



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1999

REINSPECTION AUGUST 2000

Laing Training Services

SUMMARY

Laing Training Services provides satisfactory training in construction to trainees from the local population with a wide range of needs. There are good community links and the company accesses many different sources of funding to support trainees. Training staff understand the varied backgrounds of the trainees and deal with all applications sensitively. Practical workshop sessions are undertaken well but theory sessions are less effective and do not specifically address trainees' needs. Work experience is not yet a fully integrated part of training. Training plans lack detail and clear target setting. Managers are receptive to staff and trainees' feedback and the annual business plan provides clear financial targets. Management data are not used systematically to make changes to training programmes. At the time of the first inspection, the company's quality assurance arrangements were less than satisfactory. Since then, however, rigorous procedures have been developed and prompt action has been taken to address the identified weaknesses. However, the systems for monitoring the quality of work-based training are inadequate.

As a result of reinspection of Laing Training Services, the original published report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 reinspection. All other sections of the original report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective practical workshop training
- ◆ all staff dedicated to trainees' success
- ◆ caring and sensitive approach to all applicants
- ◆ diverse mix of ethnicity and age ranges among trainees
- ◆ open and responsive management style
- ◆ productive range of community links and access to funding sources
- ◆ robust business plan to guide operation



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ work experience not fully integrated into training
- ◆ procedures not systematically followed by all staff
- ◆ no effective use of data to inform training programmes
- ◆ quality assurance procedures not consistently applied across training programmes
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of the quality of work-based training

INTRODUCTION

1. Laing Training Services (LTS) is an associate company of Laing Partnership Housing, a division of Laing Homes Limited. The parent company, John Laing plc, celebrated 150 years in business in 1998 and is an international family-controlled business offering the full range of construction contracting services. LTS was started in 1987 and has training centres in North and East London at Newham (Royal Docks Campus), Hackney and Edmonton. The main activity is construction craft training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 3 in brickwork, carpentry and joinery, painting and decorating and plastering. Through Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding, a 16-week scheme to provide NVQ level 2 training in dry lining is also offered. Basic employability groups are present at each of the centres to help those who have severe barriers to achieving employment onto a structured programme of training and support. At the time of the first inspection, there was a total of 258 trainees of whom 64 were New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. There are now 378 trainees, of whom 33 are New Deal clients. Each centre is lead by recently appointed business managers who report to the operations manager. A total of 35 full-time staff are employed, including two staff who are responsible for recruitment and work-based placements. Two centres have been equipped with information technology facilities.

2. Training is provided through a range of funding sources and contracts. Work-based training for adults working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 is contracted through FOCUS Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), which is the co-ordinating TEC for this inspection, London East TEC (LETEC) and North London TEC (NLTEC). Trainees working towards NVQs at level 1 attend the centres through franchised arrangements with the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) at two local colleges. LTS has contracts with the Employment Service and another training provider for the New Deal. Three local further education colleges provide the off-the-job element of the full-time education and training option leading to level 2 NVQs across all of the construction trades offered at the centres. Private customers also make use of the facilities on a commercial basis, and short courses are run regularly to help small businesses successfully secure work through main contractors. Some multi-skilling programmes to develop flexibility in trade skills have been provided for local authorities and housing associations.

3. Trainees are recruited from across London, but mainly from the boroughs of Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Newham, Barking & Dagenham, Camden, Enfield, Haringay, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark. The London boroughs include diverse cultures, ethnic origins, language, education and skills levels. About 50,000 people live in 'insecure' accommodation in London. The average unemployment rate in the boroughs served is 12.7 per cent compared with the average for London of 11.2 per cent and 5.2 per cent nationally. Nearly a quarter of a million people in Greater London are resident refugees and 46 per cent of the unemployed live in social housing



compared with 19 per cent of those employed. The average proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups is 33 per cent compared with 5 per cent nationally. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 31.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. Managers produced the first self-assessment report following training sessions arranged by the co-ordinating TEC and shared drafts with all staff. The introduction was comprehensive and gave helpful insight into the background of the provision and the diversity of the communities being served. The report was well written and followed the guidelines of *Raising the Standard*. The report accurately reflected the training situation found by inspectors who agreed with all grades except equal opportunities, which they found to be better than assessed by LTS. Good cross-referencing to supporting evidence sources was helpful to inspectors. A realistic action plan was included with the self-assessment report and many items had been addressed by the time of inspection.

5. An updated self-assessment report and action plan were submitted prior to reinspection together with supporting data. Actions taken to address all issues identified during the first inspection are included in the report.

6. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at LTS during August 1999. Inspectors were based at the Newham training centre beside the river Thames and visited the training centre in Hackney daily. A total of 109 trainees were observed in practical and theory training sessions and one assessment was witnessed. Sixteen trainees were visited on four local construction sites and discussions also took place with site supervisors. Inspectors interviewed managers, all the providers' instructors and administrative staff. They examined documents, including trainees' files, portfolios, assessors' records, external verifiers' and various audit reports, the business plan, the quality assurance manual, marketing materials, minutes of meetings and other management files. The grading profile of the observed sessions is contained in the table below.

7. For the reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of six days at LTS in August 2000. They interviewed 14 trainees and 11 members of staff. They discussed with the recently appointed procedures manager and senior training managers ways in which support had been provided to address the first inspection findings. Inspectors examined the recently produced quality assurance manual and procedures together with minutes of meetings and other documents to monitor the process used and subsequent actions taken. They visited each of the training centres and examined trainees' files, review sheets and control documents.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1	5	2	3		11
Total	1	5	2	3	0	11

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

8. Construction training is offered to young people and adults at training centres in Hackney and Newham. There are 246 trainees working towards NVQ at levels 1 to 3 in the table below. Additionally, 12 trainees are undertaking a 12-week basic employability programme, covering literacy, numeracy and language development before progressing onto an NVQ level 1 in their chosen occupational area. Seventy-nine of the trainees are working towards an NVQ level 1 qualification through collaborative agreements with two further education colleges. Sixty-four clients are on a New Deal-funded full-time education and training scheme. The Employment Service refers most of the trainees to LTS and all attend one of the training centres for an initial assessment of their knowledge and skills. After initial assessment, trainees and clients access either the basic employability programme or proceed straight on to an NVQ level 1 in their preferred craft. Most spend three months on the NVQ level 1 scheme followed by six months working towards NVQ level 2. The few who progress to NVQ level 3 spend a further six months in training. Some trainees have the opportunity for work experience on building sites run by Laing Partnership Housing or through local community regeneration projects. The self-assessment report was informative, although some of the strengths and weaknesses referred to generic aspects. Inspectors agreed with the occupational strengths and weaknesses and identified others. They awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

Carpentry and joinery	Painting and decorating	Brickwork	Plastering	Dry lining	Total
83	71	57	20	15	246

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly enthusiastic and motivated trainees
- ◆ effective prevocational programme
- ◆ effective practical training
- ◆ trainees who satisfactorily complete their programme helped to purchase tools

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few work experience opportunities
- ◆ little influence by trainees over their training plans
- ◆ ineffective use of training resources in some theory sessions
- ◆ some cramped and untidy workshop space

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees benefit by practicing techniques related to local building design. The design and maintenance of box sash windows, which feature in many local Victorian houses is an example of training given in addition to that required by the qualification.

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees who complete the programme satisfactorily may apply for assistance in the purchase of tools and equipment. Two carpentry and joinery trainees recently employed on a Laings housing project have been given 110 volt power tools. This has enabled them to establish credibility with their new work colleagues and to contribute productively to the commercial environment of a building site.

9. Trainees have a spirit of optimism about the opportunities available as a result of their training. The good quality of practical tuition and dedication of staff are crucial in enabling trainees to secure long-term employment, often for the first time in several years. Punctuality and attendance is good at the training centres, with trainees booking in and out as they would at work. Trainees who secure employment during training are encouraged to complete the qualification, and instructors make site visits to ensure a record of workplace activities is maintained as evidence towards the qualification. Staff are occupationally qualified and all trainers have recent industrial experience. The content and standard of practical tuition, along with the work ethic demanded by staff, prepares trainees well for employment. Assessment of trainees' competence is adequate and meets the requirements of the awarding body. Those in need of literacy, numeracy or language support undertake a well-planned and -delivered prevocational course lasting up to 12 weeks. The content is biased to the individual occupational aspirations of the trainees. All participants value the support given and understand how it will benefit them when they move to occupational programmes. Over the past three years, there has been a gradual improvement in achievement rates. Sixty-eight per cent of those who start on an NVQ level 2 construction programme achieve the award, and retention on the prevocational programme is good at 86 per cent. There are only marginal differences in achievement figures between the two centres. All trainees leaving the programme are given valuable careers advice and guidance, including details of support agencies who may be able to assist in funding for self-employment and contact numbers for community projects and local employment agencies. Those trainees who satisfactorily complete the agreed programme of training are helped to purchase good-quality hand and power tools to assist them when at work.

10. Work experience for some trainees takes place during the training programme and site evidence is collected towards the qualification, but there are few opportunities and they tend to take place towards the end of the training period. This does not help trainees make sound links between on- and off-the-job training at the earlier stages of their programme. LTS has recently appointed a placement officer dedicated to securing work experience and employment for trainees. Placements are not yet an integrated part of all trainees' programmes. Trainees follow a set training plan but it is not significantly modified to take into account the trainees' learning style or prior experience. Some of the work areas are untidy, with materials not properly stacked or put in bins. Brickwork trainees have to dismantle their own work, which is wasteful of their time. In some workshops, trainees have to undertake other training activities until space is available, which hinders continuity. Some classroom training sessions lacked sparkle. Sessions were often too long to sustain concentration. Trainees were expected to copy the instructors' handwritten notes from a whiteboard. Little use was made of visual aids or handouts, and the use of learning packs and text books was poorly managed. In some sessions, trainees at all levels attended together, and little account was taken of individual needs or the relevance of the lesson to their current progress.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

11. Trainees are recruited from 11 inner London Boroughs which have a variety of cultures, ethnic origins, languages, education and skill levels. Thirty-five per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic communities, 13 per cent are refugees and women constitute 1 per cent. Many trainees are from disaffected groups, including ex-offenders, long-term unemployed, refugees, single parents and the homeless. The general manager, to ensure compliance with legislation, reviews the equal opportunities policy annually. Equal opportunities data are maintained for staff and trainees. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and identified additional strengths. They awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of additional support given to a trainee to overcome a perceived barrier to employment. A trainee who is profoundly deaf joined LTS on a three-month prevocational programme and then progressed to a full-time painting and decorating course, achieving an NVQ at level 2. He was unsuccessful in securing work and returned to LTS for further assistance. Funding for tools was arranged, along with a four-week work placement. The painting contractor included him in a team, of which one member was also deaf. At a review of his progress in the third week, a permanent job offer was made. LTS' jobs officer attended the site induction, the placement review and liaised with the disabilities advisor, who offered the employer a wage subsidy for 13 weeks through the Employment Service.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high awareness of equal opportunities issues by staff and trainees
- ◆ trainees represent the community mix of age and ethnicity
- ◆ productive training links with a wide range of community organisations
- ◆ positive images in marketing materials
- ◆ appropriate access at both centres for trainees with disabilities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ few women on programme
- ◆ no structured use of monitoring data to inform planning

12. Equality of opportunity is firmly established in all aspects of provision and actively promoted by staff. It is carefully introduced at interview for staff and during induction for trainees. There is a high percentage of trainees representing the local minority ethnic communities. Staff are also a representative mix of the local community. There is an acute awareness of the impact of incidents of racism, harassment and bullying, so they are dealt with quickly and sensitively. One proven case of racism resulted in the instant dismissal of a trainee for gross misconduct. Both staff and trainees have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues and of how complaints are dealt with, ensuring a safe and secure working environment. LTS is involved in many links with local authorities and community groups, including organising specialist taster courses for under-represented groups, self-build organisations, people with disabilities, and school children to introduce them to the industry. A course organised for trainees with hearing impairment led to staff attending deafness awareness and sign language training, and a loop system being installed into one centre. These joint partnerships involve considerable publicity, where non-stereotypical images are used in an

effective and stimulating way. All workshops at the training centres are on the ground floor and are accessible to those using wheelchairs. There are currently no trainees with mobility difficulties on a programme.

13. There is no active recruitment of women but women have attended several previous programmes and future proposals to encourage women to become trainees are about to take effect through working with Women and Manual Trades (WAMT) and Women's Education in Building (WEB) schemes. Statistics and data on both staff and trainees' ethnicity and gender are gathered. Reports are regularly submitted to the various partner organisations regarding trainees, but they are not used in a systematic way to inform recruitment targets or strategies. Materials used for induction and to support training are not adapted for English for speakers of other Languages (ESOL) or for trainees with other learning needs. Equal opportunity is not a regular item on formal agendas, but is openly discussed by all levels of staff. For example, a manager identified that training refugees is more expensive than for other trainees because of the high level of support required. In some instances, no additional funding was available but as staff were able to prove the refugees' exceptionally high level of commitment and their desire to succeed, LTS agreed to continue the policy of supporting such clients.

Trainee support

Grade 2

14. Trainees are recruited through the Employment Service, job clubs, gateway programmes, other providers, and by word of mouth. The company operates a flexible programme and each applicant is promptly offered an initial assessment, which includes numeracy and literacy. Where the assessment shows that an immediate start on one of the company's skills training courses would not be appropriate, potential trainees are either referred to other providers or offered the basic employability prevocational programme. Those with major learning difficulties are referred to appropriate agencies. Counselling is offered at all stages of training, and group reviews are held regularly. The self-assessment report accurately reflected the company's strengths and weaknesses and inspectors awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effectively planned open access to flexible training
- ◆ comprehensive advice and guidance given to all applicants
- ◆ staff sympathetic to needs of trainees
- ◆ effective counselling provided at all stages of training
- ◆ good help and guidance towards employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no use of initial assessment to prepare realistic individual training plans
- ◆ little detail and target setting in individual training plans
- ◆ poor tracking of trainees' progress in wood occupations

15. The company is committed to providing the necessary support to eventually secure employment, and this is founded on a strong commitment from staff at all levels. The company policy, high ethical considerations, and management style support these factors well. The company operates a flexible programme, monitoring its capacity weekly to ensure that available training places are offered to applicants with the minimum of delay. Potential trainees are given relevant, accurate and objective advice and are guided to other providers or alternative programmes if it is agreed to be of more benefit to the applicant. Initial assessment is thorough and undertaken professionally, in a manner which makes the trainee feel relaxed. Initial assessment of basic skills leads to trainees being offered appropriate support where necessary. There is no formal accreditation of prior learning, but trainees who quickly demonstrate competence are put on a fast track to gain their qualification. The working relationship between all the staff and the trainees is positive and enhances their achievement prospects. Training staff are dedicated, encouraging and committed to helping their trainees to succeed. They actively encourage trainees to approach them for advice and guidance. Many trainees have extensive pastoral support needs, and these are effectively provided by staff and recorded. Personal problems are dealt with quickly, fairly and effectively. Review meetings take place regularly. Levels of satisfaction with the programmes among trainees are high. Notice boards prominently situated in both centres' canteens display current job vacancies, and staff provide good support to trainees making applications. All trainees who successfully complete training are provided with a set of good quality tools appropriate to their needs in employment.

16. The results of the initial assessment are not used to inform the induction process or to produce meaningful individual training plans. While initial induction is comprehensive and demonstrates the company's caring approach, it fails to meet the needs of some whose understanding of the English language is poor. The use of jargon and less commonly used words leads to confusion and loss of participation by some trainees. Individual training plans are minimalist and contain little to provide either the trainee or the staff with meaningful and measurable programmes to follow. Wood-occupation trainees are not aware of their progression on the programme and have little knowledge of what awaits them. The system for reviewing trainees' progress is not yet fully developed. Some trainees' files do not reflect their progress and do not track dates for completion of elements of their training or the standards achieved.

Management of training

Grade 3

17. A general manager heads the company's management structure and maintains regular contact with the responsible director in the parent company. An operations manager has responsibility for two team leaders who manage 12 instructors each between the two training centres. A new training centre is planned to open in Edmonton in the Autumn of 1999. Company policies, targets and strategic direction are widely disseminated. Monthly and quarterly reports and forecasts are presented at parent company and main-board level. Information is communicated through a series of scheduled and structured meetings. All staff meet quarterly, company managers meet weekly and programme teams meet weekly. At these meetings, staff are encouraged to contribute ideas in relation to company development. The self-assessment report identified two strengths and two weaknesses which inspectors confirmed, and additional strengths and weaknesses were found. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open and supportive management style
- ◆ strategically focused and regularly monitored business plan
- ◆ effective use of financial data to manage training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some staff not systematically following company procedures
- ◆ no sharing of best practice across occupational areas and between centres
- ◆ no use of management-information data to inform training target setting

18. The open and supportive management style encourages staff to openly debate issues about the training programmes and managers address them promptly. 'Personal Improvement Planning' (PIP) forms the basis for annual performance appraisal. The process is part of a long-established parent-company procedure and is designed to meet the agreed development needs of staff. Most staff attend and benefit from the parent company's in-house development and training programme. The organisation has effective communication, which is maintained through a wide range of recorded meetings used to monitor performance and to communicate targets for training achievements. Information is cascaded effectively from senior management to the craft training teams. Meetings are effective in providing a forum for both the giving and receiving of information required to enable staff to do their jobs effectively. Business planning takes place annually and includes all staff. Strategic focus is clear, and the wide community links enable new business opportunities to be identified. Financial data is regularly produced to inform management decisions.

19. Company procedures relating to training are not always systematically followed by staff. This has resulted in some reviews being missed and training plans not being updated in accordance with agreed procedures. Although team meetings are held regularly at each centre, there is inconsistent practice between centres. Staff welcome the opportunities which weekly team meetings at each centre give them to discuss training issues, but there is little structure in the conduct of the meetings. At one centre, for example, a meeting lacked an agenda and at the other centre, no records of previous minutes were available. Examples of best practice in relation to recording and tracking of trainees' progress on their programmes are not routinely shared across occupational areas or between centres. While accurate and current data are used, there is insufficient breadth of management information generated and analysed. This limits managers' information in relation to training outcomes.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

20. Since the first inspection LTS has restructured its quality assurance procedures. An operations manager, reporting directly to the general manager, has responsibility for the assurance of quality issues. Additional support is provided by the parent company through the recently appointed procedures manager. The quality assurance manual has been extensively revised and now includes a full range of procedures including audit compliance, document production and control procedures. The parent company's staff undertake external auditing of the quality assurance systems and their findings are reported to senior management.

At the first inspection, the weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ lack of cohesive and comprehensive quality assurance procedures
- ◆ insufficiently robust trainees' review procedures
- ◆ little statistical evidence to inform decision making
- ◆ no routine maintenance of records
- ◆ underdeveloped action plans and target setting

21. Following development of its action plan, LTS has now addressed all of the identified issues. Particular emphasis has been placed on introducing coherent quality assurance procedures across the programmes, with support and guidance being provided by specialists from the parent company. All but one of these weaknesses have now been addressed. Additional strengths and weaknesses were identified during the reinspection. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in LTS's updated self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ prompt action taken as a result of self-assessment
- ◆ rigorous quality assurance procedures supported by flow diagrams
- ◆ good use made of action planning to address issues of quality

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little use of data to guide decision making
- ◆ missed opportunities to share good practice
- ◆ inconsistent application of quality assurance procedures
- ◆ inadequate system for monitoring quality of work-based training

22. The revised quality assurance manual has a clear framework and comprehensive set of procedures, which are well understood by staff. Existing procedures have been critically reviewed and appropriate new sections introduced. A document production and control procedure is used effectively to control the generation of new documents and revisions to existing ones. Procedures for compliance with audits provide a thorough system for ensuring that all issues identified through internal and external audits are followed up and actioned. These procedures are new and not yet fully established into the quality assurance process. The effectiveness of many of the new and revised procedures cannot yet be evaluated. Internal verification procedures have been revised and are well recorded and followed by staff. Some staff have yet to gain their full assessor awards. External verification reports identify that awarding body requirements for internal verification are being met. All quality assurance procedures are supported by easy-to-follow flow diagrams which staff find helpful in increasing their awareness of the procedures and processes. Staff have made suggestions for improvements and are supportive of the new and revised procedures, using them to make continuous improvements to the training provided.

23. LTS's self-assessment process was rigorous, and it has made effective use of action planning to restructure and clarify staff's roles. Centre business managers report on a monthly basis to the operations manager on quality assurance issues. The thorough action planning has resulted in helpful revisions being made to trainees' review processes and documentation. Written feedback is now gathered from trainees at their four-weekly reviews and appropriate action is taken on issues identified. Overall trends are monitored and evaluated by senior managers and actions agreed. Development opportunities for staff have increased and relevant training has been provided to help to improve the quality of training and assessment.

24. Most of the information collected by LTS is not routinely analysed or evaluated or used to guide decision making. Trainees' achievement data are not effectively used to plan or develop the programmes. There are missed opportunities to share good practice between the centres. Some teaching staff are unaware of the methods and materials being used in other areas, and styles vary in the use of learning and assessment materials. In one centre, analysis sheets are produced from the results of trainees' questionnaires, which instructors find informative. In another centre, action points are issued to instructors following the analysis of trainees' comments, but they have little awareness of the overall picture. Frequent team and assessors' meetings are held and include staff from all centres. Issues relating to training and assessment are discussed in a positive and



open way. However, a structured agenda is rarely adhered to and important issues are sometimes overlooked. The quality assurance manual contains standard formats for minutes of meetings but these are not routinely followed and issues such as reviewing of previous actions and targets have been overlooked. There are also inconsistencies in the administration of trainees' reviews between different trades. Trainees in one centre return their completed reviews to the instructor they are being asked to comment upon, instead of returning them to the business manager in order to maintain confidentiality. In some instances this has resulted in unproductive and inaccurate responses. Very little work-based evidence is gathered by trainees for their portfolios and subsequent assessments. The procedure for monitoring the quality of work-based training is inadequate and not fully implemented across any of the occupational trades. Management and staff have identified the need to revise and develop this procedure.