



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JULY 2000

NETA Training Group

SUMMARY

NETA Training Group offers good training in construction and engineering. The training and assessment is well planned. Work placements are good, NVQ achievement rates are high, and many trainees and clients secure long-term employment. Call-centre training is excellent; there is effective initial assessment of occupational skills, training resources are good, and trainees are well supported in their search for jobs. Hospitality training is less than satisfactory; training is unplanned, opportunities for assessment are missed and achievement rates are poor. Trainees, clients and employers have little understanding of equality issues and insufficient awareness of their obligations. Pastoral support is good. However, initial assessment is generally ineffective and individual training plans are poor. Management of training is less than satisfactory; there are no contracts with subcontractors and employers have little understanding of NVQs and the part they should play in their delivery. Quality assurance is also unsatisfactory; arrangements focus mainly on compliance with contracts. The company's quality assurance procedures do not cover all training activities, and there is little evaluation of training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	2
Retailing & customer service	1
Hospitality	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong links with local employers
- ◆ good job opportunities for many trainees
- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications in construction and engineering
- ◆ some excellent resources for construction and call-centre trainees
- ◆ good pastoral support

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment in most occupational areas
- ◆ slow progress for modern apprentices
- ◆ inadequate development and assessment of key skills
- ◆ ineffective promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ poor management of employers and subcontractors
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training

INTRODUCTION

1. NETA Training Group (NETA) was established in 1975. It provides training for the engineering construction industry, primarily in Teesside. It also has national and international customers. NETA is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. There are 75 staff. Operational management responsibility rests with the general manager, who is supported by a team of seven managers. One of the managers, in a newly created post, has overall responsibility for all government-funded training programmes. The general manager reports to a board of trustees, drawn from representatives of the local engineering construction and other related industries.

2. NETA has been involved in government-funded training since 1982. Before then its business focused exclusively on commercial training. NETA has a contract with Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). There are currently 211 trainees and clients following national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1 to 3 in construction, engineering, retailing and customer service and hospitality. Seventy-four trainees are modern apprentices, 69 are on national traineeships, 21 are following other forms of work-based learning for young people, and there are 13 trainees on work-based learning for adults. NETA is a member of the partnership which contracts with the Employment Service's Teesside unit of delivery for the New Deal. There are 34 young people following the New Deal full-time training and education option. NETA also holds a direct contract with the Employment Service for the New Deal Gateway programme.

3. NETA offers a wide range of customised commercial courses, on a local, national and international basis. It is the United Kingdom's largest provider of training in the engineering construction industry. The company operates from a main site in Stockton-on-Tees, with satellite centres at Thornaby-on-Tees and Canning Town in London. The London centre is used solely for commercial training courses. In the financial year 1999-2000, commercial income represented 75.5 per cent of the company's turnover.

4. The TEC's area of operation covers the unitary authorities of Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Hartlepool and Darlington, which have a combined population of 653,700. The unemployment rate varies across the five unitary authorities, but at an average of 8 per cent in May 2000, it compares unfavourably with the Northeast's average of 7.3 per cent and the national average of 4.3 per cent. In some areas of Tees Valley, unemployment exceeds 20 per cent.

5. In July 1999, 8 per cent of school leavers in Teesside were unemployed; a further 8 per cent entered employment, including modern apprenticeships, while 56 per cent continued in education. Fifteen per cent entered government-funded work-based training, and the destinations of the remaining 13 per cent were unknown. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above ranged from 31 per cent in Middlesbrough to 42.9 per cent in Darlington, compared with the

national average of 47.9 per cent. Less than 2 per cent of the population in the Tees Valley are from a minority ethnic group. However, minority ethnic communities are unevenly distributed across the area. In Middlesbrough, minority ethnic communities form 4.4 per cent of the population. In Hartlepool and the borough of Redcar and Cleveland the figure is 0.7 per cent.

6. Until the 1970s, the area relied almost exclusively for employment on steel making, bulk chemical production and shipbuilding. These industries are in decline, and until recently, the area has failed to attract employers to fill the gap. Some new employers are now established, including a number of micro-electronics companies and call-centre operators.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. NETA completed its self-assessment report in May 2000. This was first time the organisation had carried out a self-assessment in accordance with the Training Standards Council's (TSC) guidelines. Previous self-assessment exercises, conducted in 1998 and 1999, were completed against a locally approved framework produced by the five North East TECs. No reports were produced as a result of these earlier self-assessments, and there were no written records of strengths and weaknesses.

8. The self-assessment report prepared for this inspection was compiled by the general manager and the manager responsible for government-funded training, in consultation with other NETA staff. In preparation for self-assessment, the government-funded training manager attended a training event provided by Tees Valley TEC. The information gained from this event was shared with all staff at NETA. An action plan has been developed by the company to help address the issues raised as a result of self-assessment.

9. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 23 days with NETA in July 2000. All the occupational areas were inspected. Inspectors visited 28 employers and interviewed 24 workplace supervisors. They interviewed 48 trainees and visited both of NETA's training centres in Teesside. Twenty-one staff were interviewed. Two representatives from organisations to whom training is subcontracted were also interviewed. Inspectors examined a range of documentary evidence, including 40 NVQ portfolios, together with assessment and review documents, and internal and external verifiers' reports. Policy and procedure documents, marketing information and a wide range of performance data were also examined. Inspectors observed several reviews and 11 instruction sessions.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1	4				5
Engineering		2				2
Retailing & customer service			3			3
Hospitality		1				1
Total	1	7	3	0	0	11

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

10. There are 35 TEC-funded trainees and 22 New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. The construction training programmes are in scaffolding, gas fitting and thermal insulation. Off-the-job training is carried out at the training centre in Stockton. TEC-funded trainees and the New Deal clients undertake work placements with a variety of companies and local authorities, mainly in the Stockton and Middlesborough areas.

11. Until June 2000, NETA subcontracted some modern apprenticeship training to another provider. The arrangement covered several construction occupations including scaffolding, carpentry and joinery. Since 1997, 85 modern apprentices have started training, mostly through the subcontracted agreement. All the present trainees are trained by NETA. Forty-seven per cent achieved an NVQ at level 2 and 19 per cent an NVQ at level 3. A further 12 per cent achieved all the goals in their individual training plans.

12. There are 13 New Deal clients working towards a basic scaffolding qualification, which will give them the necessary entry-level qualification for the scaffolding industry. There are also two modern apprentices, employed by local scaffolding companies. They are working towards an NVQ level 3 in scaffolding, which, if achieved, will give them recognition in the industry as advanced scaffolders.

13. Twenty-four trainees are on a national traineeship programme, working towards an NVQ level 2 in thermal insulation. Local depots of large national and multi-national companies employ them all, predominantly in the petro-chemical sector, where they receive training on the job. They started training in 1999-2000, and, during their two-year training programme, they receive off-the-job training and NVQ assessment in 10 two-week blocks. To date, none have left training. Between 1996 and 1999, 57 per cent of trainees completed their individual training plans and 70 per cent gained employment in the industry.

14. There are nine adults on the work-based learning programme, working towards an NVQ at level 2 in domestic gas installation and maintenance. They are all employed, either with a national company which has a local base, or with one of three local borough councils. They receive training on the job, and attend NETA for planned, two-week periods when they undertake additional training off the job. They are also assessed on and off the job. This is the first group of trainees to undertake the programme, and they are all still in training. NETA has recently started to train New Deal clients in gas installation. Twenty-two clients have started to date, and nine are still in training. The course lasts 20 weeks and clients receive training and assessment for elements of the accredited certification scheme, which is a statutory requirement of the gas industry.

15. NETA's self-assessment report for construction covered scaffolding only. Thermal insulation and gas fitting were included under engineering. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but found that some were no more than normal practice. The self-assessment report also identified some weaknesses. Inspectors found further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

GOOD PRACTICE

New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option are provided with scaffolding tools and equipment worth in excess of £100 each. When they finish their training they will have the personal equipment which a prospective employer requires of them. This increases clients' chances of finding employment.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well-planned, off-the-job training
- ◆ good use of work-based evidence and assessment
- ◆ excellent placement and employment opportunities for New Deal clients
- ◆ additional qualifications increase employment opportunities
- ◆ well-resourced training facilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessing key skills
- ◆ failure to set targets for progress towards the NVQ in scaffolding
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification procedures

16. Off-the-job trainers have extensive industrial experience. They provide good role models for TEC-funded trainees and the New Deal clients. The training is good, well planned and varied. TEC-funded trainees and New Deal clients speak highly of their experiences with NETA. Training staff make excellent use of their long-established industrial contacts to widen the scope of available placements.

17. The two modern apprentices in scaffolding receive training on the job from their employers. They work with teams of experienced scaffolders on a wide range of activities. Both were employed before they began training with NETA. NETA took on the modern apprentices after an approach from their employers, so that they could benefit from the formal training and assessment required to register them as advanced scaffolders. Well-established systems are in place for the systematic collection of evidence from the trainees. Rigorous procedures, introduced by NETA, have maximised the assessment opportunities for scaffolding trainees.

18. Workplace reviews for the scaffolding modern apprentices, however, have not been fully effective. A failure to systematically monitor progress towards the NVQ has resulted in the delayed achievement of some NVQ elements and units. Employers are not aware of the NVQ assessment criteria, and are therefore unaware of the work that their trainees need to cover to complete their NVQs.

19. Trainees on the gas-fitting programme benefit from rigorous work-based assessment. Supervisors and mentors who undertake the assessments are well qualified and hold the relevant assessors' awards. Assessments take place in

customers' homes and trainees are clear about the assessment criteria and the process. Assessors are skilled at identifying evidence relevant to other units and elements when observing trainees' performance. For example, evidence of communication skills and health and safety planning often emerge from a single task, observed by the assessor. Trainees are working to high occupational standards, and demonstrate appropriate levels of responsibility in their work.

20. The New Deal clients working towards the basic scaffolders' qualification are provided with excellent work placements which, for many of them, develop into long-term employment within the scaffolding industry. Achievement and employment rates are good. Since 1998, 61 New Deal clients have started training as scaffolders. Of these, 77 per cent have achieved the goals on their training plans and 36 per cent have obtained jobs in the industry. Training staff are highly supportive of the New Deal clients.

21. Most trainees benefit from additional training to complement their NVQ training and improve their employment prospects. For example, thermal insulation trainees follow a substantial course in scaffolding appreciation for which they receive a NETA certificate. This takes their training beyond the minimum required for the NVQ. New Deal clients undertake a two-day course on which they are trained and assessed for an industry-approved safety qualification. This award is a requirement of the construction industry and possessing it significantly improves the holders' job prospects.

22. New Deal clients on the newly introduced gas-fitting programme are placed with local and national companies. Trainers have considerable experience in their occupational sectors and use their contacts in the industry effectively to give clients excellent opportunities for work experience. Several New Deal clients have been offered employment and those who have completed their work placements are confident of securing employment on completion of the programme.

23. The scaffolding workshop is a purpose-built environment designed for training and assessment. It is well resourced, with up-to-date equipment. Scaffolding trainees are given a significant amount of tools and safety equipment, which they can keep upon completion of their training. Scaffolding and thermal insulation trainees undertake training and assessment activities on a high-level industrial-scale rig, which accurately simulates real working conditions. Staff involved in off-the-job training make good use of resources to simulate real activities which occur in the industry.

24. Opportunities to recognise and assess key skills are being missed. Many on- and off-the-job training and assessment activities generate potential evidence of competence in one or more key skills, but these opportunities are not being identified or exploited. The two modern apprentices, for example, are not being helped to identify their use of key skills in the workplace. National trainees following the thermal insulation course spend a week of their off-the-job training time covering key skills. However, these are delivered in isolation, with little reference to their occupational training.

25. Until recently, internal verification in construction lacked rigour and was too infrequent. The sampling of assessments and portfolios was not systematic and opportunities to improve assessment procedures were missed. New systems have been established which introduce acceptable levels of quality assurance. However, they have yet to have an impact on training. In scaffolding and gas fitting there are not enough qualified internal verifiers.

Engineering

Grade 2

26. There are 110 trainees: 53 modern apprentices, 44 national trainees and 13 on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in a variety of engineering and engineering-related trades, including plant maintenance, instrumentation, fabrication and welding, pipe fitting, and materials processing and machining. Most trainees are employed in one of 49 local, national and international companies representing a wide range of occupations within the engineering industry. The larger companies are involved in activities such as welding and fabrication, chemical industrial work, shipbuilding and offshore construction. The smaller companies provide services to the local community and to larger multi-national companies.

27. Trainees initially attend the centre in Stockton for a period of three months, and work towards the engineering foundation NVQ at level 2. While this training is going on, work placements are found for each trainee. Trainees gaining employment at any stage are transferred to the modern apprenticeship programme. Most trainees attend a local college of further education on a block-release basis, spending two weeks in college and two weeks on the job. Others attend on a day-release basis. At college, they study the theory elements of their NVQ. The development of key skills forms part of the college programme for those attending college on block release. NETA provides key skills for those trainees who attend college on a day-release basis. NETA's staff carry out reviews of trainees' progress at least every 12 weeks. They also carry out the assessments. Fifteen members of NETA's staff are qualified assessors, five are qualified internal verifiers, and two are qualified to accredit prior learning. Reviews and assessments take place both on and off the job. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses. Two of the strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the other strengths and weaknesses identified by the company and found a number of additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and frequent reviews involving all parties
- ◆ comprehensive on- and off-the-job assessment
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to achieve additional qualifications
- ◆ high rates of NVQ achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of systematic planning for on-the-job training
- ◆ unsatisfactory procedures for recording and monitoring trainees' achievements
- ◆ slow progress by modern apprentices

28. Trainees are reviewed regularly both on and off the job. Reviews are effective and frequent. They are conducted at least every 12 weeks but, in many cases, they occur more frequently, sometimes as often as every two weeks. The reviews are conducted by a qualified assessor from NETA who has occupational competence in the area in which the trainee is working. Trainees' progress towards completion of the NVQ is reviewed and recorded and new goals are set. The review process involves the trainee, the employer and the assessor. Each receives a copy of the completed review document. Realistic and challenging targets are set for the trainee to meet by the next visit, and the employer's involvement in this process is critical in ensuring that trainees have the opportunity, at work, to achieve these targets. Reviews cover all aspects of training, from pastoral issues to the technical content of the NVQ being studied. Clear written feedback is given to the trainees on the progress they are making towards achieving the NVQ.

29. Most assessments are carried out on the job by NETA's staff, who are qualified assessors and occupationally competent in the areas concerned. Assessments are mainly based on direct observation of trainees at work. Supporting evidence includes written assignment work, set by the assessor at the previous review, and photographic evidence of tasks being carried out. When an assessment of a particular task cannot be carried out at work, arrangements are made for the trainee to be assessed off the job or, in certain circumstances, to transfer to another employer. Details of the assessment are recorded in the trainee's portfolio. Assessment of training on and off the job is of a high standard. Procedures for recording and monitoring achievement however, are unsatisfactory. Although each element of the NVQ is accredited as it is successfully completed, there is no central record of trainees' achievements. The company has achievement record cards, but they are not filled in. All assessment records are kept in trainees' portfolios, and if a portfolio were to be lost, there would be no record of achievement.

30. Trainees begin their training on one of a wide variety of engineering-related NVQs at level 2. Rates of progression from this point are good. Some progress from basic craft courses to more demanding technician-based qualifications. Trainees gaining employment are encouraged to become modern apprentices and stay in training to complete their qualifications. Trainees attend a local college of further education to learn the theory elements of their NVQ. In addition trainees work towards specialist qualifications which improve employment prospects. These include awards for electrical engineering, offshore safety, coded welding,

crane driving and first aid. Trainees and employers value the additional skills which are developed in achieving these awards.

31. Where trainees have lost their jobs because employers have laid off workers or ceased trading, NETA has brought the trainees to their Stockton training centre for off-the-job training and quickly found them alternative employment. As a result, they have been able to continue their training with the minimum of disruption.

32. On-the-job training is not systematically planned. Trainees cover all the elements of their NVQ, either at work or in the training centre, but this is mainly because trainees and assessors are aware of the content of each of the units. Trainees are assessed as and when they complete the relevant work. There is little or no attempt to plan workplace activities in order to maximise the opportunities for trainees to demonstrate NVQ competencies.

33. Achievement rates for adults and young people on work-based learning programmes are good. Although there are no adults in training at present, all adults to date have completed their individual training plans and almost 80 per cent have gained employment. Over the last four years, more than 70 per cent of young people have achieved an NVQ level 2, more than 60 per cent have gained employment, and a further 12 per cent have continued their training by entering the modern apprenticeship programme.

34. The number of modern apprentices has fallen steadily from 42 in 1996-97 to 11 in 1999-2000. However, modern apprentices are making slow progress towards completion of their individual training plans. Twenty-four per cent of those starting in 1996-97 and 10 per cent of those starting in 1997-98 have completed their plans. A little over 50 per cent of apprentices starting between 1996 and 1998 left training without completing their training plans, although nearly half of them achieved an NVQ at level 3. Eighteen modern apprentices who started between 1996 and 1998 are still in training. Only three of the 35 apprentices who have started training since 1998 have left training, although most of those remaining have yet to achieve an NVQ at level 2.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 1

35. There are 14 trainees. Five modern apprentices and one national trainee are working towards retailing NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and customer service NVQs at level 2. There are eight adult trainees on the work-based learning programme for call-centre operatives. All the adults are unemployed and all are following a six-week training course. NETA takes up to 10 new recruits onto the call-centre course every three weeks. Call-centre training takes place in a modern purpose-built call centre at NETA's Thornaby premises. The modern apprentices and the national trainee are all employed in local shops. Their training and assessment is subcontracted to another provider. Assessments are carried out in the workplace, once a week at pre-arranged times. All assessors come from retailing backgrounds and have appropriate assessors' qualifications. Where it occurs, the employers carry out on-the-job training. Off-the-job training, on a variety of retailing-related

subjects, takes place on a monthly basis. Trainees are invited to attend all sessions. The company reported separately on its own training and the subcontracted training and awarded separate grades. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. A number of the strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than the grades given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ very frequent visits from trainers/assessors in retailing
- ◆ well-resourced call-centre training
- ◆ good initial assessment of occupational skills in the call-centre
- ◆ high retention rates for call-centre trainees
- ◆ strong support for call-centre trainees in finding jobs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates in retailing

36. Retailing trainees are all employed by well-known shops and have the opportunity to gain experience in a wide range of departments and retailing activities. Although not a requirement of the modern apprenticeship framework, many modern apprentices complete the retailing NVQ at level 2 before progressing to the retail operations NVQ at level 3. Some trainees also achieve a customer service NVQ at level 2 as an additional qualification. Assessors from the subcontractor visit the trainees on a weekly basis. They examine work set the previous week, and set more work for the following week. They also conduct observations of the trainees at work. The frequency of these review and assessment visits means that trainees are set realistic and achievable short-term targets. In addition, with so little time between visits, any problems which may arise are resolved quickly. Despite the level of support trainees receive, however, retention rates are poor and progress towards NVQs is slow. No modern apprentices have completed their individual training plans, and five of the 10 apprentices joining since 1998-99 have left early. Three of these five left with an NVQ at level 2.

37. The call-centre training programme was set up just over a year ago. Trainees work on modern, industry-standard equipment. The software used is industry specific. Trainees are prepared well for jobs as call-centre operatives. The call-centre has a good reputation with local employers and the Employment Service, and the company has been very successful in attracting trainees to the course.

38. There is an effective initial assessment of occupational skills. Trainees for the call-centre course are normally referred to the company by the Employment Service, whose staff contact NETA directly by telephone, usually with the prospective trainee present. The subsequent telephone conversation, between the

prospective trainee and one of NETA's call-centre trainers, forms part of the initial assessment and interview. Because telephone skills are an integral part of the job, NETA staff have introduced this process to help identify individual development needs right at the point of entry. On the first day of training, a trainee's computer skills are assessed while they use industry-specific call-centre software. The results of the assessment help in planning their training. Industry-standard performance indicators are used throughout the training. For example, an accuracy rating of 98.2 per cent is used as the indicator for assessing competence when entering data.

39. Formal training, covering both theory and practical skills, usually takes four weeks. Training is well planned and well structured. The mix of theory and practical training is well thought out, and effective in maintaining trainees' interest and motivation. After the intensive training, trainees are encouraged to apply for as many jobs as they can. On average, over 50 per cent of trainees get jobs, although the success rate for some groups is significantly higher. The curriculum vitae of each trainee who is leaving without a job is kept on file. Employers routinely approach NETA when they need to recruit new operatives, and the company sends details of those still unemployed, further helping to improve their trainees' job prospects. Since the course started a little over a year ago, retention rates have been 100 per cent and all the adults starting training have achieved the goals on their individual training plans.

Hospitality

Grade 4

40. There are 14 modern apprentices and four adults on the work-based learning programme. There are also 12 young people on the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. All trainees and clients are working towards one of a variety of hospitality NVQs at levels 1 to 3. The apprentices are working towards NVQs at level 3 in restaurant supervision, licensed premises supervision, accommodation supervision or kitchen supervision. The New Deal clients are working towards NVQs at level 2 in bar service, licensed premises supervision, and food preparation and cooking. The adult trainees are working towards an NVQ at level 2 in bar service or an NVQ at level 3 in licensed premises supervision. All trainees are expected to achieve a food hygiene qualification and a basic health and safety certificate, training for which takes place at the Thornaby training centre. Induction is carried out by NETA's staff and in the workplaces. Trainees and clients also receive an induction from their employers and placement providers.

41. Most trainees and clients work in public houses operated by national or regional chains. There are also some trainees in hotels. All training and assessment is undertaken in the workplace. Assessment and verification is conducted by NETA's staff, all of whom hold the relevant assessor and verifier's qualifications. One member of staff is occupationally qualified to assess bar, food and drink service and food preparation. The other is occupationally qualified to assess bar and drink service. The self-assessment report lacked detail and was not sufficiently

self-critical. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths stated in the report. The other two strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified a further two strengths and five weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that awarded by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent visits to the workplace by trainers/assessors
- ◆ high level of responsiveness to individuals' needs
- ◆ good, well-structured portfolios
- ◆ good short-term assessment planning for assessments

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate learning resources
- ◆ delayed introduction of key skills
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

42. Trainees receive frequent visits from NETA's staff, often as many as one or two a week, if required. There is a review of the work the trainee has completed since the last visit, and an agreement on targets to be achieved by the next visit. On some of these visits staff observe trainees at work and conduct assessments. On other occasions, visits have a more general purpose, or focus on testing occupational knowledge or reviewing portfolios. All visits occur at times agreed by the trainees and employers, and the team at NETA alter the arrangements at short notice if asked to do so. NETA's staff are also in regular contact with trainees and supervisors by telephone. Formal reviews of progress occur every 12 weeks.

43. NETA is responsive to individuals' needs. The New Deal clients are immediately found placements to match their career aspirations. If, for any reason, placements have to be changed, this is done quickly and with the full involvement of the trainees and their employers. NETA's strong links with employers in the area enables the company to offer trainees a range of employment opportunities. The high level of help and support received by trainees and workplace supervisors is acknowledged and valued. Trainees are highly motivated.

44. Trainees' NVQ portfolios are well structured. They contain a variety of evidence, which is carefully indexed and matched against the elements and units of the NVQ, and cross-referenced where appropriate. Trainees understand the NVQ process and take pride in their portfolios. NETA's staff provide trainees with effective support in building their portfolios, but take care to avoid trainees becoming too reliant on their advice.

45. Training is totally work based, and mainly unplanned. All trainees have individual training plans, but these simply contain a single target date for the completion of the whole training plan. All trainees acquire good practical skills, but there is no systematic planning of the training trainees will undertake. Trainees simply engage in the work which their employers require. The formal reviews do not focus on the training received during the review period, and no use is made of the individual training plans during these reviews. There is little attempt to systematically monitor or evaluate the quality of the training in the workplace.

46. Learning resources to support the trainees are inadequate. The amount and quality available varies from placement to placement. In some cases trainees rely on visits to the local library to obtain the information they need. There is some resource material at the Thornaby centre, but it is of variable quality and of little use to trainees as they do not visit the centre. Some photocopied material is distributed to trainees, but much of it is uninteresting and some of it is difficult to read. There is no effort to provide resources designed for individual trainees.

47. NETA's staff undertakes all assessment. There are no work-based assessors although, in two placements, workplace supervisors are working towards relevant assessors' qualifications. Assessors ensure that trainees are clear about their forthcoming assessments and that they understand the preparation required and the assessment methods to be used. Some effective use is made of witness testimony. However, other opportunities to gather evidence are not being taken. The degree to which employers are involved in the assessment varies. Some employers see this as entirely NETA's responsibility.

48. Owing to a staff vacancy there are not enough appropriately qualified trainers in food preparation and cooking and housekeeping. A new internal verification system has been piloted within the hospitality department. It is now fully operational and providing a highly effective service.

49. Key skills are mentioned at the start of the modern apprenticeship programme but there is no work on key skills until trainees start their level 3 qualification, and are issued with copies of the key skills units. Relevant work completed for the level 2 NVQ is then cross-referenced to competencies listed in the key skills units. Assignment work designed to help trainees gather occupational evidence for the level 3 NVQ is also matched to the evidence requirements of the key skills units. Trainees understanding of key skills varies significantly.

50. Retention and achievement rates on hospitality programmes are poor. Of the modern apprentices starting since 1997-98, none have completed their individual training plans. In the last four years, only two out of 50 starters have completed their apprenticeships. NVQ achievement rates are also poor. Sixty-two per cent of modern apprentices who started training since 1996 have left without achieving an NVQ at any level. In 1999-2000, 13 of the 21 starters have left without achieving an NVQ. Retention and achievement rates for New Deal clients are similarly poor. Of 40 starters in 1999-2000, six found a job and three gained an NVQ level 2, while 34 failed to complete their training plans. Job outcomes and NVQ

achievement rates among adult trainees are also unsatisfactory. Of 38 trainees who started training in 1998, 10 found employment, six gained an NVQ and 29 left early without any qualifications.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 4

51. NETA has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, which is updated annually. A copy of the policy is included in the recently introduced trainees' information pack which is sent to TEC-funded trainees and the New Deal clients at induction. The pack also contains a written explanation of the policy and copies of the disciplinary, grievance and complaints procedures and the NVQ appeals procedures. Overall responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the general manager, but a member of the management team has recently been given the additional brief to serve as the company's equal opportunities officer. All job descriptions refer to the responsibility of staff to maintain and promote equality of opportunity, and equal opportunities is always an agenda item at management meetings. The company states its commitment to maintain equality of opportunity and equal access to vocational training and qualifications for all its customers. The small amount of promotional material produced by the company has to be approved by the equal opportunities officer. Ninety-one per cent of trainees and clients are men, and 1.6 per cent of all trainees and New Deal clients are from minority ethnic groups. There are no trainees classed as having a disability. Of the 70 staff, 50 are men, and none are from a minority ethnic group. The self-assessment report did not contain any strengths and contained two weaknesses. Inspectors identified a single strength and further weaknesses. The grade awarded is the same as that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and effective complaints procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices
- ◆ no analysis and use of data relating to equal opportunities
- ◆ no recruitment targets for under-represented groups
- ◆ poor access to the Thornaby training centre for people with restricted mobility

52. There are few formal complaints. Those that arise are dealt with swiftly by the general manager, in line with the company's written procedures. All complaints are investigated thoroughly and fairly. Detailed records are kept and the complainant is kept fully informed of progress during any investigation.

53. NETA have embarked on a number of initiatives to address weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. The allocation of day-to-day responsibility for equal opportunities to a member of the management team is beginning to raise the profile of equal opportunities within the organisation. Recently the company has run a one-day training event for staff, to raise their awareness of equal opportunities issues. This is the first time that such an event has been organised. A similar training event is planned for those staff who could not attend the first one.

54. Trainees show little understanding of equal opportunities, and some have no recollection of the topic being mentioned during induction. None could adequately explain how equal opportunities applies to them as employees and trainees. The checklist of topics to be covered at trainees' induction makes no mention of equal opportunities. Although all trainees have the information pack containing a copy of the company's policy and procedures for equal opportunities, few trainees were familiar with the contents of the pack. The design of the book and the amount of information it contains makes it unsuitable for trainees with literacy problems. There are plans to use this handbook during induction. The company is planning equal opportunities training for trainees, based on the recent training organised for staff. At present, trainees are not given any information or advice on practical issues such as workplace bullying or harassment.

55. The pre-placement checks on employers and placement providers pay insufficient attention to equal opportunities. In many cases, employers are not asked for a copy of their equal opportunities policies and procedures. Employers and placement providers receive the company's information pack and a copy of NVQ procedures. However, NETA's staff provide no further explanation of these. The agreement with employers contains a statement of the need for employers to commit themselves to equal opportunities, but there is no test of this commitment. There is no systematic monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. Subcontractors have recently been asked for copies of their equal opportunities policies, but at present, the company relies on the assumption, rather than the knowledge, that its subcontractors have good equal opportunities practices.

56. The company has no procedures for collecting and analysing data on trainees in terms of gender, ethnicity, and disability. Information on trainees' progress, achievements and destinations by gender, ethnicity and disability are difficult to extract from existing records. The proportion of trainees from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly lower than the proportion of people from minority ethnic communities within the local population, and the company has done little to try to address traditional imbalances between male and female trainees in particular occupational areas. As a result of the self-assessment, the company has launched initiatives aimed at developing links with groups in the local community under-represented on its training programme. However, it has yet to identify and accumulate the data necessary to pursue these initiatives effectively.

57. Access to the Thornaby training centre for people with restricted mobility is poor. There are no assigned parking spaces for disabled drivers near to the entrance. The heavy set of double doors giving access to the building are difficult

to open. There is no lift to the first floor, where the training rooms are located. The only toilet for wheelchair users is on the ground floor.

Trainee support

Grade 4

58. Trainees and clients are introduced to NETA in a variety of ways. Most of those on modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes are recommended by their employers, many of whom have used NETA for several years. The Employment Service refers the New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option to the company. A few trainees contact NETA after meeting careers service representatives or respond to recommendation from friends or relatives. Trainees who are unemployed receive off-the-job training while seeking employment or attending job interviews arranged through NETA's network of industry contacts. On some programmes, trainees receive an initial assessment of their basic and occupational skills before starting their training. All trainees have an induction to NETA's procedures followed, in many cases, by a further induction when they begin work with employers. Most trainees undertake off-the-job training at NETA's or other training centres on a day-release or block-release basis. Trainees and clients in hospitality undertake all their training in the workplace. Reviews of progress are usually conducted by a member of NETA's staff, either in the workplace or in the one of the company's two training centres. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered some of the strengths to be no more than normal practice and found a number of additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible training arrangements to meet individuals' needs
- ◆ high levels of personal support for trainees and New Deal clients
- ◆ effective recognition of trainees' achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment of basic skills
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ inadequate training plans
- ◆ poor recording of the additional support provided for trainees
- ◆ inadequate job-search provision

59. NETA provides off-the-job training to suit the individual needs of trainees and employers. When opportunities to acquire and demonstrate the competences required for the NVQ are not available in the workplace, trainees attend NETA's training centres to undertake additional training and assessment at times

convenient to the employer and the trainee. In some cases, the company uses its good relationship with employers effectively by moving trainees between employers to ensure that they develop the full range of competences for their chosen occupation. Where economic factors have led to trainees becoming redundant during training, NETA arranges for off-the-job training to continue, while making efforts to secure them other employment. The company has considerable success in arranging employment for its trainees and New Deal clients.

60. Trainees and clients receive strong pastoral support from staff at NETA. Individual circumstances which may affect training are taken into account, and staff help in dealing with personal problems, including travel difficulties. Time off is arranged for trainees who have family problems, and members of staff readily assist in researching benefit issues and arranging childcare. The frequency of visits to trainees in the workplace is increased if additional help is needed or personal difficulties arise. New Deal clients in particular benefit from NETAs' links with industry. Training programmes and placements take close account of clients' aspirations and many clients secure permanent employment as a result. Clients' success in finding jobs owes much to the research the company has undertaken with employers to identify occupational areas in which there is a regional or national skill shortage. In one case, New Deal clients attend a placement with a national employer several hundred miles away. Clients are accommodated in a hotel and have the use of a hire car to travel to and from work during the four-week placement.

61. NETA celebrates the successes of its trainees. There is an annual award ceremony, which is well attended by trainees, parents and representatives of industry. The event is intended not only to recognise the achievement of those who are leaving, but also to help motivate those who are still on the programme. In one instance a trainee who was to receive the apprentice of the year award lost his job shortly before the presentation ceremony. The event was used to publicise the trainee's circumstances and another employer offered him a job. Many trainees are successful in regional and national skills competitions. Recent issues of NETA's in-house newsletter highlight the successes of welding trainees who have received union and institute awards. Many of the cups and shields awarded to trainees are displayed in the reception area of the company's headquarters. Many trainees who have not succeeded in formal education achieve their first ever qualification with NETA.

62. The initial assessment of basic skills is inadequate in many occupational areas. Most trainees start training and employment without having any test of their basic levels of literacy and numeracy. NETA relies mainly on its occupational tutors to identify trainees and clients with learning difficulties. In one instance, a trainee with reading difficulties had been given textbooks to read in researching a workplace task. Neither NETA nor the employer had identified the trainee's literacy problem despite an initial interview and several weeks training.

63. There is no initial assessment of key skills and opportunities are missed to raise trainees' awareness of key skills at an early stage in their training. In many

occupational areas the development of key skills is left until late in the training programme. This has left trainees unsure about the significance of key skills, particularly the part they play in the workplace. The absence of a key skills test at the beginning of the programme has led to some trainees undertaking information technology training when they already have considerable experience of computers or, in a few cases, qualifications in information technology.

64. In many cases, training plans fail to reflect the needs of individual trainees. The completion dates for awards are often identical for groups of trainees. Little allowance is made for the different environments in which trainees work, individual learning needs or past experience and qualifications. Training plans are rarely updated to record achievements or to reflect changes in trainees' circumstances.

65. Details of the additional support given to trainees and clients are not systematically recorded. Several parties are involved in providing this support and the lack of an agreed method of recording has led to confusion. One engineering trainee is receiving extensive literacy support from another training provider but there is no written record to show the progress this trainee is making.

66. Jobsearch support for trainees and clients nearing completion of their programmes is inadequate. Some trainees and clients who have not secured employment are unclear about what they will do when they leave. The company is failing to capitalise on the sense of achievement these trainees are experiencing in achieving their awards. A programme of jobsearch activities, including interview techniques, compiling a curriculum vitae and writing letters of application has been developed, but has yet to be implemented.

Management of training

Grade 4

67. The company has an annual business plan. It was first accredited as an Investor in People in 1997 and was re-accredited in January 2000. A team of seven department managers supports the general manager, who reports to the board of trustees on a quarterly basis. The management team meets formally on a monthly basis to discuss progress against objectives in the business plan. It also meets weekly on a less formal basis. Information on the issues raised and decisions made at management meetings are communicated to all staff. Government-funded training accounts for a little less than 25 per cent of NETA's turnover. Until the beginning of this financial year, each department took responsibility for all aspects of government-funded training. However, in response to the self-assessment report's identification of the need for a manager to take direct responsibility for government-funded programmes, a new post was created in April 2000 for the management and co-ordination of all TEC and Employment Service business. Some engineering training is subcontracted to the local college of further education and all the retailing training is subcontracted to another training provider. NETA employs 44 trainer/assessors for its government-funded training and commercial work. All are occupationally competent and have the relevant

training and assessor qualifications. The strengths identified in the self-assessment report represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses identified. They also found other strengths and weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective, well-established relationships with employers
- ◆ strong involvement in government and industrial initiatives which strengthens training opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal agreements with subcontractors
- ◆ inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some employers' lack of understanding of, and involvement in, NVQ programmes
- ◆ underdeveloped management information systems
- ◆ failure to follow staff appraisal procedures

68. NETA has been operating as a training organisation for 25 years and has a sound reputation in the local business community for the quality of its training. The company maintains close contact with commerce and industry through the activities of its business development department and this enables it to offer trainees and clients good opportunities for training and employment. NETA understands the needs and demands of the industries in which it operates, and uses this expertise to ensure that the training is at the leading edge of developments within these industries. NETA is also represented on regional and national groups, at a strategic level, and on several national training and industry-specific groups. This means that the company is able to respond quickly to new legislation and the changing demands of industry, and to tailor its training programmes accordingly.

69. NETA uses subcontractors for some of its training. However, it has no service level agreements with its subcontractors, except in one case where an agreement relates solely to compliance with the terms of the TEC contract. The company conducted a paper-based audit of one of its subcontractors but there was no contact with trainees or employers, and no observations of training, assessment or internal verification. NETA has no input into the ways in which subcontractors select trainees or monitor work placements.

70. On- and off-the-job training takes place in most occupational areas. Some of the training is well planned. Some of it is not. Off-the-job training in construction is particularly good, but there is little or no co-ordination of this training with training on the job. All training in hospitality takes place on the job and most of it is unplanned. Off-the-job training in retailing is given by a subcontractor and there are no formal mechanisms for co-ordinating this with training provided in the

workplace. Off-the-job training in engineering takes place at a local college of further education. The training is good and there is frequent contact with the college, but there are no checks to ensure that subject areas are not being missed or that there is no duplication of the training taking place on the job.

71. For all occupational areas, employers have varying degrees of understanding of the NVQ process and of what their involvement should be. While this is due in part to the attitude of individual employers, the company has no procedures for dealing with employers' lack of knowledge or the adverse effects this might have on trainees' progress. Retailing trainees are not given any time to work towards their qualifications when at work and this contributes towards their slow progress. In construction, some employers are unaware of NVQ standards and have little knowledge of the tasks which trainees undertake when away from work.

72. The data produced by the company's management information systems are presented in a form which makes it difficult for them to be used by managers in making their decisions. The problem was identified in the self-assessment report and new systems have been introduced. The absence of reliable achievement and retention data has made it difficult for managers to identify weaknesses in the occupational areas.

73. There is a clear written account of the company's staff appraisal system but procedures are not always followed. There were few annual appraisals in 1998, and the 12-week and six-monthly probationary reviews are often missed or not recorded. Personal action plans produced as a result of staff appraisals are usually followed, but there is no formal monitoring of progress.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

74. NETA is accredited to ISO 9002, a nationally recognised quality assurance standard, and has a detailed policies and procedures manual on quality assurance. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with the general manager, supported by another member of staff who co-ordinates quality assurance issues and matters relating to the Investors in People award. NETA has a number of trained quality auditors, and an annual schedule of audits is carried out, covering all the procedures described in the company's manual at least once. The self-assessment report identified few strengths or weaknesses and action is already being taken to address the weaknesses identified. Inspectors found most of the strengths to be no more than normal practice. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of self-assessment
- ◆ prompt action taken to address issues identified through self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training
- ◆ failure of quality assurance arrangements to cover all aspects of training
- ◆ failure to make self-assessment an integral part of quality assurance arrangements

75. In its self-assessment report, NETA accurately identified many of the strengths and weaknesses of the training it provides. An action plan was drawn up promptly, and actions have been taken to address the weaknesses. There has been insufficient time for these actions to have a significant impact on the organisation and quality of training. Nevertheless, the planned changes are substantial.

76. The quality assurance manual does not cover all aspects of government-funded training, and procedures are focussed on compliance with contract rather than the continuous improvement of training. The annual audit of procedures leads to immediate corrective action where failures to observe these procedures are identified. All staff are aware of the requirements of the system.

77. NETA does not routinely evaluate the quality of training and has never conducted an overall review of training. Improvements to particular aspects of training have been introduced, but mainly in response to particular events, not as part of a systematic process. Although feedback is routinely collected from all commercial clients, this process has not, until recently, extended government-funded training. The company is now planning regular surveys of the opinions of trainees, clients, staff and employers. The quality of training differs significantly between occupational areas and between direct and subcontracted training. The absence, until recently, of easily accessible data on retention, achievement and destinations has made it difficult to assess the overall quality of training. Employers and subcontractors are unaware of NETA's quality assurance procedures and the role they should play in assuring the quality of training.

78. NETA has a newly introduced, comprehensive strategy for internal verification. At present, it is fully operational only in hospitality, where internal verification is well planned and rigorous. The strategy is being introduced in other occupational areas.

79. Self-assessment is not an integral part of NETA's quality assurance arrangements, and there has not been an annual self-assessment in accordance with the TSC's requirements. In 1998 and 1999, the company had responded to locally approved TEC quality monitoring procedures, as required by its contract with the TEC. This contract also stated, contrary to the requirements published in *Raising the Standard*, that training providers were not required to produce an annual self-assessment report. NETA completed its first self-assessment, using *Raising the Standard*, in May 2000. The company overstated the quality of its provision in some areas and understated it in others.