



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 2000

Agenda Training Limited

SUMMARY

Agenda Training Limited provides good training in agricultural occupations. There is a wide range of courses available. Retention and achievement rates are high and assessment is rigorous. Trainees produce good portfolios of evidence, but have limited access to training materials. There is a lack of awareness of equal opportunities among staff, trainees and employers and little monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. Trainees are given good support to meet individual needs but initial assessment and accreditation of prior achievements are not systematic and induction is not planned or carried out systematically. Trainees' progress reviews are poorly conducted. Management of training and quality assurance are less than satisfactory. Performance against training targets is closely monitored but there is poor monitoring of subcontractors and little planning of off-the-job training. There are insufficient staff resources to manage all aspects of training. Internal verification is well organised and rigorous but many procedures for quality assurance are inconsistently applied and weakly monitored.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
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KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high retention and achievement rates
- ◆ rigorous assessment and internal verification
- ◆ wide access to opportunities for work based learning
- ◆ good, individualised support to trainees

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ insufficient staff resources
- ◆ inadequate awareness and implementation of quality assurance procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. Agenda Training Limited (Agenda) is a subsidiary company of the Lantra Trust, which also manages the national training organisation for land-based industries. It was set up in 1994 following the privatisation of the statutory Agricultural Training Board. Its purpose was to provide management-consultancy services, including off-the-job short courses and work-based/on-site training for agricultural businesses. It offered a small number of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in England and Wales until 1998. A large number of Scottish vocational qualifications (SVQs) has been offered in Scotland for over 10 years. In 1998, a report commissioned by the national training organisation identified barriers to training leading to NVQs in agriculture. These included lack of access to flexible work-based training, lack of arrangements for work-based assessment and lack of information about the availability of training. As a result, a vocational programmes department was set up within Agenda to provide a work-based training service for agricultural and associated industries. Trainees are located in Durham, North Yorkshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Coventry, Warwickshire, Hereford, Worcester, Bristol and Sussex. Training is organised by seven locally based training co-ordinators. It includes on-the-job learning and assessment, attendance at off-the-job training organised by local employer-led training groups and attendance at colleges. All off-the-job training is subcontracted. Some training is subcontracted to a national provider of greenkeeping training.

2. Agenda contracts with eight training and enterprise councils (TECs): County Durham, North Yorkshire, North Derbyshire, North Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Humberside, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) and Sussex Enterprise. In addition, Agenda is a subcontractor providing training funded by WESTEC and Hereford and Worcestershire CTTE in the Bristol area and the Hereford and Worcestershire areas respectively. These trainees also come within the scope of this inspection. Coventry and Warwickshire CCTE is the co-ordinating TEC for the purpose of inspection. The vocational programmes department employs six full-time and six part-time staff. Twenty-two subcontracted assessors and verifiers are also used. At the time of inspection, 149 trainees were on programmes in agriculture. Of these, 55 were advanced modern apprentices, 81 were foundation modern apprentices and 13 were on other work-based training programmes for young people. A breakdown of the numbers of trainees within each programme is given in the table below.

3. Local economies, educational achievement and unemployment rates vary widely within the communities served by Agenda. For example, in North Yorkshire, where 40 per cent of trainees are located, the economy is relatively diverse. Tourism, food production and agriculture account for a high proportion of economic activity. In 1999, 55 per cent of school leavers in North Yorkshire achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at

grade C or above compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. This is the highest rate of all the TEC areas in which Agenda operates. The achievement rate varies from 38 per cent in Durham and Humberside, to 51 per cent in Sussex and 49 per cent in Hereford and Worcester. The proportion of young people staying on in full-time education and entering work-based training varies across the areas served. For example, in 1999, 19 per cent of school leavers in County Durham entered government-funded work-based training with 58 per cent staying in full-time education. In Sussex, 76 per cent stayed in full-time education and only 5 per cent entered government-funded work-based training. Many of the areas served have a high proportion of land and agricultural businesses. For example, north Derbyshire contains the Peak District National Park and 63 per cent of County Durham is designated as agricultural land. In Humberside, 12.8 per cent of businesses are involved in agriculture, hunting and forestry. Land-based industries employ 3 per cent of the workforce in Sussex. In Bristol, the service sector employs 82 per cent of the working population and most of Agenda's trainees in this area are following programmes in floristry, amenity horticulture and garden-centre operations. Unemployment rates vary from 6 per cent in County Durham and north east Derbyshire to 2.2 per cent in Warwickshire and North Yorkshire and 1.3 per cent in west Sussex. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups in the rural communities which Agenda serves is low. It ranges from less than 1 per cent in County Durham to 3 per cent in north Derbyshire. In the area served by WESTEC the proportion is 2.7 per cent, although it is much higher in some parts of Bristol.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Agenda undertook its first self-assessment 12 months after starting to provide work-based training with support from North Yorkshire TEC. The second report was produced before the inspection with support from Coventry and Warwickshire CCTE. Evidence for self-assessment is gathered through feedback from trainees and employers and regular meetings of the management team. Progress towards targets in the action plan is reviewed at monthly management meetings. The report was compiled by the operations manager and graded in consultation with the chief executive and the management committee.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 25 days with Agenda during September 2000. Inspectors visited 34 work placements, the head office and offices of local training co-ordinators. They interviewed 43 trainees, 27 workplace supervisors and other employers' staff, and 35 staff from Agenda, including the operations manager, programme manager, assessment-centre manager, training co-ordinators and assessors. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including trainees' files, NVQ portfolios, records of meetings, procedural manuals, policies, correspondence and external verifiers' reports. They observed one training session and four assessments, awarding a grade 2 to each.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 2

6. There are 149 trainees on programmes in a wide range of occupations, which are shown in the table below. All trainees except four are employed. Seven training co-ordinators are responsible for groups of up to 60 trainees in each location. Employers and trainees are recruited through telephone marketing, careers services, local employers' groups and word of mouth. Most training takes place in the workplace. Short training courses away from the workplace are available to most trainees. All assessment takes place in the workplace. There are 22 appropriately qualified visiting assessors and verifiers, who have relevant occupational qualifications and experience. Each trainee is allocated a personal assessor who visits the workplace at least once a month. Veterinary nurse training is subcontracted to two colleges. Induction takes place in the workplace. Health and safety is checked before trainees start on a programme and is monitored by training co-ordinators during progress reviews. The retention rate over the past three years has been 83 per cent on foundation modern apprenticeships, 78 per cent on advanced modern apprenticeships and 86 per cent on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Achievement rates for most completed programmes are high. Trainees still in training are making good progress towards achievement of their target qualification. Inspectors agreed that high retention and

achievement rates and rigorous assessment are strengths and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

Trainee numbers

	Advanced modern apprenticeship	Foundation modern apprenticeship	Other training	Total
Agriculture & commercial horticulture	31	30		61
Amenity horticulture	5	19		24
Floristry	9	16		25
Retailing (garden-centre operations)	9	9		18
Animal care	1	1		2
Gamekeeping			3	3
Fencing		6		6
Veterinary nursing			10	10
Total	55	81	13	149

STRENGTHS

- ◆ rigorous assessment
- ◆ good NVQ portfolios
- ◆ wide range of additional training courses available
- ◆ high retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient materials to support training
- ◆ poor awareness, training and assessment of key skills

7. Assessment is well planned and regular and helps trainees make good progress towards achievement of the NVQ. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace, usually once each month, to carry out assessments, plan future assessments and review action plans. There is a thorough assessment process, which includes recording of assessments, sampling of portfolios, completion of feedback sheets and monitoring of progress. There are regular meetings between the assessors and the internal verifier. Records are detailed and internal verification is rigorous. A

copy of the action plan is given to the trainee following each monthly visit by the assessor. Assessors often make additional visits and provide support by telephone. They regularly meet trainees' requests for assessment visits at short notice to take advantage of opportunities assessment identified by trainees.

8. Trainees' portfolios are of a very good quality. They are clearly referenced, contain a wide range of diverse evidence and show that trainees have a good understanding of the requirements of the NVQ. Assessments are recorded in detail. A wide range of assessment techniques is used, including direct observation, written and oral questions, photographic records, case studies and projects. The needs of trainees with learning difficulties are taken into account in assessment. Some witness testimony is used but it is not planned routinely in order to encourage trainees to make best use of evidence from the workplace.

9. There is a wide range of additional training courses available for most trainees. These are run close to where trainees are based by training providers who are approved and monitored by Agenda's parent company. Most of the courses lead to qualifications which assist trainees with career progression. These qualifications are additional to those required as part of qualification frameworks. They include first aid, health and safety, manual handling and a wide range of relevant occupational short courses.

10. Retention and achievement rates for most programmes are high. Retention on advanced modern apprenticeships averages 78 per cent. Retention rates are higher in agriculture, commercial horticulture and amenity horticulture than in floristry and garden centre operations. Although the company has offered advanced modern apprenticeships only since 1998-99, achievement and progression rates are good. Fifty per cent of trainees who started at work towards level 3 NVQs in 1998-99 have completed the advanced modern apprenticeship. Since foundation modern apprenticeships were first offered in 1998-99, 84 per cent of trainees have remained on their programmes. Seventy-eight per cent of trainees who started in 1998-99 have completed the framework. Retention and achievement rates of trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people, including veterinary nurse trainees, are also high. All trainees recruited in 1997-98 achieved the qualifications on their individual training plan. For the past two years, the average retention rate has been 75 per cent. Trainees on all programmes are making good progress towards achievement of their NVQ and additional qualification requirements.

11. Most training is work based and for most trainees lacks structure. Most training is unplanned and is undertaken as part of the normal working day. Most trainees work on portfolios in their own time. In most programmes, there are no learning materials to help trainees understand related theory. Trainees rely on information supplied by the assessor, their employer or through the trade press and magazines. There is no systematic provision of support materials to ensure trainees are well prepared for assessment. Agenda's parent company produces good training materials, but these are available only to trainees attending short courses away from the workplace. Some trainees do not have direct access to a computer to

support their training. In some cases, training co-ordinators and assessors take portable computers to the workplace, but these are not left with the trainee.

12. There is no initial assessment of trainees' key skills and little key skills training. Most trainees are unaware of the requirements for key skills. Trainees do not take advantage of the opportunities for training and assessment for key skills which occur in their work and occupational programme. Assessment of key skills is often left to the end of the programme. Individual learning plans do not always identify key skills as a target qualification although it is a requirement of the qualification framework. In a few cases, assessors with key skills experience are providing guidance to trainees.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

13. The chief executive of the parent company is responsible for implementing the equal opportunities policy. The programme manager has responsibility for monitoring the equal opportunities policy in relation to staff and trainees. The policy has been reviewed within the past 12 months and satisfies TEC requirements. New staff are given a copy of the equal opportunities policy. An external organisation with expertise in equal opportunities is working with Agenda's staff to improve understanding of equal opportunity issues. Job descriptions do not specify responsibility for equal opportunities. There is a complaints procedure, which includes feedback to the quarterly quality assurance meetings. Trainees are given the equal opportunities policy and complaints procedure at induction. Employers sign a training agreement, which includes a requirement to comply with equal opportunities legislation. One current trainee is from a minority ethnic group and eight have learning difficulties or disabilities. Of the 149 trainees, 39 are women. The self-assessment report correctly identified the wide range of opportunities to access training as a strength. The report identified two weaknesses which were agreed with by inspectors, but did not identify the lack of awareness of equal opportunities and inadequate promotion of equality of opportunity. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of opportunities for trainees to access training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities policies
- ◆ lack of awareness of equal opportunities among staff, trainees and employers
- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities during trainees' recruitment

14. Many trainees are recruited to the programme from remote rural areas where attendance at off-the-job training is difficult. The programme enables them to undertake training and assessment in the workplace without the need to travel for off-the-job training. Trainees are able to gain qualifications through work-based training and assessment, which are not easily available through other routes. For example, there is training in specialist areas, such as poultry production and fence erection, where other training is not available locally. Some trainees have worked for their employer for some time before entering training and have not previously had the opportunity to undertake formal training and assessment. Some trainees in urban locations have domestic and work commitments which prevent attendance at off-the-job training. They benefit from Agenda's flexible, work-based training.

15. There are few procedures to monitor the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy. Staff are not fully involved in the revision and updating of policies and procedures. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda item at meetings of verifiers and assessors but no action has followed. There has been no training on equal opportunities for staff. A staff training day is planned to help staff to monitor equal opportunities in the workplace. A pack of information on equal opportunities has been provided recently for staff to give to employers but this has not yet been issued to employers.

16. Trainees' induction includes an introduction to equal opportunities. Trainees are given a copy of Agenda's policy and sign to confirm they have received it. There are no arrangements to ensure that equal opportunities are discussed regularly or promoted to trainees and employers. Agenda's staff do not discuss equal opportunities at progress reviews and do not monitor equal opportunities in the workplace.

17. Trainees have a poor understanding of equal opportunities and of examples of unacceptable behaviour such as harassment and bullying. Agenda's staff take action to protect trainees from discrimination and harassment. Trainees are given copies of the appeals and grievance procedures but are not clear about how to complain. Although employers sign a contract which makes reference to equal opportunities, there is no check that they understand and promote equality of opportunity.

18. Agenda collects data on equal opportunities but does not use it to set targets for recruitment. There is no strategy to widen participation by under-represented groups. No action has been taken to try to address the gender imbalance on most programmes. Promotional literature has positive images to encourage both men and women to apply and features trainees from minority ethnic groups. No information is given to indicate that Agenda has an equal opportunities policy or that applications are welcome from people from all backgrounds.

Trainee support

Grade 4

19. Agenda recruits trainees who are employed in a wide range of land-based industries. Many are recruited through direct contacts with employers established by Agenda's network of assessors and training co-ordinators. Agenda's staff have access to the parent company's marketing materials and have also developed NVQ information sheets for use in the recruitment and induction of new trainees. Recently, Agenda has used telephone marketing to recruit more trainees in areas where it has established training co-ordinators and assessors. The aim is to find local employers which are prepared to accept a trainee or which already have a staff member who needs training. When a new employer is located, Agenda advertises locally to find a trainee who is then interviewed and selected by that employer. Trainees receive an induction from the local training co-ordinator, who also visits the trainee to conduct progress reviews. Pastoral support is also provided by the training co-ordinators. Assessors for the occupational areas sometimes provide support to meet trainees' identified additional learning needs. Some co-ordinators are appropriately qualified to give support for basic and key skills. Inspectors did not agree with any of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but agreed that lack of systematic initial assessment is a weakness. Inspectors identified additional strengths and significant additional weaknesses and awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular support in the workplace
- ◆ clear target-setting by assessors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment
- ◆ no systematic induction
- ◆ little accreditation of prior achievements
- ◆ no use of individual learning plans as working documents
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress

GOOD PRACTICE

An assessor visited a trainee in hospital for dialysis before a kidney transplant operation. He enabled the trainee to continue on the programme by assisting with work on the portfolio and negotiating with the TEC to enable the trainee to attend work for less than the normally required hours.

20. Assessors provide good training and support to trainees in the workplace. Trainees with individual learning needs, including dyslexia, are given additional time on assessment visits. Assessors encourage and support candidates who lack confidence and communication skills. A range of methods of assessment is used, including the use of oral questioning to test understanding of knowledge. Assessors are readily available to carry out additional assessments or meet other requests for support when required. Training co-ordinators also provide support

and encouragement to trainees and often maintain contact with them outside the normal training arrangements. Many employers are supportive of trainees and take an active interest in their training and assessment.

21. Assessors visit trainees regularly to conduct assessments and to set learning and developmental tasks. On each visit, assessors give theory work and practical tasks for the trainee to complete prior to the next visit. The assessor and trainee agree clear targets, which are recorded in detail on assessment plans. Copies of these are sent to the assessment-centre manager, who also monitors trainees' progress. These targets ensure good progression by the trainee and also take account of employment and seasonal variations in the occupational sector.

22. There is no systematic initial assessment of most trainees' occupational, basic or key skills. Some support needs in basic skills are not identified and trainees have a poor awareness of key skills. In cases where some initial assessment has taken place, it has not been used to prepare realistic training and developmental plans for trainees. Some trainees are not receiving basic skills support which initial assessment has identified a need for.

23. Induction is not planned or carried out systematically. Most trainees have an individual induction with their training co-ordinator but the time and emphasis given to this varies across specific occupational programmes and different regions of the country. Many trainees have little recollection of their induction and of issues covered such as their rights and responsibilities and equal opportunities. There is little reinforcement of topics covered at induction, apart from health and safety, in the subsequent training and assessment. Some trainees who have recently joined have been given an improved and updated induction pack. This contains updated policies and information together with exercises for trainees to complete to reinforce their knowledge and understanding of topics covered at induction.

24. There is no systematic assessment, either on entry or during training, of trainees' prior learning and achievements. Some trainees have joined training programmes with relevant occupational qualifications and experience but this has not been taken into account in planning their training and assessment. This has led to repetition of work and some demotivation of trainees. Some trainees have benefited from the use of accreditation of prior learning. Evidence of achievement in key skills was accredited for some agricultural trainees.

25. Individual training plans are not updated and often do not accurately specify learning programmes or how trainees' needs will be met. Many do not contain accurate targets for training and assessment or details of which key skills and additional qualifications are being worked towards. Some are not signed by either the trainee or the training provider. Individual learning plans are not used as working documents to record individual learning needs or to set targets. Training co-ordinators conduct progress reviews but these are often irregular. They also lack detail and records are often incomplete. Most aspects of trainee support, including advice on opportunities for progression, are not recorded. Most trainees are not given copies of their progress review records and are not aware of the

progress they are making toward meeting the requirements of their training programme.

Management of training

Grade 4

26. An operations manager, reporting to the chief executive of the parent company, manages the vocational programmes department of Agenda. An assessment-centre manager, supported by an administrative assistant, is based in Wales and is responsible for all aspects of trainees' assessment, including registration, liaison with awarding bodies and external verifiers, and recording of assessments. A programme manager is responsible for equal opportunities, health and safety, internal auditing and northern training contracts. A finance co-ordinator is responsible for all claims and manages the database on trainees. There is one full-time training co-ordinator. Six other training co-ordinators are employed for between one and three days each week. Twenty-two subcontracted assessors/internal verifiers assess and verify occupational programmes and key skills. Off-the-job training courses are subcontracted to training providers approved by Agenda's parent company. Some greenkeeping training is subcontracted to another national training provider and off-the-job veterinary nurse training is subcontracted to two colleges. Arrangements have been made to meet a need for work-based training identified through research into the training needs of the agricultural sector. All except four trainees are employed. The parent company was accredited as an Investor in People in 1999. Inspectors agreed that staff appraisal and training are strengths and identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ close monitoring of training targets
- ◆ systematic analysis of staffs' training needs
- ◆ regular training of subcontracted assessors and verifiers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor monitoring of subcontracted training providers
- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ no systematic induction of new staff
- ◆ inadequate staff resources

27. Training targets are monitored closely at all levels within the company. The assessment centre manager, the training co-ordinators and the operations manager monitor assessment visits and internal verification. Co-ordinators complete weekly

feedback forms and send them to the operations manager. These give information on trainees starting and leaving programmes, enquiries received, assessment and progress-review visits, potential recruitment and future priorities. A full business plan was developed in 1999 and recently updated with revised targets for numbers of trainees and their achievements. Each week, the operations manager and chief executive review trainees' recruitment, achievement rates, trainees leaving programmes and progress against financial targets.

28. There is a systematic and long-established staff appraisal scheme. Appraisal of all directly employed staff is carried out according to the parent company's policy every three months. It includes a detailed review of roles and responsibilities, identification of training and development needs and progress towards training targets. Clear objectives are set with start and end dates. A corporate training and development plan is produced outlining general and specific objectives. The board of trustees reviews progress towards this quarterly. A central record of all staff training is kept. Appraisal and development procedures do not extend to subcontracted staff.

29. Training days are held approximately every three months for subcontracted assessors and verifiers. Recent topics include an update on training frameworks, portfolio building, introduction of new assessment paperwork, assessment planning and key skills. These are repeated in the North and the South to encourage attendance by all staff. Feedback from those attending is used to evaluate effectiveness of the training. For example, a session held in May 1999 covered key skills, but feedback indicated dissatisfaction with its quality. Other informal training and updating days are arranged by training co-ordinators to cover specific aspects of assessment and verification.

30. There is poor monitoring of subcontracted training providers. There are no agreements or written procedures for quality assurance for colleges providing off-the-job training for veterinary nursing. When trainees attend the parent company's training courses, Agenda does not receive feedback sheets completed by trainees or routinely observe training to monitor quality. There is no monitoring of the quality of training given on the job by employers. Training subcontracted to a specialist national provider of greenkeeping training is not monitored routinely.

31. Most training takes place on the job. Training plans are rarely drawn up, and, in most cases, employers do not allocate trainees time for training. There are few links between training carried out and assessment plans. This leads to missed opportunities for structured training linked to assessment and does not encourage the involvement of the employer in providing supporting evidence. There is little use of witness testimony. Some employers are fully involved in providing reliable witness evidence, but most are not encouraged to support trainees in identifying opportunities to gather evidence.

32. Induction of new staff and staff who are changing roles is not systematic. Formal procedures exist for newly recruited permanent staff. There are no procedures for staff who are changing roles within the organisation. Staff recently

appointed to new roles from within the company have not received a structured induction to them. New duties and responsibilities are not systematically covered. There is no formal induction for temporary staff or new subcontracted training co-ordinators and assessors. Newly appointed training co-ordinators working in isolation have some support material, but are not systematically introduced to their roles.

33. Current staff resources are insufficient to manage all aspects of the training effectively. Training co-ordinators have large caseloads of trainees. Most are co-ordinating training over a wide geographical area. In some cases, this has led to infrequent reviews of trainees' progress, inconsistent practice and poor completion of paperwork. Recent changes to the management structure designed to provide better support for co-ordinators are not yet fully effective.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

34. The operations manager has overall responsible for arrangements for quality assurance arrangements. The parent company is accredited to a nationally recognised standard. There is a written policy and supporting procedures for quality assurance. Quality assurance procedures meet TEC requirements in most areas. Standard policies and procedures are distributed to staff through the intranet or on disk with written confirmation of the changes. Quality assurance issues, including any complaints received, are discussed quarterly at senior management team meetings. Amendments to procedures are agreed at this meeting and disseminated at meetings of training co-ordinators and assessors. There are procedures for self-assessment and action-planning and the company produced its second self-assessment report for the inspection. Internal verification meets the awarding body's requirements. External verification reports are co-ordinated by the assessment centre manager, who circulates action plans to appropriate staff. Surveys of trainees and employers' opinions of training are undertaken every six months and the responses are analysed. Inspectors did not agree with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The identified other strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate awareness and implementation of procedures for quality assurance
- ◆ ineffective use of internal auditing
- ◆ week monitoring of the effectiveness of quality assurance

35. Internal verification is well planned and co-ordinated. The assessment-centre manager co-ordinates all internal verification and external verifiers' visits and reports. Action plans are circulated to the relevant training co-ordinators, assessors and internal verifiers. Senior managers monitor progress towards completion of these actions. The process of internal verification is well recorded and monitored. Internal verifiers produce good-quality documents to support assessors. They give detailed and constructive feedback to assessors. Regular assessors' meetings are held and minuted. Action plans are produced and followed up. Internal verifiers regularly visit the workplace to monitor assessments. Internal verifiers sample all NVQ portfolios.

36. Agenda has a comprehensive police for quality assurance, which is supported by clear procedures. Many of these procedures are new or recently updated. The latest version of the procedures, literature, forms and processes relating to quality assurance are available on the intranet. Many of these new and updated procedures are not yet fully operational across all aspects of the training. There is no system to ensure that all co-ordinators, assessors, trainees and employers are aware of the company's procedures for quality assurance. This leads to inconsistency and uncertainty in the use of the paperwork by the training co-ordinators and assessors working across a range of locations and occupational areas.

37. Agenda carries out internal audits to check for compliance with contractual requirements. Not all auditors are fully aware of the procedures, which are poorly written and not always effective. Internal audits have failed to identify fundamental errors and omissions in recorded information. Some external audits of financial and administrative management have identified serious irregularities in contractual compliance. The company has since been subject to more frequent external audits.

38. Many of the standard forms in trainees' files are poorly completed. Examples include missing signatures, poorly completed individual learning plans and check lists which are not kept up to date. Some staff do not understand which forms and procedures are in use. There is no consistent procedure for identifying which version of a form is the one currently in use. In response to recent self-assessment a large number of new procedures have been introduced which are not yet fully effective.

39. Agenda produced its second self-assessment report for the inspection. It is clearly set out and identifies strengths and weaknesses for the occupational area and generic aspects. A detailed action plan, which identifies responsibilities for action, timescales and indicators of success, is included. Inspectors considered many of the strengths identified in the report to be no more than normal practice and that significant weaknesses in some areas were not recognised. Inspectors agreed with the grade for training in agriculture, but awarded lower grades for the generic aspects than those given in the self-assessment report.