



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 2000

# CMS Training Services Ltd

## SUMMARY

CMS Training Services Ltd provides good foundation for work training. Training is well planned to meet the individual needs of trainees. The company offers satisfactory training in business administration and retailing and customer service. Trainees have access to well-structured training opportunities and many progress into employment. However trainees in these areas make slow progress towards their NVQs and key skills are insufficiently developed. Equality of opportunity is well managed and practice is effectively monitored. A high level of practical support is offered to trainees. Management and quality assurance arrangements within the company are good. Staff are committed to continuously improving training. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated. Some training and assessment practices are ineffective in some subject areas.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Foundation for work	2

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned training
- ◆ good progression into employment
- ◆ effective teamwork within the company
- ◆ high level of practical support for trainees
- ◆ wide range of initiatives to promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ clearly written policies and procedures
- ◆ good use of management information

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress of trainees towards achieving NVQs
- ◆ insufficient focus upon key skills requirements
- ◆ underdeveloped life skills programme
- ◆ ineffective training and assessment practices in some subject areas

## INTRODUCTION

1. CMS Training Services Ltd (CMS) was established in 1982. The company has training premises in Huddersfield and Batley. It is organised into two divisions: CMS Consultancy, which employs a team of consultants who undertake work both nationally and internationally; and CMS Vocational Skills Training, which offers government-funded training. The company employs 36 staff, 26 of whom provide training for young people and adults.

2. Youth training is funded through an agreement with Calderdale and Kirklees Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Adult training is funded both through the TEC and through the New Deal, for which the company has two subcontracting agreements. Through one contract, CMS works nationally with a large employer, providing training for employees who have been recruited to the employment option of the New Deal. Under the other contract, CMS provides training locally through the voluntary sector option. In the past 12 months, the company has been involved in projects funded through the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). The company works in partnership with a local college of further education but at the time of the inspection there were no collaborative programmes in operation.

3. At the time of the inspection, the company had 226 trainees. There were 14 modern apprentices, 57 national trainees and 44 trainees on other government-funded youth training programmes. National trainees, modern apprentices and 29 youth trainees are working towards NVQs in retailing and customer service, and business administration. Within foundation for work, 15 youth trainees are on life skills programmes which are provided as part of the Learning Gateway. Most adult trainees who are funded through the TEC are working towards basic skills awards. Some are also working towards NVQs in retailing, distribution and business administration. Trainees who are funded through the New Deal are working towards NVQs in business administration and customer service. At the time of the inspection, there were 66 trainees on the New Deal and 45 adults on programmes funded by the TEC.

4. CMS serves the district of Kirklees, which has a population of just over 378,000. The population's profile shows a higher proportion of young residents than the national average. The 1991 census indicates that 91 per cent of the population is white. The number of people from minority ethnic groups is rising. In some areas of Kirklees, over 20 per cent of the population is from minority ethnic groups. Unemployment stands at 4.0 per cent (June 2000) compared with a national average of 3.5 per cent and a regional figure of 4.4 per cent. Recent falling levels of unemployment in the area have been attributed to the growth in the service industries. Manufacturing remains the main source of employment in the region. In Kirklees, 19 per cent of residents are employed in skilled manual occupations. This is higher than the national average of 16 per cent. The area is



dominated by small and medium-sized employers. In 1995, just under 88 per cent of companies employed fewer than 25 people.

5. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 41.3 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Just under 70 per cent of young people continued to further education at the age of 16, and 14 per cent started a government-funded training programme.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. CMS’s vocational training manager led the preparation of the self-assessment report which was submitted before the inspection. All staff had contributed to the preparation of the report and to the development of the resulting action plan. By the time of the inspection, considerable progress had been made to address weaknesses which staff had identified. Inspectors found that the self-assessment report gave an accurate assessment of strengths and weaknesses in retailing and customer service and business administration. Inspectors awarded a higher grade for foundation for work than that given by the company. In the generic areas, action taken by the company to address weaknesses which had been identified in the self-assessment report resulted in inspectors awarding higher grades for management of training and quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with the grades given by the company for trainee support and equal opportunities.

7. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 18 days with the company in August 2000. Four inspectors visited trainees in the Kirklees area and one inspector spent two days with the New Deal clients in Sheffield and London. Inspectors observed training and progress review and assessment sessions which were held both in the training centres and in the workplace. Fifty-three trainees and 12 workplace supervisors were interviewed and 28 interviews were held with members of CMS’s staff. Trainees’ portfolios of work and evidence referred to in the company’s self-assessment report were examined in the company’s head office.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration			2			2
Retailing & customer service						
Foundation for work			4			4
<b>Total</b>			<b>6</b>			<b>6</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 3

8. There are 96 trainees in this occupational area working towards a level 2 or 3 NVQ in administration. Thirty are national trainees, eight are modern apprentices, 52 are New Deal clients, and six are on other vocational programmes. Most of the New Deal clients are following the employment option with a national employer and receive training at sites in Runcorn, Sheffield, Darlington and London. All the other trainees, including nine New Deal clients on the voluntary sector option, receive training at CMS’s sites in Huddersfield and Batley. Weekly off-the-job training sessions are offered at Huddersfield, providing theory training and support

for portfolio-development. Key skills sessions are also offered each week to modern apprentices and national trainees. Trainees are placed with a range of employers, reflecting the local economy. These include engineering and textile companies, hotels and government departments. New Deal clients following the employment option are employed on a one-year contract, and the target date for the completion of their NVQ corresponds to that date. Staff involved in training and assessing in this occupational area have suitable qualifications and occupational experience. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as the grade given by the company in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ careful selection of appropriate work placements
- ◆ good progression by trainees into employment
- ◆ well-structured off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ slow progress of trainees towards NVQs
- ◆ little involvement of supervisors in reviews and assessments
- ◆ poor development and assessment of key skills

9. CMS's staff give care and attention to obtaining placements appropriate to the needs of trainees. Prospective placements are carefully vetted and regularly monitored to ensure that they comply with, for example, health and safety regulations. Placements support the trainees' personal development. They offer opportunities for trainees to gather evidence for their NVQs, and gain experience of a range of business activities, such as sales, accounting and using information technology. Employers confirm the successful integration of trainees into workplace teams. New Deal clients following the employment option have gained in self-esteem and confidence through the provision of challenging work roles and responsibilities. There is a close working relationship between placement and training staff, who swiftly resolve issues which could affect the trainees' progress.

10. Many trainees proceed to permanent employment within their placement. Twelve New Deal clients following the employment option have successfully completed an NVQ since 1998. Nine of them have found permanent full-time employment with their company. At the time of the inspection, other New Deal clients were in the process of applying for full-time positions with this same organisation. In the year to April 1999, 64 per cent of youth trainees in the Huddersfield and Batley areas progressed to employment, and in the year to April 2000, 52 per cent of adult trainees gained employment, after an average of 18 weeks with CMS.

11. Off-the-job training is well structured. The focus of the training is on developing knowledge linked to NVQ units and key skills. Trainees enjoy these

sessions, which provide opportunities to clarify the evidence requirements of the NVQ, and to share experiences with each other on the evidence they need to collect for their NVQ. Off-the-job training sessions also help trainees to put together their portfolios. Trainees are encouraged to develop action plans and to identify target dates for the completion of units. Pro-formas provided by CMS help trainees in this. Trainees' portfolios show that the practice of action-planning and identifying targets is well established.

12. The achievement rate of qualifications among trainees is satisfactory. In the past year, over 62 per cent of trainees achieved an NVQ. But trainees' progress towards target qualifications is slow. At one site, for example, 23 trainees are currently working towards NVQs and at the time of the inspection none had completed any units, even though some have been on the programme for almost 12 months. Portfolios indicate that trainees are collecting and assembling appropriate evidence, but trainees are not being assessed as they progress. Assessment is not linked to the successful meeting of targets, and this serves to undermine the practice of planning and target-setting. Some trainees are confused as to the progress they are making. For those who leave the training programme early, there is no provision for the successful completion of individual units to be accredited.

13. Employers have little involvement in the implementation of training plans. Many attend progress review meetings with trainees and training staff, but they make little contribution to these meetings. There is a lack of knowledge and understanding of competency-based qualifications among employers. Inspectors found no evidence of employers' involvement in assessment.

14. The company is aware of the lack of progress towards the development and assessment of key skills on national traineeships and modern apprenticeships. Strategies have been introduced to address this concern, including providing support sessions which focus in particular upon developing the trainees' information technology and application of number skills. Key skills are not being successfully integrated into the trainees' programmes, nor are they being assessed regularly. Some trainees are uncertain about the nature of key skills, and others view them as being a separate component of their training programme. Target-setting for NVQ units does not identify opportunities for trainees to cross-reference appropriate evidence to key skills units.

### Grade 3

#### **Retailing & customer service**

15. CMS provides training leading to awards in retailing, warehousing, distribution and customer service. At the time of the inspection, there were six modern apprentices, 27 national trainees and 26 trainees on other government-funded young people's training programmes. There were 11 adult trainees working towards NVQs in distribution and 14 New Deal clients working towards qualifications in either distribution, retailing or customer service. Most trainees are in appropriate work placements in the Kirklees area, but four of the New Deal clients are based with an employer in Runcorn. All trainees receive an induction at the beginning of their programme, which is provided by CMS's staff, usually at

one of the training centres. This is followed up by an induction from the trainees' placement provider. Some off-the-job training is available to customer service trainees. All national trainees and modern apprentices are offered the opportunity to attend key skills sessions run at the training centres. Staff at CMS are qualified assessors and all have significant occupational experience, which they update regularly in line with the awarding body's requirements. The number of trainees who progress to employment is high. During the previous year, this figure stood at almost 63 per cent. Almost 57 per cent of trainees during this year achieved their NVQs, which is above the local average. The self-assessment report identified some weaknesses and strengths which inspectors considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified further weaknesses and strengths during the inspection and agreed with the grade given by the company in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good progression into employment by level 1 trainees
- ◆ effective use of workbooks
- ◆ wide range of evidence in trainees' portfolios

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient assessment of key skills
- ◆ few links between initial assessment and training plans
- ◆ no clear targets for trainees

16. Opportunities for trainees to progress from level 1 NVQ training programmes into jobs are good. Many of the trainees who have additional learning needs are placed in sheltered placements with supportive employers who help build the trainees' confidence. Staff at CMS visit the trainees as frequently as every two to three weeks to ensure that they settling in well. They often call on them when passing to check that there are no problems. A contact sheet is regularly updated at the front of the trainee's personal file, which ensures that should a problem arise, all staff have access to records of discussions with the trainee. Some employers offer additional training to trainees, which helps them to develop skills which further enhance their chances to secure employment.

17. The training centre has developed theory booklets for trainees on NVQ courses at levels 2 and 3 in retailing. Level 2 booklets are used extensively with trainees as a distance-learning resource. Employers are able to interpret the booklets in the context of their organisation. This allows the training to be tailored to each company's systems and procedures. Employers have found them useful when covering aspects such as legislation. The booklets are up to date and of a good quality. Exercises and written questions relate directly to the NVQ and reflect the needs of the retail business. All staff at CMS have a high level of



expertise in the retail industry through many years' experience. This has given them the knowledge to produce effective training materials. All of the training for trainees working towards qualifications in distribution takes place on the job. Topics such as health and safety, safe manual lifting, stock rotation, stock counting and the use of protective clothing are covered. In customer service there is a training workshop available for trainees which focuses upon the development of practical customer service skills. Key skills exercises have recently been developed to extract key skills evidence from the workplace. There are examples in retailing and customer service of trainees using application of number and information technology to carry out surveys of sales.

18. Many sources of evidence are used across the retailing and customer service and distribution programmes. For example, extensive use is made of witness testimonies from employers. Employers have a good understanding of the use of testimonies and trainees' confidence is boosted by their comments. Photographs taken by the trainees bring a visual impact to the portfolios and demonstrate how, for example, displays are created. Observations of trainees in the workplace are carried out regularly.

19. Trainees' awareness of key skills is limited. Some training in key skills takes place in the workplace, mostly through projects and exercises developed by staff at CMS. Training sessions linked to key skills are available to trainees in CMS's training centre but no retail trainees have used this facility. Employers do not have a clear understanding of key skills and staff at CMS provide them with little information. Only a small amount of key skills assessment has taken place. There is no evidence that such assessment is planned, nor is there evidence of a programme to ensure that all trainees receive key skills training where necessary. This has resulted in missed opportunities assessing key skills. The company is aware of this issue and has devised an action plan to address key skills assessment across the company.

20. Not all trainees have received an initial assessment. In many cases existing experience and qualifications have not been checked or matched against NVQ or key skills requirements. Where initial assessment has taken place it is not used for planning individual training programmes. Individual training plans are not reviewed with trainees and there are few opportunities for existing skills not identified at the start of the programme to be recognised once the trainee is on a training programme. Some trainees have to reproduce work they have undertaken before joining the company. Inadequate initial assessment has also led to some trainees' additional support needs not being identified. For example, staff at CMS did not know that a trainee was dyslexic until after she had completed an NVQ at level 2 with the company.

21. The individual training plan includes a target date for the achievement of the NVQ. Few interim targets are set against units or elements. There is little evidence to show that key skills are being assessed alongside the NVQ. Trainees' progress is recorded on sections of the review documents which are not always left with the trainee. Therefore the trainee has not got a reference between visits of what has to be achieved or completed. Assessment planning takes place but is not adequately

recorded. Trainees do not get a copy of plans made and often do not have a clear recall of the targets which have been set.

## Grade 2

### Foundation for work

22. CMS offers foundation for work to both young people and adults. The youth programme is the life skills element of the Learning Gateway and lasts for between one and 52 weeks. The focus of the programme is on developing trainees' behaviour and skills, which will help trainees to enter work and to form successful personal relationships. Trainees are referred by the careers service and are interviewed with their personal advisor by CMS's staff. When trainees elect to join the programme, they may be placed on a waiting list for up to a week if existing numbers on the programme are too high. Adult trainees are referred in most cases by the Employment Service. Interviews are on demand and eligible trainees can generally enter training within a few days of their interview. The adult basic employability programme lasts for up to 26 weeks. Support is given to trainees to develop their job-search and interview skills, their confidence and, where required, their basic skills. Adult trainees may undertake work experience and some may also gain wordpower and/or numberpower qualifications. NVQs at level 1 in any of the occupational areas offered by the company are also available. One tutor in each training location works with the life skills trainees and one with the adult basic employability trainees. Occupational specialists support the adult tutors where trainees are having work experience. There were 31 trainees in training at the time of the inspection. Of 95 adult trainees who started training during the past contract year, 20 gained employment, and 53 wordpower/numberpower qualifications were achieved. During the current contract year, 39 adults have started training and eight have progressed into jobs. Twenty-one trainees have joined the life skills programme since the start of the contract year and 15 were still in training at the time of the inspection. The self-assessment report identified strengths which inspectors considered to be no more than normal practice and had not identified two weaknesses. The inspectors found additional strengths and awarded a grade higher than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective initial assessment on the basic employability programme
- ◆ individualised training programmes
- ◆ supportive teamwork among tutors

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient specialist placements
- ◆ underdeveloped life skills programme

23. All basic employability trainees are interviewed before acceptance, and a detailed record sheet is used. At this interview, comprehensive notes are made of the candidate's background, relevant work experience, general presentation and communication skills. Details are also noted of the candidate's reasons for wanting to join the programme, their aspirations for employment, health and any problems such as alcohol or drug addiction. Existing barriers to employment are also noted. If the candidate enters training, the interview notes are used to develop the individual training plan. The plan is further developed using the results of initial assessments during the first week of training. The assessments are of the trainees' personal appearance, presentation, confidence, time-keeping, attendance, basic literacy/numeracy, motivation and existing job-search skills and knowledge. The individual training plan is then agreed with each trainee and targets set with dates for achievement.

24. Each training plan contains targets specific to each trainee. The targets are known as 'milestones' and are identified activities through which a trainee's progress may be measured. Every milestone is negotiated and agreed with each trainee. A milestone may be as simple as maintaining the tidiness of a work area for a given period of time or obtaining an additional qualification. The essence of the milestone is its appropriateness to the trainee's individual needs. One trainee who lacked confidence agreed that a milestone would be to run a tuck-shop. This involved identifying stock, ordering, selling and maintaining basic security. Another trainee successfully completed a short course in teaching English as a second language as a milestone and now assists tutors with English language training for trainees whose first language is not English. Training plans are updated as new milestones are identified. Training times can be varied, for example for trainees to receive word processing practice at times when personal computers are available. One trainee has an individual eight-week programme in a hospital work placement, which could lead to his being employed as a porter. This programme demonstrates the joint approach which is adopted between the trainee, CMS's staff and the potential employer, where the agreed goal is to develop the trainee's employability. All tutors demonstrate a clear knowledge of the trainees' personal needs and circumstances.

25. There is a strong ethos of team working among all tutors which benefits the trainees. There is regular and frequent communication within each training centre and between the two centres. Newly developed resources are routinely duplicated by the originator and supplied to other colleagues. Occupational tutors will assist basic employability and life skills tutors to identify suitable work placements and may also visit trainees in these placements. Where occupational specialists undertake these visits, communication with the basic employability tutor is made both verbally and by means of a written 'contact sheet' which gives brief details of the trainee's welfare.

26. Both the basic employability and life skills programmes are intended to help trainees to prepare for, find, or return to employment. Both job tasters and work experience opportunities are useful learning exercises. There is a shortage of potential placements offering the necessary protected environments in which

trainees can develop confidence, the work ethic and the skills required for sustainable employment. The company recognises that more specialist placements are required and steps are being taken to identify further opportunities for placements.

27. The two life skills tutors are relatively new. One joined the company eight weeks before the inspection and the other started working with the life skills group at the beginning of the contract year. Both are working to increase the number of individual learning activities which are needed to develop all the skills required by clients. Some contacts have been made with external organisations such as the army, a leisure centre and the millennium volunteers. The company recognises that a greater number of external contacts offering learning opportunities needs to be developed and there is evidence that this is being addressed through the efforts of the life skills tutors.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 2**

28. CMS has a policy statement which outlines its commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for both trainees and employees. This statement is displayed in both of the company's training centres. It is also included in employees' induction packs and in the information folders given to placement providers. A statement which commits employers to ensuring equal opportunities for trainees is included in the contract which they sign. A shortened version of the statement is given to trainees and discussed with them during their induction. Responsibility for equal opportunities within CMS lies with the company secretary. He reviews practice against the company's equal opportunities quality standards, monitors progress against the company's equal opportunities action plan and prepares the annual equal opportunities report. He submits monthly reports to the company's board. There is an equal opportunities committee of staff members which meets regularly. Equality of opportunity is an agenda item for all monthly staff meetings. The company has received an award from its local TEC in recognition of its work to promote equality of opportunity. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective promotion of equality of opportunity
- ◆ well-written equal opportunities procedures
- ◆ established mechanisms for reviewing equal opportunities
- ◆ careful monitoring of equal opportunities data
- ◆ wide range of initiatives to promote equality of opportunity

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ restricted access to training facilities for those with mobility problems
- ◆ few attempts to address gender issues during recruitment

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Saturday clubs are held in local centres to encourage young people, particularly those from minority ethnic groups, to consider vocational training. It was noticed that most trainees at the sessions are women. The company is opening up clubs at alternative centres, which have been selected to attract male applicants.*

29. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted within the organisation. Staff have an excellent understanding of equal opportunities and of local cultural issues. They are clear about their individual roles and responsibilities in promoting equal opportunities to trainees, employers and other partner organisations. Equal opportunities issues are an agenda item for all staff meetings. Staff have the opportunity to raise any concerns about equal opportunities and to receive information about developments within the company. Each month a report on equal opportunities issues within the company is made to the board. Board members are involved in the review of the equal opportunities policy statement, which is given to all staff during their induction. As part of the review of equal opportunities within the company, staff training needs are identified. Workshops are held to ensure that training needs are met and any specific concerns staff may have are tackled. For example, some staff were unsure how to promote equal opportunities to employers effectively. The company works with both the TEC and other external agencies to ensure that staff and company are up to date with current initiatives and legislative changes.

30. Procedures dealing with equal opportunities issues are well documented and subject to regular review. All staff are fully aware of the company's harassment, appeals, grievances and complaints procedures. They introduce the procedures to trainees during their induction and then check that trainees have no issues to raise at each progress review meeting. Where trainees have experienced problems such as harassment and bullying in the workplace, they are able to raise them with their assessors, who address concerns promptly. Trainees are aware of how equality of opportunity should apply in the workplace. Employers indicate their commitment to equal opportunities when signing the training agreement. The company is developing ways to increase employers' awareness of equal opportunities issues.

31. There are clear mechanisms to review equal opportunities. Six years ago, the company secretary devised equal opportunities quality standards which provide a framework against which performance can be monitored. He is responsible for the regular monitoring of equal opportunities within the company. Findings are widely reported within the organisation and form the basis of an annual equal opportunities report and action plan. The equal opportunities committee is involved in monitoring the action plan. It meets regularly to review equal opportunities practices within CMS and to identify areas of further development. Each year the committee reviews assessment methods and promotional material to check for bias and stereotyping. Currently, a small amount of literature is produced in languages other than English. The company plans to increase the range of training materials available in other languages. All advertisements used by the company indicate its commitment to equality of opportunity, although no attempts

are made to address gender stereotyping within the literature. For example, warehousing is not actively promoted as a career for female applicants.

32. There is careful monitoring of equal opportunities data by both the equal opportunities committee and the vocational training manager. At the time of the inspection, 25 per cent of trainees and 18 per cent of employees are from minority ethnic groups. Fifty-three per cent of trainees are female and 10 per cent of trainees have disabilities. Seventy-four per cent of staff are female and no member of staff has a disability. In its equal opportunities policy statement, CMS sets itself the target of ensuring that its trainees are representative of the local area. Performance against this objective is monitored and where issues are identified strategies are devised to increase participation by under-represented groups. Work has been undertaken in local communities to increase the number of women in training from minority ethnic groups. Analysis of equal opportunities data is used to highlight areas of concern. For example, it has highlighted the need to develop a strategy to increase the number of trainees from minority ethnic groups who progress into employment. Some action has been taken where statistics have identified an imbalance between male and female trainees. For example, the company is working to increase participation by young men in Saturday morning business administration programmes.

33. The company is involved in a wide range of initiatives within local communities. Projects include a programme of Saturday morning clubs aimed at encouraging year 11 school pupils to participate in training. There is also a basic skills programme for women from minority ethnic backgrounds, which is held in local primary schools, and a programme aimed at increasing participation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in retail occupations. Some programmes are devised by CMS. Others are run in partnership with the local college of further education and the TEC. Staff have a good knowledge of the backgrounds of their trainees and excellent contacts within the local community. One member of staff has been involved in outreach work within the community, which has strengthened the company's links with community groups. Where appropriate, the company uses newspapers circulated within the local communities to promote opportunities for employment and training.

34. When a need is identified, the company purchases specialist equipment and develops training resources to support trainees with additional learning needs. For example, resources have been purchased to support trainees who are visually impaired. Access to facilities at both training centres is restricted for trainees who have mobility problems. Training rooms at the Batley site are situated on the upper floors or in the basement, with very steep stairs between floors. The company is aware of this issue, which has been a discussion item at equal opportunities meetings for over 12 months.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

35. Trainees are recruited to the company through the Employment Service and the careers service. An induction to the training programme is provided by CMS's

staff, and includes guidance on procedures, policies and the NVQ system. Initial assessment of basic skills is carried out as a basis for individual training plans, and to identify trainees' additional support needs. CMS aims to provide a high level of support for trainees in the workplace, and, in addition to quarterly progress review visits, there are workplace visits by training staff each month. During these visits staff offer practical support to trainees and monitor their progress. The company works closely with the careers service and local schools to attract trainees and to secure work placements. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report, and agreed with the grade given by the company in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ high level of practical support for trainees
- ◆ frequent and effective contact with trainees
- ◆ innovative recruitment strategies

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no copies of progress reviews for some trainees
- ◆ no initial assessment or accreditation of prior achievement in some areas

36. CMS's staff are readily accessible to trainees. They are accommodating and flexible in their responses to the trainees' personal and employment support needs. The staff development policy has ensured that there are staff with appropriate counselling qualifications, and there is a strong emphasis on offering trainees practical support which minimises disruption to their training plans. This is demonstrated by the provision of sheltered placements for trainees who are suffering the effects of major illness or stress arising from bullying. Staff accompany trainees to external counselling sessions in their own time and are often available to listen to a trainees' problems.

37. Visits by the company's staff to trainees in their placement take place at least once every month. In addition to scheduled visits, more informal, drop-in visits take place regularly. The outcomes of discussions during both kinds of meetings are recorded. Trainees' progress reviews provide an opportunity for pastoral support, and the company has developed a programme of additional visits, which provide further opportunities for staff to monitor trainees' support needs. Good relationships have been developed with placement staff. CMS's staff are welcome visitors to most placements, where their contribution to the welfare of trainees is appreciated by placement managers. In London and Sheffield, briefing meetings have been introduced to enable line managers to relate better to trainees' problems and to resolve problems in partnership with CMS staff.

38. The company has developed strong links with the community. Initiatives have been introduced with both local schools and the careers service to promote training

and employment opportunities to young people and to adults from diverse backgrounds. Recruitment and promotional strategies are carefully planned, and targets groups are identified. CMS's staff have clear roles and responsibilities in these activities. They regularly participate in careers guidance surgeries in Huddersfield and Batley, and are involved in operating an 'apprentice club' for school pupils. This club is a 20-week programme which is designed to give young people an early awareness of NVQs and an introduction to the world of work. Participants in the club have the opportunity to gather evidence towards NVQ units at level 1. Staff are also involved in a mentoring project with local school pupils which aims to help young people make informed employment choices, and to reduce the potential for later drop-out from training programmes.

39. Some trainees have not received copies of progress reviews and are not fully aware of the progress they are making towards the achievement of their qualifications. Initial assessment varies between the programme areas. Foundation for work trainees receive a good initial assessment, which covers key areas including basic skills. There are some weaknesses in initial assessment for trainees on business administration and retail programmes. Some trainees receive no initial assessment for key skills and often their existing skills are not matched against NVQ requirements. Many trainees join training programmes with some prior experience and competency-based qualifications, including general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) gained at school. The trainees' prior experience and qualifications are not consistently accredited, and trainees are often unaware of this entitlement.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

40. CMS employs 36 staff. There is a clear organisational structure and all staff have job descriptions which outline their individual roles and responsibilities. The company was first recognised as an Investor in People in 1992. It has successfully maintained this status over the past eight years. Systems for staff appraisal, training and development are well established. There are two manuals which contain the company's policies and procedures. The first contains information relating to personnel issues, and the second is a quality manual, which is more specific to the vocational skills training division which deals with government-funded training. Copies of the manuals are accessible to all staff. The vocational skills training division of CMS has its own business plan. The development and monitoring of this plan are the responsibility of the company secretary and the vocational training manager. The vocational training manager is the line manager of all staff involved in providing government-funded training. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ high standard of internal and external communication
- ◆ strong encouragement of effective team-work



- ◆ careful monitoring of staff's performance against the business plan
- ◆ clear focus on staff development

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped systems for tracking trainees' progress and achievements
- ◆ inconsistent training and assessment practices across occupational areas

41. The company has established good links with local employers, business organisations and community groups. CMS's staff maintain an excellent rapport with their placement providers, which helps to ensure that trainees are well supported while they are on their programmes. Links with business organisations and community groups are used to promote the company's programmes and to ensure that the training reflects local needs. Within the company there are excellent mechanisms to ensure that staff communicate effectively at all levels. Staff are organised into teams which focus upon occupational areas and which draw staff from both the main training sites. Staff co-operate well and readily share expertise, giving colleagues practical support where necessary. Staff teams, all of which are led by the vocational training manager, meet each month. In addition, there are quarterly meetings which all staff attend, during which broader issues such as the company's business plan are discussed. Staff are consulted wherever appropriate. Their views on issues such as financial planning and external inspection influence decisions taken by the company's board. Communication by the board is effective and staff feel fully informed about strategic issues.

42. Staff teams are allocated performance targets which are taken from the company's business plan. These targets are based upon the government-funded training contracts and are closely monitored each month. The vocational training manager circulates statistical information with a commentary to all staff in advance of their monthly team meetings. Part of the meetings is spent reviewing performance and discussing with staff how improvements can be made. In addition to occupational teams reviewing their targets, staff from the two training centres in Huddersfield and Batley meet regularly to review performance at their sites and to discuss any specific issues that have arisen. Discussions at team meetings are recorded and action is taken on staff recommendations. Staff performance in achieving success against the business plan's targets is recognised by the board through a staff bonus scheme.

43. The company has well-established procedures covering key aspects of the management of staff. All staff have job descriptions which are reviewed as part of their annual appraisal. They are set clear targets which outline what is expected of them for the next 12 months. These are regularly reviewed. A broad range of staff development opportunities is available to staff. Staff can attend external training events. The consultancy arm of CMS also runs courses for staff leading to nationally recognised awards. Training reflects the company's requirements and also takes account of individuals' development needs. Progress against the staff

development plan is monitored by the vocational training manager, whose own development is reviewed at board level. A detailed procedure has been introduced to ensure that all new staff receive a full induction into the company. The effectiveness of the induction was reflected by the speed with which staff appointed during the months leading up to inspection had settled into their roles and by their ability to contribute fully to programme developments.

44. The company has a database which holds information about individual trainees and records information about the progress they have made. This information is used to process external funding claims. There is no centralised system whereby a manager can trace the progress of trainees through their NVQ or monitor trainees' achievements effectively. In order to establish how many units of an award a trainee has achieved, it is necessary to refer back to the individual's training plan or to gather information from verification records. Groups of trainees cannot be analysed to determine how a cohort is progressing. It is difficult for the manager to identify where trainees are making slow progress or to identify trends linked to individual qualifications or individual trainers. It is also difficult to interrogate the database to extract some simple information, for example the number of trainees working towards specific awards.

45. The company has procedures to cover most of the key aspects of training and assessment within the company. However, practices are inconsistent both between occupational sectors, and within the sectors where programmes are being provided on more than one site. For example, individual target-setting is carried out effectively within the foundation for work programmes, but it is less effective in the other two occupational areas. In Huddersfield and Batley, most line managers are involved in reviewing trainees' progress. This level of involvement does not occur with the New Deal clients working towards administration awards in London and Sheffield. There are insufficient management checks to monitor the consistency of approaches. Some auditing takes place to check that forms have been completed correctly, but these do not provide the training manager with information such as whether all trainees have had access to accreditation of their prior achievements, or whether an initial assessment of key skills has taken place.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

46. Overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with the training manager who is assisted by an administrator. CMS has written quality procedures covering the key training processes. The quality assurance system includes specific written procedures for the initial assessment of trainees, action-planning, trainees' reviews and the observation of training. The company meets the quality assurance requirements of its awarding bodies. There are regular and frequent team meetings which include consideration of matters relating to the quality of the training. Some of the strengths identified by the company were considered by the inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found the quality assurance arrangements to be stronger than the company had judged them and awarded a grade higher than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of training
- ◆ effective use of evaluations
- ◆ effective quality assurance procedures

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficiently rigorous internal verification procedures

47. The quality system is understood and supported by staff. They recognise the need to assure the quality of training and contribute to the review and further development of procedures. Thought is given across the company to continuous improvement in the quality of training. For example, the retail team is already planning for the new customer service standards, even though these will not be introduced until 2001. There is a named representative in each training area whose responsibility it is to ensure that changes in procedures are notified to all team members. The observation of trainers' classroom performance by the training manager is a well-established practice within the company. This practice has been formalised in a written procedure, the declared purpose of which is to ensure that tutors use methods which are appropriate to the needs of the group or individual. Tutors receive feedback on their performance.

48. Feedback from trainees, from leavers and from employers has been collected during the past year. The analysis of this feedback is relatively new, but there is clear evidence that feedback is acted upon. For example, a recent evaluation of feedback from employers has led to the employers' handbook being revised. There are also plans to introduce a six-monthly newsletter for employers and a report on their trainees' progress. When the company received few responses to their questionnaires from employers, a member of staff visited them in person to gather their comments. Responses are analysed and a written report is compiled with suggestions on how to change practices which have attracted adverse comment. The board considers evaluation reports. External verifiers' action points are followed up promptly.

49. The company has well-written training procedures which have been developed over a number of years. There is a quality manual which contains detailed minimum standards to ensure a consistency of approach in key aspects of training. The written procedures have been drawn up following observation of existing practices, from consideration of the requirements of the TEC and of awarding bodies, from discussions with the training manager and following consultation with the staff. The effectiveness of the procedures is assured by internal audits.

50. The company has introduced a revised assessment and verification procedure. This is new and its impact has not yet been felt. Arrangements for assessment are generally sound but verification arrangements lack rigour. Some candidates are nearing the end of their NVQ yet there is little evidence of regular verification



having taken place. The company recognises that verification practices need to be more rigorous and a meeting of all the company's internal verifiers had been arranged to take place shortly after the inspection.