



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT APRIL 1999

REINSPECTION JULY 2000

Associated Neighbour Training

SUMMARY

Associated Neighbour Training offers good training in business administration and satisfactory training in agriculture, retailing and customer service and media and design. Trainees' work placements are suited to their needs, and the standard of resources and facilities for training is high. Trainees acquire occupational skills in supportive learning environments. Trainees are slow to achieve their qualifications in agriculture and printing. Opportunities for trainees to acquire additional qualifications are good. At the first inspection the use of individual training plans was ineffective and initial assessment was not comprehensive. New procedures have improved these areas. Trainees' progress is now routinely recorded. Key skills training lacks integration with occupational training. Trainees are well supported throughout their training. Equal opportunities arrangements are satisfactory. At the first inspection management and quality assurance procedures were not clearly documented. These have been rewritten in a well-presented manual. Action planning is rigorous and all staff are involved in improving the quality of training. The framework for quality assurance is incomplete.

As a result of the reinspection of Associated Neighbour Training, the original published report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	3
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	3
Media & design	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent training resources and facilities
- ◆ effective and experienced trainers and employers
- ◆ additional training opportunities available to trainees
- ◆ training and assessment meets needs of individual trainees
- ◆ arrangements ensure equal opportunities in training and assessment
- ◆ good pastoral support in all aspects of training
- ◆ detailed information and guidance given to potential trainees



- ◆ good liaison with employers and subcontractors
- ◆ improvements made through self-assessment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees' progress poorly documented
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans
- ◆ inadequate implementation of key skills training and assessment
- ◆ some slow progress and achievement
- ◆ initial assessment of trainees not comprehensive
- ◆ incomplete framework for quality assurance



INTRODUCTION

1. Associated Neighbour Training, established in 1982, is a privately owned company in which the owner has a managerial and executive role. Based in Betchworth, Surrey, the company manages and delivers work-based youth training programmes throughout the county through a contract with Surrey Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The company does not have a contract to deliver training to people with special training needs. At the time of the original inspection 17 vocational programmes were offered in the six occupational areas of agriculture, construction, engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, and media and design. At the time of the reinspection the company no longer offered training in retailing and animal care but was now offering electrical engineering within the engineering programme. At the time of the first inspection, 124 young people were following training programmes. Of these, 54 were modern apprentices, two were national trainees and 68 were following skills generation programmes (the local name for certain youth training programmes) leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3. There are now 111 trainees. Of these, 56 are modern apprentices, 33 national trainees and 22 are trainees on skills generation programmes. All trainees are permanently employed. When training programmes are entirely work based, trainees are supported by company staff who make regular visits to monitor and deliver work-based theory tutorials and carry out assessments. The company uses a wide range of further education colleges for off-the-job training which requires specialist tutor and equipment. The colleges undertake assessment and internal verification services. Internal verification and assessment are also provided by subcontractors. Associated Neighbour Training has seven members of staff. Its premises in Betchworth are used only for the management and administration of programmes.

2. Surrey has a buoyant economy and, at 1.5 per cent, one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. The county has the highest level of disposable income and the fifth highest level of gross domestic product in the country. However, Surrey has small areas of disadvantage and social deprivation where unemployment ranges from 7 to 11 per cent. The proportion of pupils remaining in full-time education after the age of 16 is high, at around 80 per cent. Surrey has a population slightly in excess of 1,000,000. A labour force survey of May 1997 indicates that 78.6 per cent of people in employment work within service industries, many commuting to the finance and business markets in London. Service industry employees within the banking, financial and insurance sector account for 23.3 per cent of the workforce. A further 21.2 per cent are employed in public administration, education and health, 11.6 per cent in manufacturing and 7.4 per cent in the construction industry. Over three-quarters of Surrey businesses employ 10 or fewer people. The 1991 census indicated that 2.8 per cent of Surrey's population were people from minority ethnic groups. The 1997 labour force survey shows that 2.4 per cent of those aged 16 and over in Surrey were from minority ethnic groups, compared with 9.9 per cent for the southeast region as a



whole. The areas of Epsom and Ewell, at 5.7 per cent and Woking at 5.4 per cent respectively, have the highest proportions of minority ethnic groups. Around 12 per cent of the population between the ages of 16 and 65 in Surrey are people with disabilities. Data from Surrey TEC's *Equal Opportunities Strategy* document of May 1998 indicate that, in Surrey, people from minority ethnic groups account for 2 per cent of entrants onto youth training programmes and people with disabilities for 5 per cent. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers in Surrey achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 53.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, 56.6 per cent of school leavers achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.



INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Prior to the original inspection in April 1999, Associated Neighbour Training completed its first self-assessment report. Staff training for self-assessment began in April 1998, when the company's managing director attended training sessions run by outside consultants, organised through Surrey TEC. The format adopted for compiling the report was abandoned in the early stages and the first self-assessment report was discarded. The submitted self-assessment report was based on *Raising The Standard* and make clear judgements on the quality of training for each occupational area and the four generic areas. Judgements were supported by identified sources of evidence. The managing director and the placement officer wrote the report and made the judgements. Copies of the draft report were circulated to staff who act as monitors or assessors for comments and amendments. Following the inspection, and the publication of the inspection report, consultation and discussion involving all members of staff led to an action plan which became a working document for the organisation. For the reinspection the company produced an action plan report outlining the action taken in all the occupational and generic areas. In addition, a self-assessment report was written for the area to be reinspected outlining strengths and weaknesses and describing the changes which had taken place since the first inspection.

4. The original inspection was carried out by a team of five inspectors, who spent a total of 19 days at Associated Neighbour Training in April 1999. The inspection covered government-funded youth training programmes in the occupational areas of agriculture, business administration, retailing and customer service, and media and design. Training in construction and engineering was not inspected because of the small number of trainees. Inspectors observed nine sessions of training and assessment and conducted 47 interviews with Associated Neighbour Training's staff, subcontractors' staff and employers. In all, 46 trainees were interviewed on and off the job, and 30 work placements were visited. Three visits were made to further education colleges and to the subcontractor responsible for assessment and internal verification. Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including TEC contracts, trainees' achievement and progression data, company policy documents, marketing and information materials, staff's job descriptions, employers' training agreements, external audit reports, and minutes of meetings. Records of trainees' interviews and initial assessment and training plans in trainees' personal files were inspected. Documents for training, assessment, monitoring and review were examined. Trainees' work portfolios were inspected, as were resources and facilities for on- and off-the-job training.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions during first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		3	1			4
Retailing & customer service		2	1			3
Media & design			2			2
Total	0	5	4	0	0	9

5. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors who spent a total of four days at Associated Neighbour Training during July 2000. They visited six companies, interviewed six trainees and four work-based supervisors. Four of the seven company staff were interviewed. Inspectors examined a broad range of documents, including organisational policies and procedures, trainees' portfolios and external verifiers' reports.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 3

6. Associated Neighbour Training has 26 trainees in this area, following programmes in horticulture, floristry and veterinary nursing. All trainees are employed. Seven trainees undertaking modern apprenticeships in horticulture are in permanent employment. For three of these trainees, off-the-job training is subcontracted to agricultural colleges and delivered by block-release sessions. Four trainees receive entirely work-based training delivered through subcontracted arrangements with a horticultural company. All seven trainees are currently undertaking level 2 NVQs in commercial horticulture (intensive crop production). The programme is scheduled over three years. Eight trainees are undertaking NVQ level 2, and two trainees level 3, in amenity horticulture (intensive crop production or hard landscaping), as part of a Skills Generation programme. Programmes are delivered over two years and off-the-job training is subcontracted to agricultural colleges. Two trainees are undertaking two-year NVQ level 2 programmes in floristry. Both trainees are employed in small florist shops and off-the-job training is subcontracted to colleges, where trainees join mainstream NVQ programmes. Six trainees are undertaking two-year Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons training programmes. All are employed at approved veterinary training centres. The off-the-job training is subcontracted to agricultural colleges and delivered by day-release mode. Inspectors were unable to substantiate all judgements made in the company's self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent training resources and facilities
- ◆ effective guidance given to trainees by trainers and employers

- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to achieve additional qualifications
- ◆ effective arrangements for health and safety induction and monitoring

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate use of witness testimony and work-based assessment
- ◆ some poor and ineffectively used trainees' progress reports
- ◆ poor individual training plans
- ◆ poor development of key skills training and assessment
- ◆ slow progress and achievement by trainees

7. Arrangements for placing trainees with employers are thorough and effective. Trainees' career aspirations are assessed at the initial interview and care is taken to match trainees with employment opportunities suited to their needs. Trainees receive good occupational training and benefit from the guidance given to them by occupationally experienced workplace supervisors. Close liaison with employers over several years has enabled the company to establish employment opportunities for trainees with a wide range of employers who are supportive of the training process. Trainees are well motivated and demonstrate occupational competence. Trainees are visited in the workplace by the provider's staff every three months in order to review their progress. Visits, however, although providing effective pastoral support, are not used to generate well-documented reports. Recording of trainees' progress and achievement and clear identification of action plans and set targets is poor. In many cases, work-based supervisors are insufficiently involved in the review process. There is no routine use of individual training plans to guide and influence training. Many individual training plans are not rigorously updated and many fail to include all relevant information relating to trainees' target qualifications. The college reports on trainees' progress in horticulture are poorly written and largely ineffective. Many do not include action plans or clear details of trainees' achievements or support needs.

8. Resources and facilities for on- and off-the-job training are good. Trainees have access to equipment, machinery and materials which enable them to complete the full range of tasks required by NVQ programmes. Working environments for on-the-job training allow trainees to acquire occupational skills. Off-the-job training takes place in well-equipped training rooms entirely suited to the purpose. Arrangements for implementing and monitoring health and safety arrangements at work and subcontractors' premises are effective. Trainees have a good awareness of health and safety issues acquired during induction. This awareness is reinforced during training by trainers and workplace supervisors. Monitoring of workplace health and safety procedures is routinely done. Initial checks on all new workplaces are conducted, followed by systematic three-monthly monitoring checks by a trained member of the provider's staff. Inadequate use is made of work-based assessment. Collection of evidence from workplaces by witness testimony or by direct observation by assessors is not routinely done. Many opportunities for assessing trainees in the workplace are missed and over-reliance is placed on gathering evidence in simulated situations off the job. Key skills

training and assessment are not fully developed and key skills are not an integrated part of training programmes. Many trainees are slow to achieve their qualifications and, in many cases, target dates for achievement are not met. Trainees' achievement and progress have, however, shown steady improvement. NVQ achievement rates for leavers in 1997-98 and 1998-99 are 27.6 per cent and 38.5 per cent respectively. A quarter of leavers during this period left early without qualifications. Leavers finding employment increased from 54 per cent in 1997-98 to 62 per cent the following year. There are good opportunities for trainees to receive supplementary training and acquire qualifications additional to the NVQ. For example, floristry trainees can take qualifications accredited by an international flower distribution company, and horticulture trainees can take a pesticide-application course.

Business administration

Grade 2

9. There are 30 modern apprentices in this area: five in accounting, three in information technology, one in personnel support and 21 in administration. Eighteen trainees are following skillscard programmes (another local name for a work-based training programme for young people) leading to NVQ level 2, of whom 13 are in administration and five in computer-aided design (CAD). All trainees are permanently employed, mainly in small businesses. Most trainees are recruited directly through marketing, although significant numbers are referred by employers and the careers service. Working relationships between employers and Associated Neighbour Training have been established for several years. Terms of employment, including salaries, are negotiated on behalf of trainees by Associated Neighbour Training. For trainees following programmes in accounting, information technology and CAD, off-the-job training is provided one day a week by local colleges of further education. Administration trainees are trained and assessed entirely in the workplace. All trainees are visited monthly in the workplace. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent work placements
- ◆ good additional training opportunities
- ◆ training and assessment tailored to meet needs of individual trainees
- ◆ high standard of work in trainees' portfolios
- ◆ good achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient initial support for trainees
- ◆ poorly completed individual training plans
- ◆ key skills training and assessment is not integral to programmes

10. Arrangements for placing trainees with employers are effective. Care is taken to assess trainees at interview to determine their aspirations and suitability for training. Trainees' needs are matched to employment opportunities, and trainees and employers express high levels of satisfaction with selection procedures and their outcomes. Initial support for new trainees in placements is, however, insufficient. The company has a policy not to visit trainees in placements during the first six weeks and some trainees and employers feel inadequately supported and are confused about the NVQ training process. On-the-job training is good and many trainees undertake interesting and stimulating tasks and have opportunities to gather evidence of their acquired occupational skills. Employers' support of trainees is excellent. Many provide good facilities and allow trainees time to gather and record evidence for NVQ accreditation. Trainees are also well supported on the job by Associated Neighbour Training's staff. Employers provide effective training during workplace sessions to enable trainees to acquire computing skills in e-mailing, word processing and spreadsheets. Trainees are also able to take advantage of training additional to NVQ requirements, for example in keyboarding, telephone techniques and interview skills. Funding for this training often falls outside TEC contracts and is jointly provided by employers and Associated Neighbour Training.

GOOD PRACTICE

The following demonstrates how employers offer trainees good opportunities for learning. Two CAD trainees and an NVQ level 3 administration trainee work in a highway management consultancy and work on a range of projects including site surveys, and designing traffic-flow schemes and cycle routes. In several cases, employers provide up-to-date computers and specialist software to aid learning. In one case, a trainee has been provided with a computer in order to meet training needs, even though it is not a specific requirement of the job.

11. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace every three or four weeks. Visits are used effectively to provide tuition, advice and support, and to discuss and assess trainees' portfolio evidence. Targets for achievement are agreed with trainees. Employers are fully involved in the monitoring process and contribute significantly to discussions and decision making. Standards of work displayed in trainees' portfolios are good. Work is well presented and demonstrates use of a wide range of evidence. Evidence is gathered effectively from completion of those tasks forming part of daily work routines. Achievement rates are good. During the year 1997-98, 58.8 per cent of leavers achieved a full NVQ. In 1998-99, the achievement level rose to 63.9 per cent. Several trainees achieve their primary goals ahead of target dates for completion. Levels of retention are high. The early leaver rates in 1997-98 and 1998-99 were low, at 18.4 per cent and 15.3 per cent respectively. Rigorous completion of individual training plans is not routinely done. Many individual training plans are not fully completed and they are not systematically updated. Generally, recording of information relating to trainees' support needs and tracking of trainees' progress is poor. Many trainees have little understanding of the key skills requirements of NVQ programmes. Key skills training and assessment are not continuous throughout the programmes and not fully integrated within training plans. It tends to occur towards the end of programmes and is delivered separately. Action to address this issue has been developed and is in the early stages of introduction.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

12. There are 20 trainees in this occupational area: five are following retail and customer service programmes, five are working towards estate agency qualifications, two are working towards warehousing qualifications and one is

following a programme leading to a selling qualification. NVQs are offered at levels 2 and 3. All trainees are placed with small and large employers across the county. Assessment in the workplace is carried out by Associated Neighbour Training's staff. Off-the-job training is provided on a day-release basis for retail and takes place at a local adult education centre. A local college delivers off-the-job training for the selling qualification. Off-the-job training for warehousing, customer service and estate agency is delivered on an open-learning basis, supported by Associated Neighbour Training's tutors. On-the-job training is delivered by employers. Retail & customer service NVQs are assessed by Associated Neighbour Training. Selling is assessed at the local college delivering the NVQ. Assessment for warehousing and estate agency, along with internal verification for all qualifications, is carried out through a subcontracted arrangement with an independent company. The self-assessment report identified some strengths which were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent co-operation between staff and employers
- ◆ good understanding of NVQ assessment by trainees
- ◆ good involvement in assessment and review by employers
- ◆ trainees well matched to placements
- ◆ effective assessment arrangements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ on-the-job training arrangements not clearly planned and recorded
- ◆ reviews not consistently documented
- ◆ learning components for estate agency not effectively integrated
- ◆ individual training plans not comprehensive or regularly updated
- ◆ lack of integration of key skills training and assessment into NVQ programmes

13. Employers are actively involved in the review and assessment of trainees in the workplace. This involvement enables them to have a good understanding of the training process and to effectively support trainees. Discussion between trainees and employers is a standard part of the review. Trainees are encouraged to comment openly on their learning and achievements. They are able to talk knowledgeably about what is involved in achieving their NVQ. Trainees demonstrate a good understanding of the assessment process. Reviews are thorough and focus on trainees' NVQ progress as well as on pastoral issues. The outcomes of reviews are not consistently recorded, a variety of forms are used and the amount of detail varies with each reviewer. Procedures for assessment of trainees are good. Observation of performance is used as a prime source of evidence and is supplemented by witness testimony from employers and questioning by assessors. Assessment decisions and practices are fully documented

and arrangements ensure compliance with awarding body requirements. Where assessment and/or internal verification is conducted by subcontractors, Associated Neighbour Training monitors it by communicating with the subcontractor on a regular basis. Internal verification arrangements are especially rigorous. However, external verifier reports are not routinely sent to Associated Neighbour Training by subcontractors.

14. Associated Neighbour Training's staff have established excellent working relationships with employers and trainees. Employers and work-based supervisors are fully supported in their training roles by Associated Neighbour Training's staff. Employers, in turn, are supportive of trainees and offer learning opportunities additional to the NVQ requirements. Care is taken in the selection of work placements to ensure that trainees are well matched to placements. Trainees have good opportunities to acquire occupational skills, but delivery of training is neither clearly planned nor recorded. Individual training plans contain only the information necessary for contract compliance and are often incomplete and not updated to indicate trainees' progress. They contain little information about training programmes and the copies given to trainees are therefore of little use in guiding them and enabling them to produce an action plan.

15. Key skills training and assessment is not fully integrated into all modern apprenticeships, although it is satisfactory in customer service. Steps are being taken to integrate key skills into retail programmes. Trainees working towards residential estate agency NVQs have had difficulty accessing assessment and key skills support. The training components specific to estate agency have not been clearly identified and incorporated into a documented scheme of work. As a consequence, there is no effective cross-referencing of evidence generated by trainees for estate agency, retail or key skills components of the programme in order to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. Associated Neighbour Training does not monitor the subcontracted estate agency training to ensure that it meets the standards required. Based on the low numbers of leavers (13 in 1997-98 and nine in 1998-99), trainees' achievements are good. In 1997-98, 46 per cent of leavers gained an NVQ. In 1998-99, 78 per cent of leavers obtained jobs and 100 per cent gained an NVQ.

Media & design

Grade 3

16. There are 12 trainees following programmes in media and design. Eight are Skills Card (work-based youth training) trainees and four are modern apprentices. Most are employed locally in the printing industry as design originators, machine printers, and print finishers. Companies are small- to medium-sized enterprises, many owner-managed, with around 50 per cent of companies employing less than 10 people. Long-term relationships have been established with many employers. In many cases, Associated Neighbour Training recruits trainees direct from employers, as employers are happy with the successes achieved by other members of their staff who have trained with Associated Neighbour Training. For over 10 years, off-the-job training has been delivered by local further education colleges.



Trainees attend college weekly on a day-release basis. Trainees join tutor groups with college students and other work-based trainees. Trainees recruited within the last six months have been trained and assessed by a private subcontractor. This has been part of a new pilot scheme introduced to improve trainees' progress and achievements and to facilitate greater management control over training programmes. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ extensive range of good placements available
- ◆ good standard of off-the-job training
- ◆ individual approach to practical skills development
- ◆ good understanding by trainees of theoretical knowledge
- ◆ good learning resources at subcontractor and college

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow achievement of NVQs
- ◆ staff's roles not clear to trainees
- ◆ poor documentation of overall progress by trainees
- ◆ key skills not integrated into NVQ programme

17. All trainees are visited in the workplace on a quarterly basis in order to appraise their general progress and to update records. During these visits, health and safety arrangements are rigorously monitored. The provider has forged strong partnerships with an extensive range of employers. This has created many work opportunities for trainees, some of whom have gained full-time employment in the printing industry. Workplace supervisors are extremely supportive of their trainees. Employers are experienced and possess occupational expertise which they share effectively with trainees. They have created work opportunities to meet the individual needs of the trainees and help them with the development of their practical, on-the-job skills. Theoretical and practical training at college is good. Trainees have good technical and up-to-date knowledge. Staff relate the training to latest practices in the industry. Trainees work on the design and production of print packages for the general needs of many service sector organisations. In three cases, trainees are working on prestigious national company-related projects. The equipment available to trainees is generally good and of a modern industry standard. Companies are equipped with modern three- to five-colour print facilities. Trainees gain experience in using a full range of materials from origination to print finish. College resources are well maintained, with the latest hardware and desktop publishing software readily available to all trainees.

18. NVQ progress is slow. There have been staffing shortages at subcontractors and awarding body accreditation delays. During the last three years, trainees have not achieved the NVQ, even though they have attended training on a day-release basis for over two years. Recently, action has been taken by the provider to address inadequate use of work-based assessment. Improvements in procedures have been

made, but it is too soon to assess the impact of this upon trainees' progress. New training arrangements make use of a specialist pool of subcontracted occupational trainers and tutors to teach theory sessions. The additional use of assessors and internal verifiers through another subcontracting agency has caused some confusion with trainees about the specific roles of staff. Links between staff have not been formally documented or communicated adequately to trainees. A modern apprentice working towards NVQ level 2 is not aware of the required progression to level 3. There is no clear system for documenting trainees' progress, or for linking the various parts of the programme. Generally modern apprentices are unaware of the key skills requirements of their programme and key skills training is not integrated into training. Two apprentices have not received any key skills training to date.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

19. The company has a well-documented equal opportunities policy. The policy statement is clear and meets legislative requirements and those of Surrey TEC. Staff's responsibilities for equal opportunities are identified, and overall responsibility lies with senior managers. The policy states that all staff at all times have responsibility for equal opportunities, but this responsibility is not reflected specifically within job descriptions. The company collects equal opportunities data in line with its TEC contract. Data are gathered routinely in respect of gender, ethnicity and disability. Performance data indicate that, during the last two years, 3 per cent of trainees were from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared with 2 per cent in Surrey. Trainees with disabilities make up 1 per cent of the intake of trainees. The Surrey TEC labour force survey of 1998 estimated that 5 per cent of young people have disabilities. Some weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report had been addressed by the time of inspection. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and detailed equal opportunities policy
- ◆ good awareness of equal opportunities issues by trainees
- ◆ open and fair selection procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped collection and evaluation of data
- ◆ no system for formal review of equal opportunities
- ◆ poorly documented complaints procedures
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of subcontractors'/colleges' equal opportunities arrangements

20. Arrangements for implementation of equal opportunities, including protecting staff and trainees from discrimination, are effective. Training agreements for subcontractors and employers include a section relating to equal opportunities. Subcontractors and employers are required to ensure that all trainees are protected from discrimination and all companies must meet the requirements of legislation. However, the agreements have not been updated to include the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. Some, but not all, sites have access for those using wheelchairs. The agreements clearly state Associated Neighbour Training's commitment to equal opportunities. The company's present arrangements for equal opportunities do not extend beyond contractual requirements. It has a comprehensive and detailed equal opportunities policy and effectively promotes equal opportunities. Plans for implementing equal opportunities procedures, however, are not well documented and methods for assessing performance in this area are not fully developed. Managers monitor the equal opportunities arrangements of subcontracted colleges through the use of 'college undertaking' forms which are sent to all colleges annually. They are effective in gathering information and exercising influence on the colleges' arrangements. They are not, however, included in subcontractors' agreements. The company relies on subcontractors and employers having their own arrangements for equal opportunities.

21. A discussion of equal opportunities is included in trainees' induction. Generally, trainees have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues and these are reinforced throughout their training by the good practice by staff. Procedures for ensuring equal opportunities in training and assessment are effective. Close working relationships between Associated Neighbour Training's staff and trainees and employers contributes significantly to the maintenance of equality of opportunity. However, there is a lack of documented policies and procedures, and contracts with employers and subcontractors, to assure equality of opportunity formally. Selection procedures for trainees are fair and strongly support equality of opportunity. The company has a well-documented selection policy and procedures which clearly identify the company's commitment to equal opportunities. All appointments are made on merit and the suitability of the trainee to a particular training programme. Documents are detailed and comprehensive and ensure a high level of protection against prejudice or discrimination by setting down clear procedures for interview and selection.

22. Procedures for monitoring and measuring the provider's performance in equal opportunities are not well documented. The effectiveness of monitoring arrangements is dependent upon verbal feedback gathered during monitoring activities, such as review visits. Routine analysis and evaluation of data are not used effectively to give an objective measurement of the success or otherwise of the company's equal opportunities arrangements, or to identify areas of strength and weakness. There is a reference to the company's complaints and grievance procedure in the general information given to all trainees, but there is no clear guidance given on the steps to be taken in the case of complaint or dissatisfaction.

Trainee support

Grade 2

23. All new trainees have an initial interview which is conducted at careers services' offices or at employers' premises for those already in employment. One member of staff, the placement officer, is responsible for interviewing all applicants. Trainees attending colleges for off-the-job training are able to avail themselves of the colleges' student support services. Where training is carried out entirely on the job, trainees are visited monthly by monitor/assessors. Where training is delivered both on and off the job, trainees receive three-monthly monitoring visits. Responsibility for pastoral support lies with the monitor/assessors and is included in their job descriptions. The organisation failed to identify any weaknesses in this area in its self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ good-quality, supportive employers
- ◆ comprehensive induction
- ◆ detailed information and guidance provided to trainees
- ◆ celebration of trainees' achievements

GOOD PRACTICE

One employer carries out induction over a period of six months. Initial on-the-job induction takes place during the first week. The trainees' progress is reviewed after two weeks and then routinely at four-week intervals for six months. Problems are identified early and addressed promptly. Training and support needs are assessed and amended as appropriate throughout training.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal initial assessment of trainees' basic skills
- ◆ poor progress reports for college-based training
- ◆ arrangements for additional support not documented

24. Detailed advice and guidance is included in the information packs issued to trainees prior to interview. The interview process, which is undertaken by an experienced member of staff, is thorough, and is used effectively to assess applicants' suitability to their chosen training programmes. Recording of interview information, however, lacks in-depth evaluative detail, and there are no written procedures or guidelines for interviewing outside equal opportunities issues. The induction process is thorough and comprehensive and covers health and safety issues and equal opportunities. All trainees receive systematic induction in the workplace, with employers fully involved in the process. A checklist is used to ensure that staff cover all appropriate aspects. There is no formal and routine initial assessment of trainees' basic skills or identification of additional learning support needs. Diagnostic testing is conducted if deemed appropriate by results of interview. Trainees' key skills are not routinely tested nor the results evaluated. Feedback to trainees on results of initial testing is not always given. Review sessions are thorough and include discussions about trainees' progress, assessing of evidence, and the setting of training and assessment targets. The monitoring process however, does not, in some cases, fully involve college-based trainers/assessors. Some trainees' reports completed termly by college staff are



poor. The content does not allow an adequate evaluation of their progress or clear identification of training requirements. Some reports fail to set targets for achievement with identified completion dates.

25. Many employers provide good facilities to help trainees to acquire occupational skills and to record evidence in their portfolios. Trainees receive assistance and guidance from employers. Trainees are well aware of the arrangements for support and are given relevant information to enable them to access appropriate support promptly. There is good team-working among staff. Trainees are encouraged to talk openly with staff about their progress and any issues which may be affecting their training. Counselling is also available to those trainees who require it, but this is not recorded. Generally, arrangements for additional support for trainees are poorly documented. There is no formal recording of individual training support needs and the effectiveness of any support given is not evaluated. Careers advice is also readily available to trainees. Regular visits are made to trainees in the workplace, over and above those required for review and assessment. Staff demonstrate a genuine interest in the trainees' welfare in the workplace. Where trainees have contacted Associated Neighbour Training with problems, staff have responded promptly and effectively. A monthly newsletter keeps trainees well informed of activities within the company and enables trainees' achievements to be made public.

Management of training

Grade 3

26. Associated Neighbour Training is a small company in which the owner is managing director and is fully involved in the daily management of training. Executive responsibility lies with the managing director. The company acts primarily as a managing agency for work-based training delivered by subcontractors throughout Surrey. All training is delivered in workplaces and colleges. The provider's premises in Betchworth are used solely for management and administrative purposes. The company has only one permanent employee, a part-time administrative assistant, who works in partnership with the managing director and has responsibility for the company's management-information systems. All other associates are considered as self-employed and paid for their services on a pro-rata basis. Many have been with the company for many years. Staff turnover is low. The company uses six assessor/monitors to visit trainees, monitor their progress and carry out work-based assessments. In some cases, assessors deliver some training and internal verification. Responsibility for interviewing and placing trainees with employers lies with the placement officer who has been with the company for five years. The placement officer works closely with the managing director in a managerial and executive role. Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report. However, the informal nature of many of the operational procedures was not clearly identified. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic monitoring of company's performance against business objectives
- ◆ effective management-information systems
- ◆ open and effective communication
- ◆ good liaison with employers and subcontractors
- ◆ clear understanding of duties and effective deployment of staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal and systematic review of management policies and procedures
- ◆ no formal written agreements with subcontractors
- ◆ poorly documented operational procedures
- ◆ no staff appraisal
- ◆ no routine recording of management decisions and actions

27. Individual roles within the organisation are clearly defined and staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities. Staff are effectively deployed and carry out tasks which efficiently utilise their experience and strengths. They work well as a team and managers encourage open and effective communication. Lines of communication are well established, largely through daily, informal contact. Staff meetings are held every two months. The company has developed effective computer-based management-information systems. Information is routinely added to the database and trainees' recruitment and achievement data is used to measure the company's performance against set targets. Performance targets are closely linked to targets set in the TEC contract. Monitoring of the company's performance against business objectives is used effectively to maintain financial viability of the company. The company has established links with a wide range of employers and colleges. Working relationships between the provider's staff and those from outside organisations are congenial and co-operative. The provider liaises with employers and colleges on a frequent basis. However, management control of subcontracted training is weakened by the absence of formal written agreements. In many cases, written evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the training provided by subcontractors is not insisted upon or received by the company. Employers are asked to sign training agreements so that Associated Neighbour Training can monitor employers' awareness of training programmes, trainees' attendance and health and safety arrangements.

28. The provider does not formally review or evaluate its management policies and procedures. Any arrangements made to address identified areas of weakness are not documented and action taken is not routinely recorded. Review and evaluation of training is undertaken informally and is heavily dependent upon the intuitive understanding of the company's needs by the two senior managers. Remedial action is often effective, but it is reactive and there are no clearly written procedures for pre-emptive action. Generally, the documentation of operational procedures is poor. Effective daily management and administration occurs but without a formal framework. Management decisions and action taken are not

routinely recorded and there are few written management procedures. Minutes of bi-monthly meetings, for instance, are not recorded clearly or filed in an easily comprehensible manner and do not enable clear tracking of action to be made, or convey full understanding of managers' intentions and decisions. Generally, there are no standardised procedures for gathering and recording information on paper. Staff use different proformas for gathering similar information. There are no arrangements for the appraisal of staff. Staff development is led by corporate needs and present arrangements do not fully address the professional needs of individual staff.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

29. Associated Neighbour Training has a framework for quality assurance which covers most of its activities. The company complies with the contractual requirements of the TEC. Its assessment and verification procedures are approved by the awarding body, and the roles and responsibilities of its subcontractors are defined in agreements which cover arrangements for quality assurance. The company has procedures for obtaining feedback on the quality of training from trainees and employers, and takes action to improve its provision.

The main weaknesses identified in the first inspection were:

- ◆ no structured quality assurance framework
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements do not focus on trainees' learning experience
- ◆ lack of formal quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors
- ◆ no review of training
- ◆ quality assurance does not ensure the quality of training

30. Since its first inspection, the company has taken various measures to address these weaknesses. These have included the development of a framework for quality assurance, and the introduction of formal quality assurance arrangements for subcontractors. Action has been taken to focus quality assurance arrangements more closely on trainees' learning experience and the quality of training. Training in two of the occupational areas inspected has been discontinued. Shortly before reinspection, Associated Neighbour Training provided an action report outlining developments and a brief summary report for quality assurance which identified strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses, but agreed with the grade indicated by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clearly defined procedures
- ◆ improvements effected through action planning
- ◆ active involvement of staff in quality assurance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ incomplete framework for quality assurance
- ◆ incomplete evaluation of feedback

31. Staff responded positively to the findings of the last inspection and have taken steps to improve areas of weakness and further develop strengths. Through regular meetings staff discussed the way that they work and made a number of changes to their practices. They have revised various documents to improve the quality of the information recorded, and have agreed a mission statement which defines the company's view of the quality it aims to achieve. The company has also produced a clearly written operations manual which is used by all staff. Staff helped to prepare the manual. It states objectives for five key areas of the company's work, and gives details of the procedures which staff should follow, with examples of the forms to be used for record keeping. Helpful references are made to other documents, such as handbooks for trainees and employers. However, other aspects of the company's work are not covered by the manual. These include trainees initial assessment, the use of subcontractors, and the evaluation of training. The company has no formal method for checking the effectiveness of its procedures, and its framework for quality assurance is incomplete.

32. The company has drawn on the expertise of its staff to expand the scope of its work. When problems were identified in the provision of NVQs and key skills by a subcontractor, the company decided to provide the training itself, and has become an approved centre. A post of NVQ co-ordinator has been created to oversee the company's procedures and the recording of trainees' progress. Part of the co-ordinators role is to focus on the trainees' learning experience. Its assessors and verifiers have worked together to produce new policies and procedures, and to agree how the centre can work most effectively. Some aspects of the new verification procedures are not well defined, and it is too soon to assess their effectiveness. External verification reports are obtained from colleges. When matters requiring attention are identified, they are notified to staff on a specially designed form. Office staff check by a stated time that action has been taken. Assessors regularly send progress record sheets to the company. These are analysed individually, and any action required is taken. Problems identified are addressed quickly.

33. The company has improved its liaison with the colleges used to provide training. Information obtained from each college has been used to establish the quality of trainees' experience. Feedback questionnaires for trainees include questions about the quality of teaching. The company has a formal agreement for colleges detailing roles and responsibilities. It includes an agreement to enable Associated Neighbour Training staff to see college verification records and to meet with college staff formally twice a year.

34. The company regularly analyses its performance against Surrey TEC's contractual targets. All staff are aware of the targets they are expected to meet. The bi-monthly staff meetings have an agenda and are now fully minuted and action

points agreed. The frequency of these meetings has been increased as a direct result of self-assessment. This has enabled staff to be kept up to date on trainees' progress and informed of the company's performance. Action plans are used to identify the action to be taken and who will be responsible.

GOOD PRACTICE

At the initial interview, trainees are asked questions about their career aims, previous work experience and skills. Each trainee is graded on a scale of 1 to 5 in 10 areas. These include appearance, confidence, attitude and enthusiasm, and body language. Interviewers have precise guidelines on the criteria for judgement. These help make their judgements more reliable and consistent.

35. Since the first inspection, the company has strengthened its procedures for obtaining feedback from trainees and employers. Informal feedback is obtained during the review process, as previously. Formal feedback is now obtained more frequently from trainees by means of questionnaires which are issued after induction, halfway through the training and when trainees leave early, or complete their training. Questionnaires are now issued to employers when trainees complete their programmes or leave early. The company has revised the questions asked to focus more clearly on topics which will help to improve training. By the time of the reinspection, 72 per cent of the employers issued with questionnaires had completed and returned them. Associated Neighbour Training' management had analysed the employers' questionnaires, but had not yet presented their conclusions to staff.

36. All staff were involved in self-assessment for the first inspection and invited to comment on the draft self-assessment report. Changes were made in response to staff comments. The report contained an action plan to address strengths and weaknesses, with identified staff responsibilities, target dates for implementation and performance indicators. However, this is not included in the company's quality framework. Associated Neighbour Training has concentrated on producing and implementing its action plan for improvements but has not produced a further full self-assessment report since the first inspection.