appropriate training is provided. This does not always happen within a reasonable time period.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

25. WATA has a quality assurance policy and a set of procedures that cover all aspects of the company's operations. There is an internal audit procedure and the company monitors the implementation of the quality assurance system. There is a quality improvement plan that is part of the company's business plan. The company also has a corrective action procedure through which problems are resolved as they arise. The company regularly seeks the views of trainees, employers and staff on

the quality of the training given. Trainees' destinations on leaving are monitored. Trainees' reasons for leaving their training before completion are also monitored. Internal verification in engineering is carried out by qualified staff from WATA. Internal verification for business administration and customer service is subcontracted to qualified staff from a private training provider. Assessors meet quarterly during staff meetings. There are agreements with all subcontractors that identify the quality assurance arrangements. The self-assessment process involved all the staff from the youth training section. Trainees, employers and subcontractors were involved in the evaluation process. Staff attended three workshops on self-assessment organised by Greater Peterborough CCTE. The self-assessment report provides a thorough description of the company's operations. The judgements are based on a variety of evidence. In general, the self-assessment grades are lower than those awarded by the inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic and effective internal audit of quality assurance systems
- ◆ corrective-action procedures effectively implemented
- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees and employers
- ◆ well-established self-assessment leading to continuous improvement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some weak internal verification practice
- ◆ few performance targets set

26. The internal audit of the quality assurance system is systematic and effective. The sampling of the procedures being audited is thorough. Good records of the audit are kept. Any issues that are identified through the audit are dealt with quickly. There is corrective-action procedure that is used effectively to remedy any problems as they arise. Thorough records are kept of the actions taken. There is a tracking system and the process is monitored until the issue is signed off as having been resolved. The implementation of the corrective action process is audited. There is good use of the information gained from trainees and employers on the quality of the training programmes. Trainees' views regarding the training they receive are frequently sought. They have the opportunity to provide their views confidentially. The results are analysed, presented in graphical form (by a trainee who uses the results as evidence for their NVQ) and discussed at staff meetings. Employers' views are also sought annually and subjected to similar analysis and discussion. For example, at the last survey, 13 per cent of employers were not aware of the main key skills units. Further information has been given to employers on key skills. This includes newspaper advertisements in which the key skills requirements of vacancies have been highlighted.

27. WATA uses self-assessment as a main tool in continuous improvement. The

company has been using self-assessment as part of its quality assurance system for some years. The self-assessment process is thorough, uses a variety of evidence and leads to sound judgements. There have been a number of improvements in the quality of the training as a result of self-assessment. For example, retention rates in engineering have improved continuously over the last three years since they were identified as being unacceptably low and an action plan was developed to improve them.

28. There is some weak internal verification practice. A member of staff being trained as an internal verifier has not had their verifications counter-signed by a qualified internal verifier. Some internal verification records have not been signed by the internal verifier. Some records have not been signed by the assessor being verified and do not carry the assessors' registration number. Feedback is not always given to assessors following internal verification. The company sets itself few performance-improvement targets. Those it has are linked directly to meeting its contractual obligations with the TECs rather than improving the quality of the training. For example, not all subcontractors meet the terms of their agreement with WATA in respect of supplying quality assurance information. There are no targets for improvements in this area. There are no performance targets for individual staff members.