



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION MARCH 2001

LAGAT

Training and Development

SUMMARY

LAGAT Training and Development provides satisfactory training in foundation for work. Trainees work towards a wide range of basic qualifications, which helps to develop their confidence to apply for jobs. Trainees are not, however, set challenging targets, and some trainees progress slowly towards their qualifications. Equality of opportunity within LAGAT Training and Development is satisfactory, and all trainees are treated fairly. However, there has been insufficient recent training for staff on equal opportunities issues. Trainees are well supported but insufficient use is made of initial assessment to develop their individual learning plans. At the time of the first inspection, management of the foundation for work programme was weak, with little co-ordination between the various parts of the programme. Quality assurance arrangements were less than satisfactory. LAGAT Training and Development did not make sufficient use of feedback from trainees and employers to improve the quality of the programmes. Since then, improvements have been made, and both areas are now satisfactory. The basic employability programme is better co-ordinated, although management of training in the workplace remains weak. Quality assurance arrangements are now satisfactory, with procedures which are followed by staff. However, feedback from trainees and employers has only recently been sought and has not yet been used to improve the quality of training.

As a result of the reinspection of LAGAT Training and Development, the original published report text for management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text, which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Foundation for work	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3



KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of qualifications offered
- ◆ high degree of flexibility for individual trainees
- ◆ good personal support for trainees
- ◆ good informal communication between staff
- ◆ effective arrangements for staff development
- ◆ good use of self-assessment and action-planning to make improvements

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak target-setting for trainees
- ◆ some slow progress by trainees
- ◆ insufficient staff training on equal opportunities issues
- ◆ no formal progress reviews
- ◆ ineffective use of results of initial assessment
- ◆ weak management of employers and work-placement providers

INTRODUCTION

1. LAGAT Training and Development (LAGAT) was established as a consortium in 1987. The partners are Lincoln Co-operative Society, Simons of Lincoln and Lincoln Chamber of Commerce. It is located in the centre of Lincoln, where its premises house the central administration and in-house training facilities.

2. LAGAT contracts with Lincolnshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide training through modern apprenticeships, other work-based learning programmes for young people, basic employability training and work-based learning programmes for adults. At the time of the first inspection, training was offered in business administration, retailing and customer service, and foundation for work. Eighty per cent of adult trainees were following foundation for work programmes. Training is now also offered in hospitality and health, care and public services, although the number of trainees in these sectors is small. Trainees on the foundation for work programme are working towards a range of basic qualifications and other goals. Trainees in the other occupational areas are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs), with additional key skills units for those on modern apprenticeship programmes. At the time of the first inspection, there were 57 trainees and nine full- and part-time staff members. There are now 78 trainees and 15 members of staff. Only foundation for work was inspected, as there were too few trainees in the other occupational areas.

3. In addition to its TEC-funded work, LAGAT provides a wide range of training programmes for local companies, including health and safety, computerised accounting and fork-lift operations.

4. At the time of the first inspection, unemployment in Lincoln was low, with only 4.1 per cent of the population out of work, compared with the national rate of 5.2 per cent. The rate in Lincoln has since fallen to 3.3 per cent, broadly in line with the national figure of 3.5 per cent. People from minority ethnic groups constitute less than 1 per cent of the population in Lincoln.

5. In 1998, 68.3 per cent of school leavers in the Lincolnshire area progressed to further education. Four per cent of leavers got a job, and a further 10.8 per cent entered full-time employment on modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes. Five per cent of school leavers progressed to other government-funded training programmes. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 48 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 2000, the figure for Lincoln had fallen to 46 per cent, whereas the national average had risen to 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. The general manager and the contracts manager, who both attended training sessions provided by the TEC, led the first self-assessment process at LAGAT. Meetings were held to involve all staff in self-assessment, which took place in the months leading up to inspection. Four members of the small staff team were new to LAGAT at the time, and they had little involvement in the process. In preparation for reinspection, LAGAT produced a full self-assessment report in November 2000. The operations manager co-ordinated the self-assessment process and drafted the report. The views of staff and trainees were collected and used as part of the process. Inspectors were given a report on the progress made towards implementing the action plan produced following the first inspection.

7. For the first inspection, a team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at LAGAT in September 1999. Four sessions of learning were observed. Inspectors interviewed eight trainees, eight staff and two workplace supervisors. A wide range of documents was examined, including trainees' files and portfolios of evidence.

8. Reinspection was carried out by two inspectors who spent a total of six days with LAGAT in March 2001. They interviewed 13 trainees and nine staff. They visited six employers and interviewed three workplace supervisors. They examined documents including trainees' files, quality assurance documents, management-information records, awarding bodies' reports and minutes of meetings.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Foundation for work			3	1		4
Total	0	0	3	1	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for work

Grade 3

10. There are 45 adults on the basic employability training programme. Trainees attend the training centre for three days each week, usually for a duration of six months. The programme consists of a training menu, from which trainees select components according to their needs and preferences. LAGAT is funded by the TEC for a range of trainees' achievements including basic awards in literacy and numeracy, units of an NVQ or a complete NVQ at level 1, attendance at a work placement, and obtaining a job. In addition to these, trainees may undertake a job-search programme and awards in vocational access, fork-truck licence, basic food hygiene, basic health and safety, first aid and information technology. Eight trainees have work placements, mainly in small charity shops. The in-house

facilities consist of three dedicated training rooms, with a range of resources including computers, overhead projector, flipcharts and a range of books and training packages. The three staff providing this programme are new to the company. Two tutors do not hold qualifications in basic skills training or assessment, but have considerable experience working with this client group. One tutor holds a general teaching qualification. In the contract year 1998-99, 21 per cent of trainees left the programme without achieving any of the progression targets identified on their individual participation plan. The remaining trainees all achieved at least one, with 25 per cent achieving a TEC-funded qualification. Some of the strengths in the self-assessment report for this sector relate to trainee support. Inspectors did not agree with the remainder but identified three different strengths. Some of the weaknesses in the self-assessment report related to quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with one of the weaknesses and identified a further two. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications offered
- ◆ training designed to meet individual needs
- ◆ good rapport between staff and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak target-setting
- ◆ some slow progress by trainees
- ◆ ineffective teaching styles for basic skills

11. Trainees work towards a wide range of qualifications within the overall learning programme. The qualifications are taught in the training centre, to small groups of trainees, allowing for plenty of individual coaching and attention. Once trainees have achieved the awards they feel more confident about applying for jobs, and that they have something of real value to offer a prospective employer. For many trainees, these basic certificates are their first formal achievements, of which they are very proud. The wide range of qualifications provides a good variety of activities, which maintains trainees' interest and motivation throughout the three training days each week.

12. Trainees negotiate the content of their individual participation plans with staff, and the process ensures that they are designed to meet trainees' specific needs and preferences. If trainees change their mind, or circumstances change, necessary amendments are promptly made. There is a strong emphasis on using trainees' interests or hobbies as a context for learning new skills and producing evidence of competence for awards, particularly those relating to literacy and numeracy skills. Trainees feel that their life experiences are valued and built upon. Links are carefully made between different parts of the trainees' programme to maximise their learning and assessment opportunities. For example, work done on a health and safety course may be used to develop their basic skills.

13. There is an effective rapport between staff and trainees. Trainees develop confidence in communication skills and participate in group discussions, drawing on their previous life experiences. This is a significant development for most trainees, many of whom have poor verbal communication skills. Staff are sensitive to the needs of trainees and provide the right balance of challenge and support throughout the training sessions. Trainees' good relationships with staff motivates and encourages them to participate fully in the sessions, even though some are initially very anxious in a group environment.

14. Although trainees are aware of their overall programme goals, targets are not set on a daily, weekly or short-term basis. Trainees are not always aware of how much progress they have made towards their basic skills or vocational access qualifications. Assessment plans are informal. There are no targets set for trainees' personal development, either in the training centre or on placement. Trainees receive feedback from staff during training sessions, but this relates to the specific task in hand, rather than the programme as a whole. The company has just produced an action plan in order to remedy the weakness relating to poor target-setting.

15. Many trainees are progressing slowly. Some have been working towards their basic skills and vocational access awards for several months, and have had no part of the award formally assessed. In some cases, trainees' progress is further hindered through a delay in LAGAT arranging for a work placement.

16. Trainers lack the necessary expertise to effectively teach basic skills. Opportunities are missed for developing basic skills within other parts of the programme. Staff also lack some of the formal training skills that are important for effective learning in small groups. There is some unimaginative and ineffective use of course handouts during training sessions. However, LAGAT recognises the need for staff development to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. Arrangements have been made for staff to attend a local college to attend an appropriate learning programme.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

17. LAGAT has an equal opportunities policy, which was updated in 1998. It applies to both staff and trainees. In January 1999, quarterly staff meetings to solely address equal opportunities issues were introduced. A copy of the equal opportunities policy is given to new staff and trainees during their induction programmes. The new management-information system records trainees' gender, ethnicity, marital status and any disability. There are 50 male and seven female

trainees. Six trainees have disabilities and none are from minority ethnic groups. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report, and awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible approach to accommodate disadvantaged people
- ◆ clear understanding by trainees of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient staff training on equal opportunities
- ◆ failure to fully implement equal opportunities policy

18. LAGAT provides training for all individuals, irrespective of whether they may have disadvantaged backgrounds, disabilities or learning difficulties. Staff work hard to ensure that they cater for individuals' learning needs and personal circumstances. The building in which the training centre is based has good access for people with mobility difficulties. LAGAT has recently reviewed its marketing and publicity material, and updated it to include a reference to the company's commitment to equal opportunities. Trainees have a sound understanding of equality issues. While some do not understand the technical language used in the policy itself, all fully understand the concept of equality as it is explained to them during the induction programme, and reinforced throughout their training. Trainees feel confident that they are treated fairly, and have a clear knowledge of the complaints procedure, should they need to use it. Employers are monitored to ensure that trainees are treated fairly. Regular visits are made to the workplace by staff, who discuss equal opportunities with both workplace supervisors and trainees.

19. The equal opportunities policy is detailed and ambitious. It states that LAGAT will monitor data on applicants for training relating to ethnicity, gender, and disability and compare it with that of people recruited. This has not yet been carried out, although there are now new systems to record this information. Similarly, the policy states that data will be monitored relating to staff recruitment, promotion and training, which is not currently done. The equal opportunities policy includes a statement committing LAGAT to regular staff training. With the exception of two staff members attending a recent training day provided by the TEC, there have been no training needs identified, or training provided. Staff receive written updates on equality issues, but the information is not reinforced through discussion. For example, a recent memorandum was circulated to staff regarding the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. Although staff have read the document, they do not understand it fully, and are uncertain of the implications of it for their everyday work and lives.

Trainee support

Grade 3

20. Most trainees are referred to LAGAT by the job centre. Applicants have an initial interview to assess their suitability for the programme. All trainees attend an induction programme which is carried out over three afternoons. It includes an initial screening test to assess trainees' competence in basic skills. Trainees are also introduced to all staff and given information on the company's policies and procedures. During the final session, trainees draw up and agree on their individual participation plans with the training officer. The plan specifies the progression targets to be worked towards. Within the first few weeks trainees undertake further initial assessment. Some have extra assessment of their basic skills development needs, which is carried out by a qualified external contractor. All undertake a Profile and Assessment Needs Diagnostic Aid (PANDA), which is an assessment tool devised by the TEC. It enables staff to identify the main barriers to employment faced by trainees, and ways of overcoming them. All trainees are encouraged to do job-search training in the first few weeks of their programme. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and one of the weaknesses highlighted in the self-assessment report, and with the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective pastoral support
- ◆ good careers guidance

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal progress reviews
- ◆ ineffective use of initial assessment

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of effective support for trainees. LAGAT has a 'case conference system', whereby staff meet to discuss individual trainees who have problems which are hindering their progress. Plans are drawn up to take appropriate action, and these are recorded and reviewed.

21. LAGAT places great importance on caring for and supporting trainees. Support is given on both personal and training-related issues. Staff are sensitive to trainees' problems, recognising and dealing with them promptly, in a variety of ways. In some instances, a case conference is arranged where staff meet and focus their attention on helping the individual concerned. Sometimes counselling is provided. In other cases, trainees are referred to external agencies for specialist help. In addition to problem-solving when the need arises, staff relate to trainees in an understanding and positive manner which helps to develop trainees' confidence and self-esteem. Learning support for trainees extends beyond contractual requirements; trainees are encouraged to attend the training centre and use the learning resources after they have completed their programme, and many do so.

22. Trainees have an induction which takes place over three afternoons and which covers topics such as health and safety and equal opportunities. They also receive an induction pack. Trainees are given plenty of clear information at the start of their programme to ensure that they fully understand what training is on offer and can make an informed choice on the most appropriate programme. They also benefit from an individual interview during their first few weeks, with a member

of LAGAT's staff who is knowledgeable, experienced and well qualified in careers guidance. The interview provides the opportunity for trainees to check that they are on the most suitable learning programme, and that the training details in the individual participation plan are appropriate. Amendments are made where necessary. Trainees are also given relevant information on realistic work options throughout their programme.

23. Formal progress reviews have not been taking place. Some trainees have been on their programme for several months without having formally discussed their progress with staff and monitored their achievements against the overall training plan. The action-planning part of the review process has not been carried out and many trainees are uncertain of their goals and targets. Recently, a new member of staff was given the job of reinstating the formal progress review process. Progress reviews are now taking place, but trainees have been disadvantaged by their absence for many months.

24. The results of initial assessment are not fully used to develop an appropriate training plan. The basic skills assessment helps staff to identify trainees' learning needs, but these are not recorded in sufficient detail on the training plan. Trainees generally know which skills they need to develop, and staff try to ensure that the work they do is relevant, but the support is not recorded in sufficient detail and there is an over-reliance on staff and trainees remembering what needs to be learnt. The information obtained through use of the PANDA assessment is not used to determine learning objectives or methods, and is seldom referred to throughout the programme. Accreditation of trainees' prior learning takes place at induction.

Management of training

Grade 3

25. LAGAT is led by a general manager, who has overall responsibility for its operations. Five staff members report directly to the general manager. They hold the posts of business manager, operations manager, senior training officer, office manager and contracts manager. Three trainers, who are responsible for providing the foundation for work programme, a trainer in information technology and an administrative officer, report directly to the operations manager. Two assessors and an administrative officer report to the contracts manager. The office manager has line management responsibility for an accounts officer. In the past 18 months, the number of staff has increased from nine to 15. Four members of staff have joined LAGAT in the past six months. The number of trainees on all programmes has increased since the first inspection. Earlier this year, LAGAT was re-accredited with the Investors in People Standard.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ management information not used for decision making
- ◆ weak management of the basic employability programme
- ◆ failure to implement some staffing procedures

26. Since the first inspection, LAGAT has made some progress towards rectifying the first two of the main weaknesses identified by inspectors and one has been fully rectified. LAGAT now has some systems to generate management information which can be used to plan and manage training, although it is still not used to its full potential. The management of on-the-job training is still weak for all training programmes. However, many improvements have been made in the management of foundation for work training, particularly in the use of the initial assessment process throughout the programme and in the planning of progress reviews. Staff's training records and appraisals are now up to date and follow set procedures. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by LAGAT for this area.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular and effective communication among staff
- ◆ open, constructive and supportive management style
- ◆ effective arrangements for staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management of employers and work-placement providers
- ◆ insufficient use of management information

27. A series of meetings is held for staff and these are used effectively to maintain good communication within LAGAT. They include monthly staff meetings, management planning meetings and assessors' meetings. Separate meetings are also held on specialist topics, such as key skills and evaluation of training. Staff meetings are arranged at times when part-time staff can attend. The minutes produced are circulated to staff, although some minutes do not clearly identify actions agreed. At staff meetings, all aspects of the organisation's business are discussed, including analysis of feedback from trainees. There is also an effective paper-based communication system. Each week, staff are given an update of the form used to monitor trainees' progress for checking. All staff have access to the management-information system through networked computers. They are able to deal with queries from employers promptly and efficiently. Staff work well as a team and use discussions effectively as a way of monitoring trainees' work and progress.

28. Staff are made to feel valued in their roles and have high levels of job satisfaction. They are encouraged to contribute to the everyday management of training, to decision-making and strategic planning. The introduction of the new key skills standards is one example of staff being consulted and their expertise used to determine a plan of action. Managers are supportive, readily available and willing to listen to staff's opinions.

29. LAGAT links the training and development of all staff to the aims of the organisation, as well as trying to address the careers aspirations of staff. Training and development needs are reviewed during appraisals and every member of staff

has an up-to-date training and development plan. Training needs are also identified from occasional surveys of specific areas, such as computer-based skills. A good mix of activities is available to meet their needs, including nationally recognised qualifications, group training events and individual coaching. All external training activities are carefully evaluated. Staff complete a form before attending training to identify their learning objectives and criteria for success. A further form is completed after the event to evaluate its effectiveness. Arrangements for staff development also include observations of staff's training methods. Constructive written feedback is provided after each observation.

30. LAGAT's agreement with employers does not give sufficient detail to enable the employer or workplace supervisor to understand the full training requirements of the trainee. Employers do not always have copies of the NVQ standards or the ongoing assessment of the trainee. The employers' agreement does not refer to the requirement for employers to allow trainees time off for off-the-job training and, in some cases, trainees do not have such time off. The agreement for work-based training for adults states that the employer should agree that training is given as described in the attached schedule. However, the attached schedule simply states "practical experience/directed training". There are also insufficient details regarding how the agreement will be monitored and it is not always enforced for example with regard to the number of working hours. Some health and safety monitoring is also not up to date. The managers responsible for assessors monitor trainees' progress but not the training itself.

31. LAGAT does not make full use of management information. The system cannot supply some important information, such as data on the number of trainees who leave their programme early, the number of work placements and the proportion of trainees who get jobs. LAGAT has not analysed retention, progression and achievement rates over contractual years to obtain evidence of its improved performance. However, its performance against the TEC contract is managed rigorously. The company does not monitor data or the numbers of trainees who repeatedly return to its programmes. Although staff know the history of individual trainees and whether they have undertaken the programme previously, the information is not analysed. Records of trainees' attendance are used for payment purposes but LAGAT does not use this information to monitor class sizes and ensure that there are appropriate numbers of staff for trainees.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

32. LAGAT has a quality assurance manual containing a set of quality assurance procedures. The operations manager has overall responsibility for quality assurance. A further staff member is allocated time to assist with developing and auditing procedures. All new procedures are disseminated to staff, together with guidance notes. The views of trainees and employers are sought through the use of questionnaires.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ feedback from trainees and employers not analysed or used for improvement
- ◆ incomplete quality assurance system
- ◆ no formal programme evaluation
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of trainees' achievements and destinations

33. Over the past four months, much work has been done to develop LAGAT's quality assurance arrangements. Its policies have been reviewed and updated. Existing procedures have been rewritten to reflect current working practices and other new procedures have been written. Systems for collecting feedback from trainees and employers have been revised and implemented. Some internal audits have been carried out on trainees' files to check that they contain all the necessary forms. The self-assessment report produced four months before reinspection included four strengths and three weaknesses for this area. Inspectors agreed with two strengths and one weakness. The other strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of action plan to make improvements
- ◆ effective system for monitoring trainees' progress

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently established quality assurance system

34. LAGAT responded slowly to the findings of the first inspection, and most of the improvements made were carried out in the four months preceding the inspection. It has made significant improvements to the trainees' experience, as a direct result of implementing the action plan produced following the first inspection. Arrangements for induction and progress reviews have been reviewed and improved. The content and presentation of trainees' personal files are now standardised, with all files now containing the necessary records. Staff have undertaken training and qualifications to enable them to initially assess and train those on the basic employability programme effectively. The company has a document-control system to ensure that all staff use the most recent version of forms. Significant improvements have also been made to the basic employability programme, which accounts for 80 per cent of LAGAT's work. The proportion of trainees who leave their programme early has fallen from 49 per cent in the 1999-2000 contractual year, to 23 per cent at the time of reinspection in 2000-01. Rates for completion of individual learning plans have increased from 27 per cent to 77 per cent during the same period, and the proportion of those leaving who get a job has risen from 15 per cent to 31 per cent.

35. Since the first inspection, LAGAT has developed a computer-based system for monitoring trainees. Before this, all records were maintained manually and

frequent errors were made in the paperwork. The new system contains information on trainees' starting dates, intended leaving dates, qualification aims, dates of planned and actual progress reviews, the name of the training officer, employers' details and timesheets. All staff have access to this system through the networked computers, although changes to the information can be made only by authorised staff. The system works well, enabling LAGAT to monitor trainees closely and ensure that they are progressing well and receiving regular monitoring visits and progress reviews.

36. LAGAT's quality assurance arrangements are not yet fully established and there are still some important processes which are not incorporated into the system. An example of this is internal verification, for which there is a policy, but no working procedure. LAGAT has three separate internal verification systems, each with its own paperwork. While all three operate satisfactorily, they are not standardised, nor are the best practices of all three systems shared. Some policies and related procedures do not correspond. Arrangements for collecting feedback from trainees and employers are still new and the number of employers who have so far responded is low. Feedback from trainees is collected three times during the training programme. It is collated and analysed and the results are reported to all staff. However, the comments from trainees are unanimously positive and do not give LAGAT suggestions for improvements. In the case of trainees on the basic employability programme, the questionnaire used is written in language which is too complex for them to read. Although staff help trainees to complete the form where necessary, this means that their replies are not confidential. LAGAT has also introduced a system to try to find out why trainees leave the programme early. The response rate is poor and no useful information has yet been obtained.