



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

REINSPECTION SEPTEMBER 2000

Hull and East Riding Chamber Training Ltd

SUMMARY

Hull and East Riding Chamber Training Ltd gives good training in business administration and satisfactory training in engineering. Trainees' retention rates are particularly good in both of these occupational areas. The training is well managed, although there is an over reliance on informal communication among staff in the training team. At the time of the original inspection there were significant deficiencies in HERCTL's equal opportunities policy. By the time of reinspection the company had produced comprehensive new policies, but trainees do not fully understand them. Positive action is now taken to recruit people from groups under-represented on training programmes. Trainees are well supported by HERCTL, off-the-job training providers and employers. At the time of the original inspection HERCTL's quality assurance policies and procedures were not satisfactory because they did not cover work-based training. By reinspection these had been rewritten to specifically include work-based training. Quality assurance procedures are not fully established.

As a result of the reinspection of HERCTL, the original published report text for equal opportunities and quality assurance has been replaced by new text, which makes reference to the original inspection findings. The summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings 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 |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Engineering | 3 |
| Business administration | 2 |

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

| REINSPECTION | GRADE |
|---------------------|-------|
| Equal opportunities | 3 |
| Quality assurance | 3 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong commitment to work-based training by all employers
- ◆ good support for trainees by all parties involved in training
- ◆ trainees' high retention rates on all programmes
- ◆ positive action taken to recruit under-represented groups
- ◆ success in implementing improvement quality plans

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no accreditation of prior learning in engineering



INSPECTION REPORT: HULL AND EAST RIDING CHAMBER
TRAINING LTD JUNE 1999 REINSPECTION SEPTEMBER 2000

- ◆ inadequate guidance given to trainees and employers on policies
- ◆ no internal audits

INTRODUCTION

1. Hull and East Riding Chamber Training Ltd (HERCTL) is based in the centre of Kingston-upon-Hull at the offices of the Hull and Humber Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Shipping. It has been offering training programmes in business administration funded by Humberside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) since September 1997. In September 1998, it introduced several extra skill areas including engineering, gas fitting, electrical, motor vehicle maintenance, construction, joinery, horticulture and leisure and tourism. In March 2000 a merger between HERCTL and another local training company, Northern Business Centre took place. Seventy trainees and two staff members from Northern Business Centre were taken over by HERCTL.

2. As well as offering training and assessment to young people on government funded programmes, HERCTL also gives training on a commercial basis to the local business community, related to a wide range of business and commercial subjects. At the time of reinspection HERTCL had 173 trainees; 88 modern apprentices, 33 national trainees and 52 following other training programmes. Trainees are involved in a wide range of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). There are 102 trainees in business administration, four in customer service, two in bricklaying, six in electrical installation, 20 in engineering, and 17 in gas fitting, four in horticulture, nine in sport and leisure, three in motor vehicle, one in procurement, one road worker, one in sign making, two in warehousing and one in information technology programmes.

3. In March 2000 HERTCL began to recruit directly for business administration programmes and now offers training and assessment to business administration trainees. The staff team has grown from three at the time of the first inspection to 14 currently. The business and training manager oversees all the company's operations. The recently appointed operations manager has a team of six trainer/assessors and one placement officer. The company also employs an administration manager, an administration assistant, a finance assistant, a reviewing officer and an assistant to the business and training manager. One of the assessors and the placement officer work part-time. The company has six subcontractors who give training, assessment and internal verification services. Internal verification for administration programmes is given by a local college. The East Riding of Yorkshire Council employs all trainees who work in sport and leisure, horticulture, joinery, construction and some who work in administration and engineering. HERCTL has 92 administration placement providers on its database, 62 of whom currently provide placements or employment. Other companies employ trainees following programmes in engineering, gas and electrical installation.

4. HERCTL is in the same geographical area as the Humberside TEC, but only operates north of the river Humber. The Chamber controls and has member companies in an area from Bridlington in the north to the boundary of Goole in the

west. Two unitary authorities, Kingston-upon-Hull City Council and the East Riding of Yorkshire Council serve the area, which is predominantly urban, with Kingston-upon-Hull as its main economic centre. The East Riding of Yorkshire Council is, geographically, the largest unitary authority in England, being responsible for a population of some 308,000.

5. The employment rate has been rising steadily, although recently its rate of increase has slowed. In July 2000 the unemployment rate in the East Riding of Yorkshire was 3.8 per cent and in Hull it was 7.2 per cent, compared to the national average of 3.5 per cent. The number of unemployed in the East Riding of Yorkshire has fallen from 5,489 at the time of the first inspection to 4,894 in July 2000. In Hull the unemployment rate in the same period has fallen from 10,913 to 9,405. The number of 18-24 year olds who are unemployed in the East Riding of Yorkshire has fallen from 1,359 at the time of the first inspection to 1,214 in July 2000. In Hull, the figure for the same period has fallen from 3,023 to 2,665. The percentage of all unemployed people in the East Riding of Yorkshire who are aged between 18-24 has remained at 24.8 per cent during 1999 and 2000. In Hull, the figure has increased slightly from 27.7 per cent in June 1999 to 28.3 per cent in July 2000. The national figure was 23.1 per cent at the time of the first inspection and 23.6 per cent in July 2000.

6. The workforce in the Humberside area is over 431,000 and of the 316,000 people in employment, over 70 per cent are in work in the areas of manufacturing, distribution, hotel and catering, public administration, education and health. The amount of part-time working in the area is well above the national average, especially among female workers, and it is expected to increase. The number of self-employed persons in the area has grown significantly. Humberside is experiencing a rate of growth in its gross domestic product (GDP) marginally below that of the UK and the ratio of investment to GDP is low. In Humberside, the population is growing faster than in many other parts of the country. Humberside is, on average, a low wage economy. According to statistics provided by the TEC, the number of new businesses opening in the area is below the national average and the proportion which fail is comparatively high. One of the main economic problems which this area faces is low levels of inward investment, particularly foreign investment, compared with the rest of the UK. It is anticipated that Humberside's economic future will continue to depend largely upon its manufacturing industry, itself dependent upon the extent to which it can remain competitive in international terms.

7. The population of the area is increasing significantly. In 1991, 1 per cent of the population was from minority ethnic groups. Within the working population, the number of younger workers is declining and the proportion of more mature workers is increasing. The number of trained and qualified persons in the workforce is growing. Thirty-eight per cent of persons in the workforce are qualified to at least NVQ at level 3, and 24 per cent are qualified to level 4 (1996).

8. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Hull was 23.4



per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

9. After attending training in self-assessment sponsored by Humberside TEC, HERCTL staff produced a self-assessment report in September 1998. A revised version was issued in January 1999. In preparation for reinspection, HERCTL produced a special report covering the two areas to be reinspected. The process was co-ordinated by the business and training manager in close liaison with the operations manager. Staff were consulted and their views were taken into account when judgements were made.

10. The first inspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors who spent a total of nine days based at HERCTL. They interviewed 24 trainees. Three interviews were conducted with off-the-job training staff, five with off-the-job management staff and six with HERCTL staff. Inspectors visited eight workplaces and met with 10 supervisors and employers. They looked at the files of four trainees, 21 portfolios/logbooks, TEC contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, meeting minutes, staff development records, marketing material, job advertisements for trainees, handbooks, staff and supervisors monitoring data and audit reports.

11. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors, who spent a total of six days with HERTCL during September 2000. They interviewed 25 trainees and held eight staff interviews. They visited two subcontractors and interviewed five subcontractor staff and visited three placement employers. A wide range of documentary evidence was examined including trainee files, internal verification records, awarding body reports, minutes of meetings, management information and documents relating to quality assurance. Inspectors observed part of an induction programme.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

12. There are nine trainees following the engineering programme all of whom are taking NVQs at levels 2 and 3. All are modern apprentices and employed by small-to large-size engineering companies. Off-the-job training during the first year is subcontracted to a local training provider. Trainees undertake this training on an 18-week block-release programme. During this time, trainees are assessed for 10 of the 11 units required for the NVQ level 2. Training and assessment in relation to the remaining unit are carried out at a later stage at the subcontractor's premises. Upon completion of this period of training, trainees return to their companies to gain further experience in the workplace and progress to NVQ level 3. Throughout their training programme, trainees work towards an additional qualification at a

local college of further education. The self-assessment report did not specify any strengths or weaknesses in engineering. Inspectors found an equal balance of strengths and weaknesses and gave the same grade as that shown in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' high retention rates
- ◆ well structured off-the-job training for NVQ level 2
- ◆ excellent health and safety practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ missed opportunities for use of work-based evidence at level 2
- ◆ some trainees' poor understanding of key skills
- ◆ inadequate arrangements for informing employers of trainees' progress

13. Off-the-job training for the NVQ level 2 is good. There are detailed course plans for practical activities and theory sessions. Trainees benefit from good-quality training in an environment they find supportive. Priority is given to the proper observance of health and safety regulations. During their first year, trainees undertake additional health and safety training courses. For example, trainees attend abrasive wheel, safe erection of scaffolding and fire-fighting courses. The importance of health and safety is reinforced throughout the training programme. Trainees make specific reference in their logbooks to good practice in relation to health and safety.

14. After the 18-week-element of off-the-job training, trainees return to the workplace. On-the-job training does not always relate to the skills and theoretical knowledge trainees have acquired at college. Employers are not always kept informed of trainees' progress towards achievement of the NVQ or other qualifications. Employers have insufficient understanding of the NVQ or how they can facilitate learning opportunities in the workplace. Trainees miss many day-to-day opportunities to gather different types of evidence of their competence in the workplace.

15. Trainees' are assessed for their NVQ level two at the subcontractor's training centre. Trainees are not assessed in the workplace. The extent to which trainees understand what key skills are varies considerably. Some trainees have no understanding of how they can provide evidence of their acquisition of key skills.

16. The provider has been running the engineering programme since September 1998. To date, one trainee has left the training programme as a result of disciplinary action.

Business Administration

Grade 2

17. There are 22 trainees on business administration programmes. Seven of these trainees are taking NVQ level 2, eleven are taking NVQ level 3 and four are taking NVQ level 4. Seventeen of these trainees are employed and are modern apprentices. The other five trainees have work placements. The Chamber of Commerce itself employs two trainees. All other trainees are employed by, or on placement with, the local council, in a wide range of departments including emergency planning, legal, electoral roll, customer service and pensions. The provider does not help trainees find employment or placements. HERCTL offers training leading to NVQs at level 2 to accommodate trainees from another local provider when that provider's programmes are full. HERCTL also offers modern apprenticeship training leading to NVQs at levels 3 and 4 for this provider's trainees and for its own trainees. All trainees attend off-the-job training at a local college and they are able to take additional qualifications in information technology and health and safety. Modern apprentices can take a supervisory management course. Trainees can also attend the Chamber's programme of seminars. Modern apprentices attend weekly sessions at the local college on the key skill of application of number. Trainees in the workplace receive a visit from their assessor every four to six weeks. All assessment takes place in the workplace. HERCTL staff carry out reviews of trainees' progress every eight weeks. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report but they found other strengths and some weaknesses that HERCTL had not identified. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' high retention rates
- ◆ delegation of high level of responsibility to trainees
- ◆ opportunity for trainees to take a wide range of additional qualifications
- ◆ comprehensive job audits
- ◆ trainees' excellent understanding of the NVQ process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to make key skills training fully integral to the programme
- ◆ undue pressure on some trainees to achieve NVQs by set dates

18. Trainees on all programmes and at all levels are well motivated. Most receive effective and comprehensive training and assessment both on and off the job. Many of those who have joined the modern apprenticeship programme while on placement have gained employment and most progress up the career ladder as a result of their qualifications. Employers give trainees high levels of responsibility to help them develop. Many trainees are progressing to the next NVQ level, and two will take degrees. As part of his work in emergency planning, one trainee has

prepared a report which his supervisor is forwarding to the Home Office. Comprehensive job audits are undertaken at the beginning of trainees' programmes so any discrepancies between trainees' job roles and NVQ programmes can be identified. Trainees are able to work in different departments and job roles to develop wider experience and generate more diverse evidence of their competencies. Trainees see the benefits of their NVQ programmes and all believe their training to be of good quality.

19. A wide range of additional qualifications is available to trainees which help them achieve their NVQ and develop their careers. Trainees' programmes are individualised and designed to meet the trainees' specific development needs. The supervisory management course is particularly beneficial for career progression. All optional NVQ units are available to trainees at level 2 and at level 3, but level 3 trainees had all chosen the same unit, because much evidence for it could be cross referenced from other units.

20. During their induction, and throughout their programme, trainees are made aware of the requirement for them to be trained and assessed in key skills. Currently, however, trainees do not undertake training in key skills as an integral part of their programme. They do not begin to collect evidence of their attainment in key skills until they have completed work for their NVQ. Trainees' prior learning and achievement of CLAIT qualifications is used as evidence of their attainment of the key skills of application of number and information technology.

21. Trainees have a very clear understanding of the NVQ process and the roles and responsibilities of the different parties involved in it. All trainees can explain which units they had achieved, how they are going to generate further evidence, and how to appeal against assessment decisions. Some trainees felt under undue pressure because they were required to achieve their NVQ within demanding timescales and some failed to do so. Other trainees complained that tutors gave more time and attention to trainees who had to achieve their NVQs by fixed dates.

22. Trainees' retention rates are good. During the time that the provider has been offering training leading to the NVQ in business administration, only one trainee has left the programme early. This trainee moved from the area and went into employment. The trainee was credited with the NVQ units achieved.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

23. HERCTL has an equal opportunities policy. The policy names the business and training manager as the person with overall responsibility for ensuring that the policy is consistently applied and reviewed annually. Subcontractors and placement providers sign a contract agreeing to follow HERCTL's equal opportunities policy in their contact with trainees. The few small placement

providers who do not have their own equal opportunities policy are encouraged to use HERCTL's policy. Equal opportunities policies are monitored through progress reviews, discussions with trainees, employers and subcontractors and evaluation of feedback from questionnaires. The equal opportunities policy is included in trainee and staff handbooks. Trainees' handbooks also contain an anti-harassment procedure. Staff receive training related to basic equal opportunities issues during their induction. HERCTL has set up a database to gather information on trainees' ethnicity, gender and any disability. This information is only available for 1999-2000. Twenty-three per cent of trainees on business administration programmes are male, which is lower than the local TEC average of 32.4 per cent. All four trainees on the customer service programme are female. All engineering, gas fitting, bricklaying, horticulture, motor vehicle and warehousing trainees are male. In sport and leisure, 12 per cent of trainees are female. Six per cent of trainees on business administration programmes have a disability, higher than the TEC average of 1.7 per cent. Information on the number of people with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups on other programme areas was not given.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate equal opportunity policies
- ◆ little monitoring of the effectiveness of policies and procedures
- ◆ no targeting of groups under-represented on training programmes

24. The company drew up and carried out an action plan to address the weaknesses identified in the original inspection. Since the original inspection, the manager has written an equal opportunities policy specifically for HERCTL, which relates to work-based training. Previously the Chamber's own policy was used. The new policy refers to current legislation and is signed and dated. An anti-harassment procedure has also been developed and distributed to trainees. The engineering subcontractor has developed an equal opportunities policy which complies with current legislation. Job descriptions for staff now include a requirement for them to observe equality of opportunity in all training matters. Equal opportunities has become a standard item on the staff meeting agenda. All marketing and advertising material now carries an equal opportunities commitment statement.

25. The reinspection self-assessment report identified nine strengths and one weakness. Inspectors found eight of the strengths to be normal practice which had been implemented as part of the action plan. Inspectors agreed with one strength proposed through self-assessment and found two further strengths. Inspectors, who found two other weaknesses, did not find the weakness proposed through self-assessment. The grade awarded at reinspection was the same as that proposed through self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ positive action taken to recruit under-represented groups
- ◆ premises redesigned for access for trainees with mobility problems
- ◆ equal status and benefits for trainees as Chamber members

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate guidance given to trainees and employers on policies
- ◆ insufficient analysis of equal opportunities data

26. HERCTL now actively promotes equal opportunities. There is a strategy to recruit women and men on to programmes which they do not traditionally choose, and to recruit people with disabilities and people from minority ethnic groups on to all programmes. All marketing and recruitment literature states that HERCTL is working towards equal opportunities in employment and training. Staff are working with local schools and giving careers talks to encourage females to consider careers in engineering and males in administration. Links have been formed with local agencies for people with disabilities to promote HERCTL's training to their clients. One recently recruited member of staff is highly experienced in working with people with disabilities. Age and disability is not a barrier in recruitment of staff. All staff are asked to contribute ideas to promote the equal opportunities strategy at team meetings. Staff attend equal opportunities and cultural awareness training sessions organised by the TEC and share information which they gather with all colleagues.

27. People with mobility problems can easily access HERCTL's facilities. A staff member was asked to redesign the space which the company occupied, to make it fully accessible for people with disabilities. The company has relocated to the ground floor of the Chamber's premises and there are no steps to negotiate to enter the building. Fire exits, corridors and doors have all been modified to allow optimum access for wheelchair users. For people with visual impairments, the help desk is located close to the entrance door. Larger computer monitors and magnifying glasses can be accessed and the company is purchasing tracker balls to help people with grip problems to access computers.

28. All trainees are given the same status and benefits as Chamber members. They are able to attend two seminars a year which are operated commercially by the Chamber, free of charge. Seminar topics include diversity and encouraging equality of opportunity. They also have access to the Chamber's newsletter and magazine. The company operates an open-door policy and will accept any trainees that partner employers have recruited, or who are recruited by HERCTL and who wish to join the training programme.

29. Not all trainees understand the wording of the equal opportunities policy. During induction, trainees read the equal opportunities policy contained in their handbook and are asked some questions about it. The policy is not explained to

them in simple and clear language and no examples are given of acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. The anti-harassment policy does not explain harassment and bullying and does not give any examples which trainees can relate to. Employers sign a contract saying that they will abide by HERCTL's equal opportunities policy but some cannot remember the policy being explained to them. There is a written procedure which explains to trainees how they can appeal against assessment decisions, but there is no written complaints procedure.

30. HERCTL is currently unable to fully analyse trends in equal opportunities. A new database has been set up to continually review programme statistical information relating to the performance of the equal opportunities policy. Application information relating to gender, ethnicity and people with disabilities, whether or not interviewed, accepted and starting in training can be analysed for the company as a whole, but not by programme area. This information is analysed on a monthly basis to look for trends in recruitment, compared to the regional statistics. The system has only been in place for three months and is not yet fully established. A programme has been designed to monitor achievement but it is not yet being used. HERCTL only holds accessible equal opportunities data on trainees who began their programme during and after 1999. Although information is gathered concerning early leavers, it is not analysed to look for trends in equal opportunities issues.

Trainee support

Grade 2

31. There are documented support arrangements for trainees at HERCTL, including comprehensive induction forms and checklists. Staff make regular visits to trainees in the workplace to carry out reviews of their progress. The frequency of these visits exceeds contractual requirements. Together with the management of the training process, support is seen as the most important activity by all staff. Inspectors agreed with the strengths cited in the self-assessment report. They found other strengths which HERCTL had not identified. The one weakness given in the self-assessment report related to a failure of staff to sample all training sessions and all trainees' learning experience; HERCTL has now taken action to rectify this. Inspectors found other weaknesses. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support for trainees from all parties involved in training
- ◆ effectiveness of progress reviews in identifying individual trainees' training needs
- ◆ clearly identified progression opportunities
- ◆ thorough and comprehensive induction programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no accreditation of trainees' prior learning in engineering
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ no initial assessment of basic skills in business administration

32. Trainees benefit from free access to a wide range and variety of short training courses offered on a commercial basis to Chamber members and the public. These include courses of relevance to level 3 trainees for example, on supervisory skills and dealing with difficult customers, and others of interest to business administration trainees like minute-taking and the functions of a manager. Trainees have access to the Chamber's information services and legal help line. They can approach the chief executive in the same way as any other member for help and assistance. Trainees' success stories are printed in the Chamber's business magazine.

33. All the organisations involved in the trainees' development are committed to helping trainees to achieve their qualifications and to supporting them in their quest for suitable employment or further education. For example, another local provider indicates to HERCTL the extra support requirements which trainees moving between the provider and HERCTL may have. At most workplaces, trainees have, in many cases, guaranteed opportunities for further training and development. Many also work where there is a more or less clear promotion route linked to attainment of vocational qualifications. One major employer, who has trainees in many different occupations, has two named management staff who serve as effective links between trainees, supervisors, the employers' own training department, local colleges and the provider.

34. Those involved in training meet informally on a day-to-day basis, and regularly at a 'quality circle'. The purpose of the circle is to match the needs of the trainees to opportunities in industry and to ensure that trainees gain maximum benefit from all aspects of their programmes.

35. Although it is rare for trainees to have problems concerned with training or of a personal nature, when they do, they are confident that they know from whom they can receive help and advice. They have an excellent recall of the purpose and content of the on- and off-the-job induction processes, and a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities and of the function and personnel of HERCTL.

36. There are effective arrangements for accrediting the prior learning and achievement of business administration trainees but similar arrangements do not exist for engineering trainees. Staff have established some good practice in the initial assessment of engineering trainees but this has yet to be adopted on business administration programmes. There is little assessment of trainees' key skills and trainees do not regard key skills training as an integral part of their programmes.

Management of training

Grade 2

37. HERCTL's team is managed by a business and training manager, and comprises a training administrator and centre coordinator, a deputy business manager and health and safety officer, and an assessor with responsibility for quality control. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to a local college and a commercial training provider for the areas inspected, and to another private subcontractor. Trainees are employed at 10 workplaces. The local district council provides employment for 80 per cent of trainees. Inspectors considered that many of the strengths cited in the self-assessment report were no more than normal practice. The inspectors agreed with the one weakness given in the self-assessment report. They found other strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by HERCTL.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong commitment to work-based training by all employers
- ◆ productive relationships between management, employers and subcontractors
- ◆ effective and well-focused staff training and development
- ◆ robust management information systems

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ over reliance on informal internal communications

38. HERCTL manages its contracts and subcontracting arrangements in a cordial and effective fashion. It has concise and relevant processes and documentation for reviewing and monitoring trainees' progress in the workplace. Relationships between all parties are based on understanding and mutual trust. Formal meetings between all those involved in training do not take place although each party usually has a form of contract or service level agreement. HERCTL's good management and employers' commitment to supporting trainees strengthen these formal and informal arrangements. These good relationships are complemented by good management information systems that allow for the accurate tracking of trainee's progress and the production of detailed reports for consideration by the quality circle.

39. Staff meetings are usually held every week and minutes of these are only taken in the event of a significant occurrence, such as a large intake of trainees or the arrival of a new member of staff. Communication between the staff at HERCTL is mainly informal, and relies on close daily proximity and trust. Formal records, however, are not kept of important decisions and of actions that need to be implemented. HERCTL plan to diversify the range of occupational areas in which they provide training, and to increase the number of trainees significantly in the near future.

40. Employees of HERCTL are asked what further training would help them better manage training, and reasonable requests for appropriate training and development are met. Some HERCTL staff are working towards assessor awards. All staff undertake attend training sessions held by the TEC and awarding bodies All the staff have substantial management or administrative experience, much of it directly relating to training. A staff handbook adequately describes the rights and responsibilities of staff.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

41. HERCTL has a quality assurance policy and a manual containing quality procedures. A copy of the quality policy is contained in the trainee and staff handbooks. There is one copy of the quality assurance manual which is held by the operations manager. Overall responsibility for quality assurance lies with the business and training manager. The operations manager has day to day responsibility for assuring the quality of training programmes. Feedback from trainees and employers is sought by the use of questionnaires. Trainees also complete an evaluation form after their induction programme.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were;

- ◆ insufficiently rigorous internal verification
- ◆ failure of quality assurance policy to cover training
- ◆ failure of quality assurance procedures to apply to training
- ◆ no analysis of feedback from trainees and employers

42. Quality assurance was awarded a grade 4 at the first inspection. Since then HERCTL has introduced an action plan to remove the weaknesses found by inspectors. The quality policy and procedures have been re-written specifically for work-based training. There are now improved arrangements for internal verification and careful analysis of feedback received from trainees and employers. In its self-assessment report, HERCTL identified eight strengths and one weakness for quality assurance. Inspectors agree with two of the strengths and have found an additional strength. Inspectors did not agree with the weakness in the self-assessment report, but found three different weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use made of the quality circles
- ◆ effective introduction of improvement plans
- ◆ positive use of feedback from trainees and employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no internal audits
- ◆ insufficient structured monitoring and observation of staff
- ◆ no integration of self-assessment and action planning into the quality assurance system

43. Since the last inspection, HERTCL has continued to make good use of quality circle meetings. There are two separate meetings held every eight weeks. One takes place at the subcontractor college and is concerned with the administration, retail, horticulture, procurement, and sport and leisure programmes. The second is held either at HERTCL or employer premises and concerns the engineering and construction programmes. The groups are well established and regularly attended by HERTCL and subcontractor staff, employers and a trainee representative. There is a set agenda, which includes close monitoring of individual trainees' progress towards the achievement of the NVQ. Since taking on the additional trainees and employers in March 2000, HERTCL has worked hard to include them in these meetings. Employers value these meetings and use them as useful networking opportunities.

44. Following the original inspection, HERTCL drew up an action plan. The company has taken action based on the plan and there are notable improvements. The business training manager is responsible for this action, but all staff and subcontractors have been fully involved. Each individual has worked systematically through their individual responsibilities. At the time of reinspection all action specified on the original plan and subsequent updated versions, had been taken.

45. HERCTL collects structured feedback from trainees, employers and subcontractors through the use of questionnaires. This feedback is analysed. Trainee questionnaires are posted directly to their homes and they may choose to reply anonymously. Responses are collated and analysed and the overall feedback is discussed at quality circle meetings. Feedback is also included in the company newsletter which is distributed widely. Where the analysis of feedback shows dissatisfaction with the service provided by HERCTL, action is taken to bring about improvements. For example, feedback showed that trainees were unhappy with the length of the HERCTL training sessions, considering them to be too long. Changes were made to shorten the length of the sessions.

46. In recent months, as a result of the action plan, the company has developed a quality assurance manual which contains a set of procedures. This process has been co-ordinated by the operations manager, who has involved staff in developing procedures for their own areas of work. Procedures are well structured and based around the training cycle, from selection and recruitment of trainees through to their programme completion. However, they are not yet fully established within the company. There is no internal audit system in place for checking that the procedures are being followed. While random checks are made on paperwork, the

process is unplanned and only verbal feedback is given to staff. Failure to carry out regular, structured checks that procedures are being followed has resulted in the company failing to identify some poor internal verification practice in one part of the subcontracted college training. This is the sport and recreation programme and affects nine trainees. Reports from the external verifier highlight significant areas of concern that are not being dealt with. HERTCL does not routinely examine the external verifier reports as part of a quality monitoring process.

47. Within the administration programme, three of the four staff have joined the company in the past six months. Two of the assessors who are not yet qualified are working towards their NVQ assessor awards. Three of the four staff who deliver the programme do not hold teaching or training qualifications. The team is largely inexperienced, yet enthusiastic and eager to learn. There is not enough formal observation of staff. While casual monitoring and observation takes place and feedback is given, the process is not sufficiently structured. The new staff have been observed carrying out an assessment as part of their assessor award, but not as part of the internal verification process. Assessment decisions by the unqualified NVQ assessors are not being countersigned. While staff approve of the current informal system, the lack of written records to support the observation activities means that quality of training is not assured.

48. HERCTL produced a full self-assessment report in January 1999. Some sectors had fewer than 10 trainees and were not included in the report. This self-assessment was used as the basis for the original inspection in June 1999. In preparation for reinspection the company produced a brief summary report covering only the two areas to be reinspected. The remaining areas have not been subject to self-assessment since January 1999. Those sectors with fewer than 10 trainees have never been subject to self-assessment. There are a total of 15 trainees in these sectors. The company has closely monitored the action plans for all occupational sectors and generic aspects originally inspected, but it has not identified current strengths and weaknesses for those not reinspected. While the action plan has been successfully carried out, there is no structured plan for future action. Neither self-assessment nor action planning are included in the quality assurance policy or procedures. As yet, self-assessment is not fully part of the quality assurance process.