



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 2000

The Training and  
Recruitment  
Partnership Limited

## SUMMARY

The Training and Recruitment Partnership Limited offers satisfactory training in business administration and customer service. The provision in construction, engineering and health, care and public service is less than satisfactory. The range of employers is wide and all trainees are employed. The work undertaken provides extensive opportunities for trainees to collect evidence for portfolios. There is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. The company actively promotes equality of opportunity. Management of subcontracting arrangements is poor. Quality assurance arrangements are inadequate and there is very little monitoring of training.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	4
Engineering	4
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Health, care & public services	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	4
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	5

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of employers
- ◆ wide range of on-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ effective action-planning in business administration, customer care and care
- ◆ good staff awareness and promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ good pastoral support

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of work-based assessments
- ◆ poor trainees' achievement rates
- ◆ lack of knowledge of training programmes by employers and trainees
- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities by trainees
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of employers' implementation of equal opportunities procedures
- ◆ poor initial assessment
- ◆ no use of individual training plans as working documents
- ◆ poorly conducted progress reviews
- ◆ weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ poor monitoring of subcontractors

## INTRODUCTION

1. The Training and Recruitment Partnership Limited (TRP) was formed in March 1998 to take over the business of Merton Training Consortium, which had been in existence since 1983. There was no allowable transfer of data with these trainees. The company has one office in Morden, south London and employs a total of 10 staff, five full-time and five part-time. All trainees are in full-time employment. The majority of trainees have off-the-job training provided by one of 20 subcontractors. Trainees in business administration and customer service do not have formal off-the-job training, but arrangements for one-to-one tuition and sessions in portfolio-building are organised when required for trainees and carried out at the TRP's premises.
2. TRP has a contract with AZTEC (AZ Training and Enterprise Council) to provide advanced modern apprenticeship, foundation modern apprenticeships and other training programmes for young people in the borough of Merton and the neighbouring boroughs of Wandsworth, Kingston and Sutton. The company has a total of 177 trainees. Training is offered in construction, engineering, business administration, customer service and health, care and public services all of which were inspected. There is also a total of 21 trainees in hairdressing, media, hospitality and management and professional. These occupational areas were not inspected owing to the low number of trainees. There are no New Deal clients.
3. Merton has a population of 184,300, of whom 3.6 per cent are unemployed compared with the national average of 3.8 per cent in August 2001. Of those people that are unemployed, 18.4 per cent are in the 18-to-24 year old age group. The main sources of employment in the area are the service industries, public administration, education, the health service, the distributive trades, hotels and restaurants. This is also the case across London and the Southeast, although in London, there are also many employment opportunities in banking, finance and insurance.
4. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 38.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Seventy-four per cent of 16 year olds in Merton remained in full-time education, compared with the average of 67.9 per cent for the United Kingdom as a whole. In London and the Southeast, 75 per cent of 16-year-olds stay on in full-time education. In London and the Southeast, the proportion of 16 year-olds participating in government-funded training programmes was 5 per cent and 6 per cent respectively, compared with 10 per cent in the United Kingdom as a whole.
5. The proportion of people in the Merton area community from minority ethnic groups is 16.3 per cent compared with 6.4 per cent for the United Kingdom as a



whole. In London, the proportion is 20.2 per cent and in the Southeast it is 3.1 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. TRP's staff attended training events on self-assessment arranged by AZTEC. All staff were consulted during the preparation of the self-assessment report and gave information and provided evidence relevant to their work roles in the company. A final version of this first self-assessment report was produced in June, three months before the inspection. At the same time the company proposed actions to rectify weaknesses, which staff are now working on.

7. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 23 days at TRP in September 2000. They visited 42 employers, interviewed 55 trainees, 28 workplace supervisors and managers, and eight company staff. Inspectors examined assessment records, trainees' portfolios, individual training plans, trainees' files, internal verification records, external verifiers' reports, statistics, minutes of meetings, the business plan and company policies and procedures.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Construction

#### Grade 4

8. The number of trainees on construction programmes is 57. The range of programmes offering NVQs at levels 2 and 3 include plumbing, painting and decorating, plastering, brickwork, wood occupations and electrical installations. There are six advanced modern apprentices, on either electrical installations or wood occupations NVQs. There are 33 foundation modern apprentices of whom four are electrical installations trainees, two bricklaying, 15 wood occupations, one plastering, one painting and decorating and 10 plumbing. Of the 18 trainees on other youth training nine are following electrical installations programmes, two plumbing and seven wood occupations. Trainees are recruited through a variety of sources. Those not already employed are matched to employers with vacancies. All trainees are employed. Trainees undergo an induction programme followed by a combination of on- and off-the-job training. The company arranges off-the-job training through subcontract arrangements with nine colleges of further education on a day-release basis. The subcontractors are responsible for internal verification.

9. At college, trainees receive training in practical skills and instruction in theory. Trainees gain on-the-job experience with their employer. Subcontractors carry out assessment off the job. Inspectors did not agree with some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report, as they considered them to be no more than normal practice Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses in the report and identified additional weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than the self-assessment grade.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good range of supportive employers
- ◆ wide range of on-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ good off-the-job training resources

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure of trainees to gather sufficient evidence on the job
- ◆ lack of work-based assessments
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ weak understanding of NVQs by some employers
- ◆ inadequate occupational experience of training advisors
- ◆ poor trainees' retention and achievement rates

10. The range of work placement and employment opportunities available to trainees is good. Well-established links exist with many local employers. The companies range in size from sole proprietors to large contractors and represent a broad range of construction industry activities. They provide a good range of training opportunities for trainees, which support the trainee in covering the NVQ requirements. Employers have a strong commitment to training. They see training as an investment and as a way of overcoming the skills gap which exists in the construction industry. Employers give additional support to trainees.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*One employer provided opportunities for a first-year trainee to carry out a college-devised training exercise while in the company. The activity enabled the trainee to practice and acquire skills relating to the qualification at an early stage of the programme.*

11. Off-the-job training resources are good. One subcontractor has well-equipped construction workshops which support the acquisition of craft skills. At the same subcontractor the trainees also have access to a modern well-equipped resource centre within the workshop complex. The computers in this area have a range of software available relevant to construction. Other learning support materials include packs from the construction national consortium as well as videos which illustrate a range of skills required in construction NVQs.

12. One subcontractor records each trainee's progress during off-the-job training by using a well-written and clear recording system. However, most subcontractors do not make adequate links between off-the-job training and the trainees' practical experience in the workplace. Most trainees' assessment takes place in off-the-job activities. There is a lack of work-based assessment. TRP recognises this weakness and some trainees have been encouraged to use witness testimony to support their assessment. However, trainees are often unsure about how to collect evidence satisfactorily and some employers are also unaware of how this evidence should be used. Trainees receive good off-the-job training but are failing to collect on-the-job evidence, despite working in situations where there are many opportunities to do so. Trainees are making slow progress towards the achievement of the targets in

their training plan.

13. Many employers are not aware of the range and requirements of their trainees' NVQ and other requirements of the overall training programme. Additionally, employers are unaware of the content of the off-the-job training. As a consequence, there is too little co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training, evidence gathering and assessment. Some trainees were unsure about NVQ requirements and their overall training programme.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*Trainees cover health and safety as an initial unit of the programmes. Despite this coverage two trainees visited by inspectors were working in hazardous environments without the protective footwear with which they had been supplied.*

14. Training advisors visit trainees in the workplace to conduct progress reviews. The advisors have inadequate knowledge and experience of the construction industry and there are no members of staff with any relevant qualifications. The progress reviews include discussion of general progress on- and off-the-job but they are rarely linked directly to NVQ progress or the individual training plan. Trainees are aware of the need to complete key skills training successfully. TRP has worked with some subcontractors to improve the development of key skills. The results of this work have not been shared among all subcontractors. Key skills are not yet fully integrated or established with vocational programmes. For example, one trainee at NVQ level 3 had almost completed the training in the occupational areas but had no evidence of attainment in key skills.

15. Overall in construction, retention and achievement rates of trainees are poor over the two-year period for which data was provided. Many trainees have poor qualifications and struggle with the course. No trainees on other youth training programmes have achieved individual training plans in the two years 1998 to 2000. Retention in 1998-99 was 45 per cent and rose to 84 per cent in 1999-2000. For advanced modern apprenticeships, in 1998-99, retention was 75 per cent with 50 per cent of trainees achieving all targets on their individual training plan. In 1999-2000 retention had dropped to 50 per cent with no completion of individual training plans to date. For foundation modern apprentices, in 1998-99 there was 60 per cent retention and no achievement and in 1999-2000, the retention rate had dropped to 51 per cent with no achievement. Currently, there are a number of foundation modern apprentices waiting to complete NVQs at level 2.

**Engineering****Grade 4**

16. There are 40 trainees working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in motor vehicle and engineering. There are 14 advanced modern apprentices, 13 foundation modern apprentices and 13 youth trainees. Programmes offered include mechanical maintenance, body repair and painting, and general engineering. Trainees in motor vehicle are placed in companies ranging from large dealerships to small partnerships, in service and repair garages and body shops. Engineering trainees are employed by small and medium-sized engineering and manufacturing companies. Trainees attend local colleges for a day a week to acquire background knowledge and for training and assessment in NVQ skills and key skills. TRP's staff visit the trainees in the workplace and liaise with the colleges. The colleges are responsible for internal verification. Staff are experienced and include a

woman member of staff with experience of motor vehicle engineering and another with experience of general engineering and training. Most of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report were considered to be no more than normal practice. Some of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be more relevant to generic aspects, others were agreed on by inspectors who also identified several additional weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good response to additional or changing training needs

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of employers' involvement in NVQ training
- ◆ poor trainees' retention and achievement rates
- ◆ missed workplace evidence and assessment opportunities
- ◆ poor knowledge and understanding of NVQs by employers and trainees
- ◆ inflexible start dates for off-the-job training

17. Some trainees are in employment which requires training in addition to that which is necessary for the NVQ. TRP helps meet these requirements. For example, it arranged training in welding skills for a motor vehicle mechanical maintenance trainee. TRP reacts promptly when trainees experience changes in their job requirements. They also respond quickly when trainees change employers and their initial NVQ, as stated on their individual training plan, becomes inappropriate. The company supports such trainees, where possible, in completing their original NVQ as well starting a new NVQ relevant to the changed circumstances.

18. The majority of employers are not involved in the NVQ training. Most employers are able to provide a good range of training opportunities and they are very committed to providing the trainees with the best opportunity possible to develop their skills. The subcontractors do not encourage any involvement by employers. Most do not issue training plans to enable the employer to link the trainees' off-the-job training with their day-to-day activities in work.

19. A total of 39 trainees have starting training on one of the three youth programmes in this occupational area over the past two years. The retention figure for 1998-99 is 38 per cent. The one trainee who started in 1999-2000 has left the programme. There were no foundation modern apprentices in the first year of the company's operation, but in 1999-2000, of those starting 58 per cent left early. The figures for the advanced modern apprenticeship programme are better with 40 per cent of the 1998-99 starters completing their training plans and, in 1999-2000, 87 per cent are still on the programme.

20. The training programme for engineering NVQs is subcontracted to a number



of local further education colleges. Trainees are required to attend the college one day a week during the academic year, when they receive tuition in the supporting knowledge required for the NVQs and in addition undertake practical work. Many of the colleges use this practical work for a substantial proportion of the evidence for the trainees to meet the NVQ standards. Where workplace evidence is used it is mainly in the second half of the NVQ programme. The assessors make few visits to observe trainees in the workplace. Overall, this results in inadequate use of the workplace to provide evidence of trainees' achievements and the achievement rate of trainees is slow.

21. Most employers have poor knowledge and understanding of NVQs and their structure. TRP does provide some information when staff discuss employment and training arrangements with the employers. TRP's staff give a brief overview of NVQs to trainees at induction but leave the detailed coverage to the subcontractors. The main contact for the employer is the TRP's assessor. Until recently, this contact has proved ineffective as TRP has lacked staff with the occupational knowledge and experience of the NVQs. College staff visit employers infrequently. The colleges present the NVQ requirements to trainees in a format related to tasks to be completed rather than units and elements of a standard to be achieved. This prevents trainees gaining familiarity with the NVQ elements and units being gained. It hinders trainees in seeing where they could use evidence from their work to enhance progress towards achievement.

22. The colleges which provide the off-the-job training only allow trainees to start a programme at the beginning of the academic year. Trainees who start with TRP at other times of the year have to wait to begin their NVQ programme. Some trainees have had to wait five to eight months and a waiting period of two or three months is common. Trainees experiencing delays often become demotivated and waste valuable opportunities for progression towards the NVQ standards.

### **Business administration**

### **Grade 3**

23. TRP offers training in accountancy, business administration and information technology NVQs at levels 2 to 4. There are 24 trainees in total, four advanced modern apprentices, 18 foundation modern apprentices and two on other youth training programmes. Some trainees approach TRP looking for a job with training, while others are referred to TRP by their employer. All trainees are employed. The trainees do not attend any formal off-the-job training. If any is required, it is arranged on a one-to-one basis and carried out by TRP's assessors during visits to the workplace. There are three members of staff responsible for this area. They are all suitably qualified.

24. The trainees' achievement and retention data are based on figures for the past two years. In 1998-99, 14 per cent of trainees on other youth training programmes achieved the outcomes specified on their individual training plans and 16 per cent are still on programme. The number of trainees leaving the programme early in 1999-2000 was 50 per cent with, as yet, no trainees' achieving. Modern

apprentices have only been recruited in the 1999-2000 contract year, when two started the programme. Twenty per cent of foundation modern apprentices starting in 1998-99 left the programme early and 20 per cent achieved their target outcomes. The remaining 60 per cent are still on programme. For those starting in 1999-2000, 68 per cent are still on programme.

25. The self-assessment report stated a large number of strengths many of which inspectors considered to be no more than normal practice and others which were more appropriate to a generic area rather than this occupational area of the report. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good range of employers
- ◆ effective action-planning
- ◆ good integration of key skills

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed assessment opportunities
- ◆ no work-based assessors
- ◆ insufficient awareness by trainees of the requirements of their programme

26. There are good working relationships between TRP, the trainees and the employers. The company has long-standing links with a good range of employers, most of whom are small to medium sized. They cover a wide range of specialisms including accountants, estate agencies, communication and retail and wholesale outlets. Employers are supportive of the trainees and most play an active role in the review process. The range of work offered by employers covers the NVQ level 2 requirements. If the work is not broad enough or of sufficient depth to cover the requirements for NVQs at level 3, the employers and TRP discuss ways in which competencies can be gained. This has involved moving trainees to different departments for a limited period of time.

27. Trainees understand the assessment process. There is an effective and frequent action-planning process for each trainee. The assessors visit the trainees at regular intervals, on average every two weeks. The assessor discusses with the trainee the completed work and ensures that it is placed in the most appropriate section of the portfolio. The trainees understand the cross-referencing they need to do before presenting the file for internal verification. During the assessment meeting the assessor discusses and lists actions that should be completed before the next meeting. Both the trainee and the assessor sign and date the plan. At subsequent meetings the assessor confirms with the trainee the progress made. The assessor and trainee discuss in detail the amount of work to be covered before the next meeting. This is influenced by the workload of individual trainees, the type of

work they are involved in and the ability of the trainee.

28. The range of work trainees are involved in day-to-day enables them to gather evidence not only for their NVQ but also for the key skills. Trainees are given a list stating all the key skills. During every assessment meeting the trainee and assessors check the list to see whether the trainee has covered any key skills during the completion of work for the NVQ. Trainees have a knowledge of the range and breadth of what has to be achieved. If a trainee has difficulty in understanding or does not have the necessary knowledge to cover a key skill element, the assessor organises one-to-one training sessions. These sessions are held at the TRP's premises where, in addition to the training, the trainees are given assignments to work through to improve their understanding.

29. There is insufficient use of assessment of trainees' activities in the workplace. The one-to-one assessment meetings between the assessor and the trainee are effective in covering the paper-based evidence, including witness testimonies which are presented by the trainee. There is some workplace observation of competence but it is not planned in advance. No observation timetable is drawn up even though most trainees have some repetitive aspect to their role which is completed at set times, such as standing in for the switchboard operator at lunchtime. Assessors are willing to assess trainees if they are carrying out relevant activities during a normal assessment visit, but they do not plan or structure work-based assessment. Workplace supervisors give help and most are flexible in ensuring the work given to the trainee covers all the NVQ requirements. The supervisors provide witness testimonies but, even though some are trained as assessors, they do not assess. All portfolios are internally verified and all units are sampled. In some cases, trainees can gain accreditation for an individual unit. Internal verifiers give little systematic feedback to assessors after they have observed an assessment.

30. Trainees have poor knowledge of their training programme. Some trainees do not know whether they are on a modern apprenticeship programme or undertaking an individual NVQ. Trainees are unaware of the requirements of the framework. In some cases, individual training plans fail to list all elements of the training programme required for the qualification.

### **Retailing & customer service (customer service)**

### **Grade 3**

31. There are 26 trainees on training programmes in customer service. There are 13 trainees working towards NVQs at level 2 through the foundation modern apprenticeship programme. Eleven trainees are working towards NVQs at level 3 on the advanced modern apprenticeship programme. There are two trainees on other youth programmes working towards NVQs at level 2. All trainees are employed. There has been an increase in the number of trainees starting the programme with 14 in 1998-99 and 24 in 1999-2000. Some trainees are referred to TRP by their employer, others approach TRP looking for a job with training. TRP

uses an extensive range of employers. Most are small to medium-size businesses but there are also large multi-national companies. Assessment takes place in the workplace. There are no work-based assessors. TRP employs two training advisors who undertake assessments. Both are occupationally competent and appropriately qualified. Training advisors also undertake reviews with trainees. The director of TRP is the lead internal verifier for customer service. Both training advisors are also qualified internal verifiers

32. Achievement and retention figures for trainees are based on the analysis of data for the contract years 1998-99 and 1999-2000. For advanced modern apprenticeships, the retention rate during 1998-99 was 60 per cent and this increased to 71 per cent for the contract year 1999-2000. Recruitment for foundation modern apprenticeships did not begin until 1999-2000. The retention rate for this period was 60 per cent. Numbers for other work-based programmes are relatively small. There were two new trainees during 1999-2000 and both left the programme early. For 1998-99, five started but only one trainee remains on the programme. To-date, there has yet to be a completion of either an advanced modern apprenticeship or foundation modern apprenticeship.

33. The self-assessment report records a large number of strengths many of which inspectors consider to be no more than normal practice. Some of the strengths identified were more appropriate to generic areas rather than the occupational area of the report. Inspectors agreed with the identified weakness in the self-assessment report of late implementation of key skills. Inspectors found additional weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good understanding by trainees of the assessment process
- ◆ good additional occupational support for trainees
- ◆ effective teamwork leading to action-planning and improvement

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ low awareness by trainees of the requirements of their training programme
- ◆ inadequate recording and monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ some unsatisfactory internal verification arrangements
- ◆ late implementation of key skills

34. Trainees have a clear understanding of the structure of their NVQ and of the NVQ assessment process. There is effective action-planning which is clearly recorded. At each visit, assessors confirm with the trainee the progress made. All assessments are conducted in the workplace and observation of trainees' performance is clearly recorded. Trainees are given immediate feedback. Training advisors have a good understanding of the standards and are able to advise trainees on how best to collect their evidence. Trainees are notified of any gaps in their

evidence base and the action required to rectify the gaps. Portfolios are satisfactory and contain a diverse range of evidence including records of workplace observation, activity logs, results of case studies, and witness testimonies from their employers. In some portfolios, case studies are not counter-signed by the employer. Most trainees cross-reference evidence against NVQ requirements at the end of the assessment process. For some trainees, this has resulted in a delay in submitting their completed portfolio. Training advisors carry out assessments in the workplace every two weeks. This helps maintain trainees' motivation. Trainees and employers express a high level of satisfaction with the assessors' support.

35. TRP arranges additional occupational support for trainees. These include training sessions at the TRP's office on appropriate telephone techniques, introductory sessions on information technology, portfolio-building workshops and advice sessions on cross-referencing evidence against NVQ standards. Some sessions are held in the evening so that trainees can attend after work. Sessions are either arranged on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Some employers also arrange additional support for trainees including time for portfolio-development and writing case studies and additional training programmes to support their job role. However, at some placements, training at work was poorly planned.

36. Training advisors work well as a team with the aim of improving the quality of training. The assessment team meets on a monthly basis to monitor trainees' progress, to consider equal opportunity issues, to review and standardise training, and to plan joint visits in order to both monitor and to share good practice. Minutes are taken, agreed actions recorded and reviewed at subsequent meetings. Work to develop good key skills practices has been less effective. The team also developed effective arrangements for action-planning and remedying the weaknesses identified through self-assessment.

37. Most trainees are unaware that they are either on a foundation modern apprenticeship programme or an advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Each trainee is issued with an induction factsheet which makes reference to NVQs and key skills. The factsheet makes no reference to the apprenticeship frameworks. Individual training plans record apprenticeship details but not all trainees have a copy of the plan in their portfolio. Trainees are unaware that the framework requires additional units over and above the main NVQ award.

38. Arrangements for recording trainees' progress and achievement are inadequate. Forms do not record the specific elements or units achieved. There are no monitoring sheets used to record trainees' achievement. Trainees do not know the elements or units they have achieved. Assessors are unable to confirm those elements and units that trainees have achieved.

39. Some aspects of the internal verification arrangements are unsatisfactory. All portfolios are internally verified and all units are sampled. However, in most cases, this is done when the trainee has completed the process of gathering all of their evidence. There is no ongoing internal verification of portfolios. The internal verifier observes assessors undertaking assessments and provides feedback.

However, this is not formally recorded. There is no internal verification sampling plan.

40. TRP has made little progress with the introduction of key skills into training. Although there are some examples of integration and good practice for some trainees, other trainees have made little progress in generating evidence for key skills. No trainee has yet achieved either a foundation or advanced modern apprenticeship in customer service.

### **Health, care & public services**

### **Grade 4**

41. The TRP offers NVQ programmes in care and early years care and education at levels 2 and 3. All trainees are employed and all are assessed in the workplace. There are nine trainees in total. Six advanced modern apprenticeship, two foundation modern apprenticeship trainees and one other youth trainee. One male trainee and two belonging to minority ethnic groups are enrolled on care programmes. There are two level 2 care trainees placed in private care homes. Seven level 3 early years care and education trainees work in day nurseries and in a school for children with learning difficulties. The assessment and off-the-job training for care of the elderly are subcontracted to a college of further education. Training for care of the elderly is offered for two hours each week for level 2 and for two hours on a different evening for level 3. Assessments are conducted by qualified workplace assessors. The company subcontracts the assessment and training of early years care and education to a different college of further education. Trainees are offered an evening programme of workshops for two hours twice monthly at college. Assessments of early years care and education trainees are carried out by assessors employed by the college. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified an additional one. Inspectors agreed with elements of one strength cited in the self-assessment report but regarded most of the strengths as no more than normal practice. A lower grade is awarded than that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good action-planning for assessments

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor retention of trainees and very low achievement
- ◆ inappropriate placement of some trainees on programmes
- ◆ late introduction of key skills

42. Care and early years care and education trainees work in a range of suitable placements. They have appropriate access to assessment and off-the-job training opportunities if necessary. Most childcare trainees are able to work with children aged from birth to five years of age. The two trainees who work with elderly people are assessed by qualified workplace assessors. They join classes of NVQ

students at the college on two afternoons a week for a series of workshops. The activities are linked to national standards and draw upon the trainees' work experience. College staff visit early years care and education trainees at their place of work each month to observe their practice, assess their achievements and to make plans about what the trainees need to do next to prepare for future assessments. The plans take into account the trainees' job roles and their different rates of progress. Assessors give constructive spoken and written feedback on trainees' progress. Placement staff help to identify opportunities for assessment and write witness testimonies to assist trainees' progress. Assessor training is provided for workplace staff, and regular assessor meetings are held to share information about trainees' progress. An appropriate range of assessment is used. The assessments are cross-referenced to other pieces of written work in the portfolios, and to the national standards in care and in early years care and education. Internal verification is satisfactory. All units are verified and accredited as they are completed. Observations of trainee assessors by internal verifiers, however, have been delayed and assessments completed by trainee assessors are not always counter-signed by a qualified assessor. TRP's staff visit trainees to carry out reviews of their progress, but do not always set clear targets with the trainees and do not then use these to update their individual training plans.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*Trainees as part of their NVQ cover health and safety as an initial unit of the programme, the issues are also covered during induction. Despite this coverage, some trainees were working in hazardous environments without protective footwear with which they had been supplied. This matter was drawn to the attention of the trainees involved, the employer and the training provider.*

43. In the past two years, 53 per cent of trainees have left early without achieving a qualification. During the same period, no trainee completed the components listed on their individual training plan. One trainee achieved an NVQ at level 2 in care in the year 1998-99 and one trainee achieved an NVQ in early years care and education in the year 1999-2000. The lack of adequate initial assessment and accreditation of prior learning means that some trainees decide which levels of NVQ to join without satisfactory advice. Some trainees are enrolled on unsuitable programmes. They struggle to understand the knowledge required and make very slow progress.

44. Some trainees are unclear about which programme they are on. College staff help trainees collect and organise written information in their files and additional support is offered by TRP's staff to help trainees index and cross-reference the evidence they have collected from their workplaces to use towards their awards. Key skills are explained to trainees at induction, but are not integrated into the early years care and education NVQ by trainers and assessors. Trainees also attend training sessions in key skills at the TRP's office. TRP's staff visit trainees towards the end of their training to identify links between evidence of achievement collected by trainees in their portfolios. They also arrange for trainees to visit the TRP's office for extra training in information technology and application of number. However, the delay in the introduction of key skills results in trainees missing opportunities to achieve key skills qualifications alongside their NVQ awards, and slows their completion of the modern apprenticeship.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

45. TRP has an equal opportunities policy which states that it opposes all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, nationality, ethnic origin, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status or disability. The policy makes specific reference to both employment and training. The policy meets the requirements of the local TEC. The company also has in place a policy dealing with harassment and a procedure for logging all complaints. The harassment policy clearly outlines what can be deemed as harassment in the workplace and it states that any form of harassment is totally unacceptable. The nominated senior person responsible for equal opportunities is the director of TRP, who is responsible for reviewing the policy every six months. People from minority ethnic communities constitute approximately 18 per cent of the resident population. During the contract year 1999-2000, 9 per cent of all recruitment was from minority ethnic groups. This has increased to 19 per cent of all new trainees since the beginning of the contract year starting in April 2000. All trainees can access the main offices on the ground floor but the training rooms on the first floor are only accessible by stairs.

46. The self-assessment report records a large number of strengths many of which inspectors found to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the identified weakness in the self-assessment that trainees have minimal knowledge of equal opportunities. Inspectors found an additional weakness to be the absence of systematic monitoring of employers' commitment to equality of opportunity. The grade awarded by inspectors is lower than that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ strong equal opportunities culture
- ◆ good staff awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ good promotion of equality of opportunity

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities by trainees
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of employers' implementation of equal opportunities procedures

47. TRP has made a conscious decision to simplify the wording of its equal opportunities policy so that trainees can understand it more easily. However, the policy makes no specific reference to appropriate legislation. The director with responsibility for equal opportunities visits all potential companies to discuss contractual requirements. Employers are required to have a satisfactory policy of their own or to agree to abide by TRP's equal opportunities policy. TRP has an



effective complaints procedure. Complaints are recorded, reviewed at each staff meeting and appropriate action taken. In a recent example, TRP took action to resolve concerns about bullying of a trainee at college. The importance of equality of opportunity is emphasised during the interview of potential trainees. Interviews include activities to evaluate trainees' understanding of equality of opportunity. TRP takes action to remedy instances of poor practice in equal opportunities.

48. There is good staff awareness of equal opportunities. At each staff meeting there is a fixed agenda item on equal opportunities. Data on both recruitment and applications are considered. These figures include a summary of recruitment from minority ethnic groups as well as trainees who are registered disabled. Staff undertake training on equality of opportunity. Four members of staff have attended equal opportunities awareness seminars. Two staff have attended seminars on disability awareness. Handouts issued at these seminars have been circulated to all staff. The staff handbook reinforces the organisation's commitment to equality of opportunity and contains copies of the organisation's mission statement, equal opportunities policy and harassment policy.

49. TRP effectively promotes equality of opportunity. The application form contains a statement confirming that TRP is an equal opportunities provider. This is also reinforced on all promotional literature. Images used in promotional material reflect the diversity of the client group. TRP is committed to the promotion of gender equality in the workplace. A recent TRP newsletter featured an article on this subject and copies of the newsletter were sent to all employers. TRP has a female trainee employed as a motor vehicle mechanic and a male trainee employed in childcare. TRP has also worked closely with an employer who requested a young woman for the position of apprentice painter and decorator.

50. Trainees across all occupational areas have little understanding of equal opportunities. At every induction, trainees are issued with an induction factsheet. This contains a section on equal opportunities. The trainees do not have good recall of information given to them on equal opportunities. An induction questionnaire which contains specific questions relating to equal opportunities is issued to all trainees. The training advisor ticks each question in order to confirm trainee's understanding. There is no written answer by the trainee to confirm that they have understood the implications of the equal opportunities policy and harassment procedures. TRP has recently introduced a quarterly trainees' evaluation form which has a section for equal opportunities. Training advisors are instructed to record questions asked and answers given. As this has only been introduced recently, there has been no evaluation to assess its effectiveness.

51. Once placements have been vetted and contracts signed, there is no systematic monitoring by TRP to confirm the implementation by employers of equal opportunities policies and procedures. During the visits by assessors there is little monitoring of the extent to which trainees are accorded equal treatment.

## Trainee support

## Grade 4

52. Trainees are referred to TRP by the local careers office, by employers and by personal recommendation. Some prospective trainees want a job which offers training, and, following a successful interview, TRP will find them employment. Other trainees are already in employment and want to gain an NVQ. On starting a programme, trainees have a one-to-one induction with a member of TRP staff. They are given an induction pack which contains a fact sheet covering the responsibilities of TRP, the advisor, the employer and the TEC. It also covers equal opportunities, health and safety and procedures to cover sickness, attendance and grievance. There is an induction questionnaire which the training advisor/assessor goes through with trainees to check their understanding and to answer any further queries. The pack also has a personal effectiveness checklist, which the trainees complete by making comments about themselves. One month after starting employment and before the start of the NVQ, all trainees have a meeting with either their TRP assessor or their advisor to discuss the NVQ requirements. Staff from the subcontractor carry out the NVQ induction for trainees who attend off-the-job training with them.

53. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report.

### GOOD PRACTICE

*When asked by TRP staff about his experience and understanding of equal opportunities, one trainee interpreted the questions personally. He gave a reflective and strongly felt account of the barriers to achievement he had experienced at school and with previous training organisations. Good support in the last two years had enabled him to progress well. He had been made male student of the year at the college he was attending, has achieved an NVQ level 3 and had been given increased responsibility in the school for special educational needs where he is employed*

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of support
- ◆ effective work-trial scheme

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor initial assessment
- ◆ no formal accreditation of prior learning
- ◆ lack of use of individual training plans as working documents
- ◆ poorly conducted progress reviews

54. TRP provides a wide range of support for trainees. It attempts to match trainees' interests and abilities to available jobs. Once employed the trainees are well supported by all staff at TRP. The staff make frequent visits to the workplace and are easily accessible by telephone. There is a qualified youth worker on the staff, who has a wide range of experience in dealing with young people. TRP helps individual trainees with academic work, by giving advice on college work and helping some trainees with problems such as spelling. Both trainees and employers value the support given. Trainees' achievements are celebrated and presentation ceremonies are held, to which employers, parents/guardians careers staff and the local press are invited. TRP has links with local schools and attends careers

conventions when invited. TRP staff produce a newsletter which is attractive in design, and has news items about trainees' achievements and articles about trainees' activities outside work. Additional training is arranged for trainees. This ranges from training in the use of specific software packages to wordpower and numberpower courses which are taught in TRP's offices. Trainees come in once a week, often before they are ready to go on to a college course. Other trainees come into TRP's offices to train individually on specific topics e.g. telephone techniques.

55. The Training and Recruitment Partnership has introduced a work trial scheme so that trainees can experience a particular work placement before starting a programme. This enables the trainee to see whether the placement and occupation are suitable before making a commitment. It also gives the employer an extended opportunity to assess the trainee before making an employment offer. Both employers and trainees view this development very positively. TRP gives active support and help to find an alternative placement for those trainees for whom the initial placement was not suitable.

56. The initial identification of trainees' skills, abilities and aptitudes is not systematic. All trainees complete an application form which covers personal details, work experience, qualifications and type of preferred job. The interviewer completes an initial assessment checklist which covers personal appearance, attitude, handwriting and the trainee's suitability and motivation for the chosen occupational area. In line with TEC requirements, a basic skills test is given to trainees who have not achieved grades above C in English and mathematics. Other trainees are not given any formal assessment in either basic or key skills and there is no occupational aptitude test. Initial assessment is not thorough and some trainees' needs only emerge when they have been working for some time. Information is collected at interview about the previous experience of trainees, but prior achievement is not accredited and some trainees repeat work which they have already completed satisfactorily. No member of staff is trained to accredit prior learning

57. Each trainee has a training plan, but the copy kept in the trainees' portfolio is generally not updated and the contents are not discussed with trainees. All trainees following the same programme and NVQ have identical plans. As there are no results from a detailed initial assessment, the plans cannot be designed to meet individual trainees' needs. The plans are produced in response to a contract, and are not used to plan and monitor trainees' progress.

58. Trainees' progress reviews are rarely linked directly to NVQ progress or the individual training plan. They cover general progress both on and off the job. Some trainees are set targets which are not sufficiently specific to help them make progress with their NVQ. Other reviews do not result in targets and, in many cases, the trainee is referred back to the action plan written after each assessment meeting with dates for completion of NVQ work. The written record of the review is brief. The timing of reviews does not always meet contractual requirements. They are not always regular or at the agreed frequency. In one case, a trainee had gaps of

nine months, five months and five months between successive reviews. Some reviews are carried out over the telephone.

## Management of training

## Grade 4

59. Training and Recruitment Partnership Limited was formed in January 1998 and has been reorganised on two occasions, the most recent restructuring being effective from April 2000. The managing director is the only director of the company. There are five full- and five part-time members of staff. Five carry out administrative duties and the other five undertake the assessment and review process and any additional training sessions held at TRP's offices. Management and staffing structures are clearly defined. There are opportunities for staff to earn promotion within the company. Annual appraisal is used to identify staff development needs and meet both individual and company requirements. Company objectives are set out in a rolling business plan which is subject to review every six months. The company was awarded the Investor in People Standard in May 2000. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good staff development practices
- ◆ good management of change
- ◆ effective internal communication systems

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ lack of identification of best practice and sharing between occupational areas
- ◆ ineffective use of management information
- ◆ irregularities in review documentation

60. The company business plan includes a strong emphasis on the training and development of all staff. In addition to the company's training plan, each member of staff has an individual plan, and funds are made available by management for staff to attend courses. Staff development is linked to annual appraisal, and is a standing item at all monthly staff meetings. Management actively encourages staff to develop new skills. External consultants are used by the company to provide training to meet specific needs. Staff are required to report to colleagues on all training undertaken, and this provides an opportunity to evaluate staff development, and to disseminate information and new knowledge to colleagues. Training attended by staff since the establishment of the company includes information technology updating, training towards the achievement of assessor and verifier awards, staff appraisal, and preparation for inspection.

61. The style of management in the company is open and supportive. The managing director is a founder member of the company and has a practical knowledge and understanding of the staff roles and activities. Recent changes to the structure of the company have been handled in a sensitive and supportive manner. Staff affected by change are clear about new roles and responsibilities. Motivation is high and staff understanding of business and training targets is good.

62. The present size of the company and the location of all staff in the same offices help promote informal communication and the sharing of information. There are also formal strategies to enhance communication among staff. The monthly staff meetings are an important part of these. Meetings are minuted, and all agendas include updating against company targets, monitoring equal opportunities, and sharing information arising from new work practices. There are also team meetings for members of management, administration and assessors.

63. There is ineffective management and co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training where training is subcontracted. Training in many placements is good, but it is not always linked to the specific requirements of the target qualification. A few subcontractors send to TRP and the employer details of the planned training. This provides an appropriate basis for co-ordination of on- and off-the job training activities. Collection of evidence of competence in the workplace is sometimes left to chance, in some cases, there is little assessment in the workplace and the integration of key skills is poor. Most subcontractors do not have a service level agreement with TRP which specifies what is expected of them.

64. The lack of close operational involvement with subcontractors, restricts opportunities for TRP to increase its awareness of good practice in training and assessment. At present, there are no planned mechanisms for identifying and sharing such information, other than assessor meetings in customer services and business administration, which are delivered in-house.

65. The management-information systems are capable of producing all the information required by the TEC. Members of staff are given up-to-date data on numbers of trainees at the regular meetings but the system is not used fully. Management information is not systematically recorded, analysed and used to inform management decisions to improve the quality of training. The systems for recording and monitoring trainees' progress towards their NVQs do not give managers sufficient information about each trainee. TRP's internal verification systems do not yet offer appropriate information upon which to base decisions affecting practice.

66. Some reviews have not been carried out in accordance with contractual regulations. Some review documents are not completed in the correct manner. There are examples where trainees' review forms have not been signed. In other examples, although the form is signed, trainees have no recollection of having had a review, or of having signed the review form.

## Quality assurance

**Grade 5**

67. The Training and Recruitment Partnership has a written quality assurance system. Policies and procedures have been developed since the formation of the company in January 1998 and these are updated annually. The managing director is responsible for quality assurance. The role of the managing director in promoting quality of training is understood by staff. Monthly management meetings are held to monitor contractual targets, and there are also monthly meetings of all staff when quality assurance issues are raised and discussed. The self-assessment report prepared by the company accurately identified major weaknesses in quality assurance. A number of the strengths identified were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified further significant weaknesses, and awarded a lower grade than the self-assessment grade.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ clear and concise quality assurance procedures

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ poor monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ no systematic collection of data
- ◆ no service level agreements with most subcontractors
- ◆ insufficient review of training effectiveness
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of safety in work placements

68. Quality assurance policies and procedures are written in language which is easily understood by staff. There is a formal updating of policies and procedures by management on an annual basis. Members of staff influence such changes through suggestions arising from the application of policies and procedures in their work roles. Changes identified by staff and incorporated in quality assurance procedures include monitoring trainees' files, and waiting lists of trainees for places on training programmes. Staff involvement helps to promote awareness and understanding of quality assurance, and also ensures that procedures reflect and are responsive to the emergence of good practice identified by staff in their work roles within the company

69. Policies and procedures developed by TRP do not give sufficient attention to the quality of training and assessment. They are largely concerned with contract compliance and the efficient operation of administrative systems from company premises. Criteria for the effectiveness of training have not been defined. Although management and staff worked together to produce a self-assessment report there are no procedures covering the self-assessment process in the quality assurance

system. TRP does not ensure that its quality assurance arrangements apply to its work with external partners.

70. TRP's quality assurance arrangements do not enable it to monitor effectively the quality of training provided by subcontractors, mainly further education colleges. It relies on the quality assurance systems of the colleges and is not sufficiently familiar with these systems. TRP's staff do not observe training sessions carried out on subcontractors' premises, do not have planned meetings with the subcontractors' assessors and do not influence internal verification arrangements. Communication with subcontractors is inadequate. In some cases, this is by telephone and fax. TRP's staff have not visited two colleges for at least 12 months.

71. The information gathered from trainees about the quality of training is superficial and there is little evidence of improvements in provision arising from the evaluation of their experience. Systematic feedback is not sought from employers or work placements. The company is aware of the lack of rigour in this area, and measures have been introduced to produce data on which to base firm and measurable improvement targets. At the time of inspection however, these measures were at an early stage of implementation.

72. There are no service level agreements with most subcontractors. TRP has issued agreements over the past two years, but in most instances, these have not been completed and returned. TRP has not been active in requiring compliance with the agreements. There is no framework in place against which to monitor and review subcontractor performance in meeting trainees' qualification targets

73. Some reviews of TRP's own training in customer services and business administration are carried out. The reviews are not part of an overall quality strategy but are dependent on individual staff initiatives. TRP does not initiate or participate in review activity carried out by subcontracted colleges, and there is no identification of best practice to inform improvements across occupational areas.

74. There is insufficient monitoring of workplace safety. In construction for example, one trainee on site was not wearing appropriate protective clothing. A review of trainees' files in engineering, identified examples of infrequent safety checks by TRP's staff and insurance details which were out of date.

75. All staff contributed to the self-assessment report. TRP did not pay sufficient attention to the framework for self-assessment and inspection in *Raising the Standard*. Many evaluations of generic aspects were inappropriately located in the occupational sections of the report. Inspectors considered many of the strengths in the report to be no more than would be expected as normal practice and identified many additional weaknesses. The overall evaluations in the report were not soundly based. Seven of the nine grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those in the self-assessment report.