



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION DECEMBER 2000

**Paragon Training  
(Dorset) Ltd**

## SUMMARY

Training in engineering and catering at Paragon Training (Dorset) Ltd is good. Trainees receive good-quality training and achieve well. Programmes for horse care and management and business administration are satisfactory, and trainees achieve qualifications additional to their targeted NVQs. At the time of the first inspection, frameworks for training in retailing and customer service and foundation for work were insufficient. Since then, considerable improvements have been made in monitoring trainees' progress centrally. Off-the-job training for trainees in retailing and customer service is now effective, but some opportunities to assess trainees in the workplace are missed. Foundation for work trainees use good learning resources in the training centres but the programme for young people remains insufficiently planned. Training elsewhere is well planned and effective and trainees are well supported. Training is well resourced and high-quality work placements are used in which employers are fully involved in training. There is insufficient inclusion of key skills in training. All trainees have good access to training, but the implementation of equal opportunities by subcontractors is not monitored. Some initial assessment is poor. In some cases, trainees' progress is slow and target dates for achievement are not met. At the first inspection there was no framework for the formal evaluation of the company's performance. Since then, systematic audits and monitoring of trainees' views have been used to plan improvements but good practice is not always shared productively. Strategic management of the company is good and productive working partnerships have been established with outside organisations.

**As a result of the reinspection of Paragon Training (Dorset) Ltd, the original published report text for retailing and customer service, foundation for work and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Agriculture	3
Engineering	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	4
Hospitality	2
Foundation for work	4

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	3
Foundation for work	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

## KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective training
- ◆ good provision of work placements
- ◆ well-resourced training
- ◆ effective support for trainees
- ◆ productive working relationships with employers and outside organisations
- ◆ good strategic management
- ◆ good and effective action to promote continuous improvement

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient training and assessment of key skills
- ◆ some poor initial assessment
- ◆ slow progress of some trainees and failure to meet target dates
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of training

## INTRODUCTION

1. Paragon Training (Dorset) Ltd (Paragon Training), formed in April 1998, is a small, privately owned company providing training for young people and adults across a range of occupational areas. Training is largely funded through Dorset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), although the company provides Jobclubs under contract with the Employment Service and is developing its commercial enterprise through training and consultancy services to local firms and organisations. The company, based in Weymouth, occupies first- and second-floor premises formerly used as a brewery and adjacent to the town's quay. This area has undergone considerable restoration and development and is now a thriving retail area and tourist attraction. All management, administration and finance operations are conducted in these premises, which afford classroom facilities for off-the-job training and an information technology suite. The company has offices in Bridport and Bournemouth for interviewing trainees and running small workshops. Since the first inspection, the company has acquired a further training centre, close to the main centre in Weymouth. This centre, equipped with a classroom and computers, is used by foundation for work trainees. Training and assessment are provided by a variety of methods on and off the site, and widespread use is made of work-based assessment. Three local further education colleges are subcontracted to provide off-the-job training for engineering, construction and accountancy. Many young people following foundation for work programmes have been endorsed by Dorset TEC as having additional learning needs and/or disabilities and requiring considerable support. At the first inspection, over 50 per cent of the young people in training were advanced or foundation modern apprentices. This proportion had risen to over 75 per cent at the reinspection. With the exception of prevocational programme trainees, all trainees are in work placements. These work placements are spread throughout Dorset. At the first inspection, over 75 per cent of trainees were employed. At the reinspection, this proportion had risen to over 80 per cent. Adult programmes for long-term unemployed people account for less than 10 per cent of work-based training. The total number of trainees rose from 236 to 378 between the first inspection and the reinspection.

2. Much of Dorset is rural and characterised by market towns, such as Dorchester, Wimborne, Bridport and Shaftesbury, still very much influenced by traditional land-based industries. The large urban conurbation of Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch occupies the southeast of the county, with a population in excess of 300,000. Many employees commute to Bournemouth and Poole from rural towns and villages. Leisure and tourism, and marine activities, which employ a quarter of the local workforce, form an important part of Dorset's economy with the major seaside resorts of Bournemouth, Poole and Weymouth making a substantial contribution to the county's income. Employment growth has been maintained over the last few years, with the largest increase seen in the service industries and manufacturing. The county's unemployment rate, in September 1999, stood at 3 per cent, more than 1 per cent lower than the national rate. In

November 2000, the unemployment rate in Dorset was 1.6 per cent compared with the national average of 3.3 per cent. However, unemployment rates in Bournemouth, Weymouth and Portland were twice the county rate. Closure in recent years of large Ministry of Defence (MoD) establishments in Weymouth and Portland resulted in redundancies. Former MoD premises have been redeveloped as part of Single Regeneration Budget programmes and have resulted in increased commercial activity at Portland Harbour and the creation of jobs. People from minority ethnic groups represented less than 1 per cent of the county's population in the 1991 census. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 50 per cent, considerably lower than the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 2000, this had risen to 54.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

TRAINEE NUMBERS ON REINSPECTION	YOUNG PEOPLE			ADULTS		TOTAL
	AMA	FMA	OTHER	Prevocational	Occupational	
Agriculture	5	2	2	0	0	<b>9</b>
Construction	1	0	14	0	0	<b>15</b>
Engineering	24	26	2	0	0	<b>52</b>
Transportation	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Business administration	24	19	4	0	7	<b>54</b>
Retailing & customer service	78	45	5	0	1	<b>129</b>
Hospitality	31	30	4	0	0	<b>65</b>
Foundation for work	0	0	29	24	0	<b>53</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>378</b>

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Paragon Training completed its first self-assessment report in June 1999. Responsibility for spearheading the process of self-assessment and the compilation of the report was undertaken by the managing director. The report and accompanying action plan were the result of extensive consultation and input from all members of staff. Training programme team leaders undertook responsibility for self-assessment in their occupational areas and differences in styles of reporting have been preserved within the report to illustrate differences in programme management and training. The directors of the company wrote generic sections of the report. Collected data, including trainees and employers' feedback, were used in making judgements. Discussion at staff meetings during the self-assessment process was extensive. All staff endorsed findings and grades contained in the report undertaken before the first inspection. Following publication of the first inspection report, all occupational teams were involved in identification of the action required in their specific areas. The post-inspection action plan was produced following meetings between the occupational team leaders and the two directors involved in the management and quality assurance of training. In July 2000, work started on a second self-assessment report. The process followed was similar to that used for the first report. All internal staff teams were asked to provide a self-assessment of their occupational areas. The second report was produced as an updated version of the first report. The findings were influenced by the analysis of responses made to a series of questionnaires given to trainees and employers, together with the results of internal and external audits. All staff were given the opportunity to contribute to the report and to endorse the findings and grades. The second self-assessment report and revised action plan were completed in September 2000. There are good introductory paragraphs for each section of the report. Changes made following the first inspection and as a result of the expansion in numbers of trainees are identified. Reference to sources of evidence are given against each of the strengths claimed. In late October 2000, the quality assurance manager and the operations director supplemented the self-assessment report with an updated version of the post-inspection action plan. This document made reference to all of the weaknesses identified in the first inspection and noted the progress made through implementation of the action plan.

4. At the first inspection, a team of seven inspectors spent a total of 28 days at Paragon Training in September 1999. The first inspection covered training programmes for young people and adults funded through Dorset TEC in the occupational areas of agriculture, engineering, business administration, retailing and customer service, hospitality and foundation for work. There was no specific inspection of programmes in construction and transportation, where numbers of trainees were low. Inspectors visited external sites to observe training in catering and horse management. They also visited local further education colleges subcontracted to provide off-the-job training and assessment. Inspectors observed

a total of 18 training and assessment sessions and made 40 visits to trainees in work placements. They interviewed 83 trainees and held 42 meetings with managers, trainers and assessors, employers and workplace supervisors. A range of paperwork was inspected including business plans, management and quality assurance files, TEC contracts, external audit reports, minutes of meetings and job descriptions and staff's qualifications. Trainees' files and work portfolios were inspected. Data relating to trainees' achievement and progression and to equal opportunities were viewed. Inspection was made of resources and accommodation for on- and off-the-job training.

5. The reinspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors, who spent a total of nine days with Paragon Training in December 2000. Inspectors interviewed 36 trainees and made visits to 10 retail work placements and three work placements for foundation for work trainees. They met with 13 workplace managers/supervisors and conducted 19 interviews with Paragon Training's staff, including representatives of staff teams in four occupational areas other than those being reinspected specifically. Inspectors visited five off-the-job training centres, including a new centre for engineering training. They examined 26 trainees' files and 22 portfolios. Other paperwork reviewed included contracts, service agreements, external and internal verifiers' reports, health and safety monitoring reports, minutes of meetings, quality assurance procedures, audit reports and analysis of trainees' feedback questionnaires. Inspectors observed three reviews of trainees' progress and two assessments of trainees' evidence. Inspectors observed and graded four training sessions in foundation for work. Two were awarded a grade 2, and the other two a grade 3.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Agriculture		1				1
Engineering		1	1			2
Business administration		1	4	1		6
Retailing & customer service		1	1	2		4
Hospitality		1				1
Foundation for work	1	1		2		4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>18</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Agriculture

### Grade 3

6. There are 19 trainees following youth training programmes in horse management. Thirteen trainees are modern apprentices in permanent employment following NVQ levels 2 & 3 in horse care and management. Four national trainees and two trainees with learning difficulties are in temporary work placements undertaking NVQ level 2 and level 1 horse care respectively. All trainees are registered with the British Horse Society. Two modern apprentices receive training entirely on-the-job. Other trainees are work-based and attend one day a fortnight for off-the-job vocational training at an equine training centre. Two members of Paragon Training staff and subcontractor's staff provide training at this centre. Key skills training, especially in information technology, is given by Paragon Training staff at their training centre in Weymouth on alternate weeks, as part of weekly off-the-job training. They also conduct assessment and internal verification at the centre. At five of the eight sites used for work-based training, employers and workplace supervisors carry out assessment. All trainers, assessors and internal verifiers are appropriately qualified and occupationally experienced. Seven work placements have been given approved training centre status by the awarding body. The company's self-assessment report was not sufficiently self-critical. Apart from identifying weaknesses in assessment, it failed to identify the key areas for improvement in provision. The high quality of training was not fully emphasised in the report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ high-quality training resources on and off the job
- ◆ good use of work-based assessors
- ◆ trainees' achievement of qualifications additional to NVQs
- ◆ good-quality training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to fully integrate key skills training and assessment with programmes
- ◆ no formal framework for training, assessment and action planning
- ◆ some individual training plans incomplete or not up to date
- ◆ failure to give trainees and employers copies of monitoring reviews
- ◆ failure to meet target dates for achievement



7. Training resources and facilities for on- and off-the-job learning are good. Facilities at the subcontracted equine training centre include a range of horses to meet the needs of riders of all abilities and experience, a well-appointed training room and a wide range of practical resources to adequately support the good-quality training. On-the-job trainers use their experience to good effect to impart knowledge and understanding to trainees. Training is effective. Small group sizes for teaching allows trainees to receive high levels of individual attention. Off-the-job training days are well organised and provide good support for trainees. Trainees attend fortnightly as two separate groups on alternate weeks. Paragon Training staff attend vocational training sessions to provide additional trainee support in pastoral matters and portfolio building as well as carrying out reviews, assessment and internal verification. Key skills training and assessment are not fully integrated with programmes and trainees' key skills are not routinely assessed at the start of training. The integration of key skills with training programmes has been developing since the company's inception, but progress has been slow. Recent introduction of off-the-job training in key skills information technology has enabled half the trainees to achieve the information technology qualification. However, some trainees well into their second year of training have yet to achieve appropriate qualifications in key skills. The use of work-based assessors is good and leads to efficient gathering of evidence of trainees' occupational skills within real working environments.

8. Much work-based training and assessment occurs outside the formal framework of a written training plan. On-the-job training is thorough, but occurs incidentally as part of normal daily work routine. Trainees do not possess written action plans for their achievement of units or elements of training. The lack of a formal training and assessment framework contributes to the failure to meet dates agreed on for achievement of qualifications in individual training plans. Generally, trainees' progress towards achieving their desired qualifications is slow. Trainees' work portfolios vary in quality, content and diversity of evidence. In some portfolios, evidence for their occupational skills and knowledge is scant or incomplete. Through funding provided by employers and Paragon Training, trainees receive training to enable them to achieve qualifications such as, British Horse Society stage qualifications, first aid at work and driving qualifications in addition to their NVQs. This additional training provides trainees with a broader level of experience, skills and understanding and increased employability. Achievement rates for trainees who complete training are good. However, since April 1998, 16 trainees have left training early, and 10 trainees, or 29 per cent of those recruited, have left early without qualifications. Of the 19 remaining trainees, eight have achieved an NVQ, giving a success rate of 40 per cent for all trainees who have started programmes.

9. The use of individual training plans as working documents to guide training is not effective. They are often poorly completed and signatures, dates and amendments are absent. Many plans are not routinely amended and information is inaccurate and/or out of date. It is often difficult to identify which training programme the trainee is undertaking. In some cases, the programmes trainees were following were not listed on their individual training plans. Monitoring of

trainees in the workplace and review of their progress is routine and takes place every 13 weeks. Employers, however, are not always fully involved in this process. Copies of the review are not given to trainees or employers to enable further discussion of training issues and the implementation of action plans, where necessary. Monitoring of health and safety arrangements at work placements is rigorous and systematic and trainees' awareness of health and safety is good.

## **Engineering**

## **Grade 2**

10. There are 35 trainees undertaking engineering training leading to national vocational qualifications up to level 3 in a range of programmes including, engineering production, performing manufacturing operations, engineering maintenance, and electrical & electronic servicing. Thirteen trainees are modern apprentices, 13 are national trainees and nine are following other youth training programmes. Most of the trainees are permanently employed. Performing manufacturing operations programmes are entirely work-based. Trainees on all other programmes attend one day a week at one of three local further education colleges subcontracted by the company for off-the-job theory sessions and practical training. Arrangements with colleges enable trainees to be recruited throughout the year rather than only at the start of academic years. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by qualified Paragon Training staff. Trainees are visited every six weeks for assessment and review of progress. A more formal review takes place every three months. Inspectors judged that provision for engineering had been undervalued in the self-assessment report. Insufficient weighting had been given to the quality of training and trainees' achievements, although the underdevelopment of key skills was not highlighted. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good on-the-job training
- ◆ supportive employers
- ◆ good achievement and retention rates
- ◆ frequent, supportive reviews

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to meet target dates for achievement of qualifications
- ◆ no practical off-the-job welding training
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills programmes

11. Working relationships between employers, trainees and training staff are co-operative and contribute to the success of trainees. Trainee achievement and

retention are good. Since April 1998, 75 per cent of recruited trainees have obtained an NVQ. Retention is over 90 per cent. On-the-job training is good. Although not always planned and fully recorded, workplace training is effective and enables trainees to acquire knowledge and understanding and develop good occupational skills. Employers are fully involved in the training and give good support to trainees throughout the training programmes. Most employers have well-equipped workshops with good resources for NVQ training. Initial evaluation of new employers' premises for health and safety measures are thorough. Three- or six-monthly health and safety monitoring visits to employers are systematic and effective and ensure safe training environments.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*Paragon Training have purchased a digital camera to enable trainees to record evidence of occupational competencies as they arise. Pictorial evidence gathered is transferred directly into documents within work portfolios. Use of these techniques motivates trainees in portfolio building, enhances evidence collection and recording and improves computing skills and understanding.*

12. Six-weekly visits to workplaces to monitor trainees' progress are effective in supporting and motivating trainees. During visits assessment and review of their progress is thorough. Outcomes of review are fully recorded and employers are fully involved in the process. Work-based assessments carried out by Paragon Training are comprehensive. Good use is made of different sources of evidence for assessment and assessors make efficient use of real work situations to gather evidence during their visits. There are, however, no work-based assessors which results in missed opportunities for on-the-job assessment. Review visits include routine setting of agreed dates for the collection of evidence of trainees' achievement. These dates are frequently missed, and, in many cases, they have to be revised. Off-the-job sessions at college do not provide support for building portfolios. Some trainees have fallen behind their schedules for achievement and portfolio building and now need to complete considerable amounts of work in the final stages of their scheduled programme. Paragon Training's staff are providing extra support for trainees in this situation.

13. Inclusion of key skills within training programmes is underdeveloped. Key skills training and assessment have yet to become a routine part of training programmes. Trainees have a low awareness and understanding of key skills. In many cases, trainees' achievements in key skills have fallen behind agreed schedules for their development. Naturally occurring opportunities for the assessment of key skills units within the workplace are often not used. Off-the-job training subcontracted to further education colleges is well resourced. However, there are no practical training facilities for arc welding in the Weymouth area and the five trainees currently there have received no formal training in this aspect of training. Company business plans are well advanced to provide a new training centre for engineering, which will overcome this problem.

**Business administration****Grade 3**

14. Paragon Training offers training in administration, information technology and accounting. There are 43 trainees following work-based youth training programmes, 30 working towards NVQ level 2 or level 3 in administration and 13 towards NVQs in accounting. There are eight national trainees, 15 are modern apprentices and seven are on other work-based training for young people. Thirty-two trainees are in permanent employment and 11 trainees are in temporary work

placements. Paragon Training's staff visit workplaces to carry out induction within the first two weeks of trainees starting programmes. Twenty-five administration and information technology trainees attend off-the-job workshops at the training centre monthly for computing and theory training and help with portfolio building. Five trainees are entirely work-based and visited in the workplace by assessors once a month. Assessments normally take place in the workplace every 12 weeks. Accounting trainees given off-the-job study time by employers attend the local college for one day a week. Other trainees use distance-learning materials for theory training. Eight adults are following a 12-week in-house programme leading to NVQ level 2 in information technology. Trainees spend two days a week in the training centre and half-a-day each week carrying out job search activities. The self-assessment report correctly identified the effectiveness of evidence collection by trainees for portfolio building. All other strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors were not highlighted in the report. Inspectors agreed with the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that the self-assessment for this provision was insufficiently detailed and comprehensive. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ trainees' employability improved by additional qualifications
- ◆ good reviews
- ◆ effective evidence collection and portfolio building by trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped key skills training and assessment
- ◆ failure to meet some dates agreed for achievement
- ◆ no work experience on adult programmes

15. Programmes are broad-based and enable trainees to acquire a wide range of occupational skills and knowledge. Administration trainees are encouraged to undertake additional training in order to achieve a second NVQ level 2 in information technology or customer service, appropriate to their job roles. Achievement of additional qualifications improves trainees' employability and increases their motivation for learning. Staff work effectively together as a team to provide training and assessment and support and guide trainees. Trainees are well supported by staff through the review system. During review sessions, trainees are given sound advice and their progress is monitored systematically. Action plans are discussed and amendments agreed on. Records of achievement and reviews are given to trainees. In some cases, the frequency of assessment has been insufficient to enable the dates agreed on for unit achievement to be met. This is particularly so in NVQ level 2 information technology. The company has appointed a new member of staff to allow more time for staff to assess in the workplace. Generally, internal verification procedures are satisfactory. However, internal verification of

assessment takes place outside a formal framework and does not ensure that the same assessment practices are applied in all cases.

16. Administration trainees are effective in the gathering of evidence of skills acquired in the workplace. Staff have produced clear, written guidelines to give trainees good awareness of assessment requirements for each unit of training. Trainees are effective in cross-referencing the requirements of training elements in different NVQ programmes in order to make efficient use of evidence of their acquired occupational competencies. Their understanding of the NVQ framework and their proficiency in portfolio building, enables them to take greater control of their training programmes and be influential in its development. The development of key skills training and assessment and their introduction into administration and information technology programmes is not complete. Schemes for the integration of key skills with training have been written, however, and staff have a good understanding of the training requirements for key skills. Little evidence of key skills work is contained in trainees' portfolios. Many trainees, including some approaching the completion of training, have yet to achieve key skills units. Learning materials to support key skills training have not been developed. In accounting, modern apprentices attending college for off-the-job training have achieved accredited qualifications for key skills, but accounting trainees on distance-learning programmes have yet to begin key skills training and assessment.

17. On-the-job youth training is good and trainees are well supported by employers. Trainees' achievement is satisfactory with 45 per cent of leavers during 1998-99 achieving an NVQ at level 2 and retention was 72 per cent. Adult trainees' achievement is good and, so far, in 1999-2000 15 out of 17 leavers have achieved an NVQ. Adult training for NVQ level 2 using information technology, however, is provided entirely at the training centre. There is no provision for trainees to gain valuable work experience by being placed in commercial environments during training. Staff have been effective in developing programmes for assessment, based on real work tasks in the centre generated by the daily administrative and management activities. Progression of adult trainees into permanent employment is low, although accurate data are not available.

### **Retailing & customer service**

### **Grade 3**

18. Paragon Training has 129 trainees in retailing and customer service compared with 54 at the first inspection. The large rise in numbers results from the acquisition of a single contract with a large national retail chain. Nine trainees are taking customer service NVQs at level 2 or level 3, with two of these being foundation modern apprentices and seven being advanced modern apprentices. There are 115 trainees doing NVQs in retail operations at level 2 or level 3, with 70 following the advanced modern apprentice programme, 43 following the foundation modern apprentice programme and one young person and one adult trainee on other work-based programmes. Two young people are working towards NVQs at level 1 in distributive operations. Of three trainees taking NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in warehousing and distribution, one is an advanced modern apprentice

and two are on other work-based training programmes for young people. Over 95 per cent of all trainees are employed. Approximately 30 per cent of the trainees are employed in retail stores outside Dorset. The programme includes trainees employed at stores of a national chain with outlets in Plymouth, Taunton, Portsmouth and Basingstoke. Most customer service trainees are employed in a leisure centre, and most trainees taking NVQs in distribution and warehousing work in medium-sized warehouses and stock rooms. There are seven staff in the retail and customer service team at Paragon Training. Three staff are part-time employees. One team member has responsibility for all internal verification for retail and warehousing NVQs. The internal verification of customer service NVQs is done, along with business administration, by another internal verifier. One of the team members is selected as team leader. At the time of the reinspection the team leader was on maternity leave and her role was being taken by one of the directors of Paragon Training. Potential trainees are referred to Paragon Training by the Employment Service and careers services, and by their employers, or make contact with Paragon Training themselves.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no central monitoring and recording of trainees' progress
- ◆ lack of commitment of some employers to training
- ◆ some weak assessment practice
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification system
- ◆ slow progress by trainees
- ◆ poor achievement rates

19. Since the first inspection, staff have implemented many of the changes specified in the post-inspection plan. Sufficient work has been done on each of the previously found weaknesses to bring them to a satisfactory level, if not make them good practice. For example, effective work has been done to improve the lack of central monitoring and recording of trainees' progress. There is now a central record which is updated, and shows both units being worked on and those completed. These records show clear evidence of units being achieved progressively. Also, an existing team member now has sole responsibility for internal verification for both retailing and warehousing. There is clear evidence that trainees' work is now internally verified both during and at the end of the assessment period. Assessors are receiving constructive feedback from the internal verifier. The internal verifier is accompanying assessors on a regular basis to observe their assessment practice. These visits are planned on a week-by-week basis as opposed to having an overall long-term strategy. However, aspects of some, such as assessment practice, need further work. In the self-assessment report produced for the reinspection, Paragon Training identified three strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths concerning assessment frequency and good off-the-job training. The third strength, relating to internal verification, was considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found another strength. Inspectors found two weaknesses which they considered to be more significant than those identified in the self-



assessment report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good training and assessment opportunities at work placements
- ◆ regular and frequent visits by assessors
- ◆ effective off-the-job training sessions

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some missed assessment opportunities
- ◆ some late recognition of trainees' achievements

20. There is a wide range of work placements used by Paragon Training. Work placements visited included specialist retailers, supermarkets, a family butcher, a fashion chain, a golf club, a large distribution centre, a tourist office and stores in a national retail chain. There are also work placements with outdoor pursuit specialists, convenience stores and other superstores. The work placements provide a wide range of learning and assessment opportunities. Most employers take a keen interest in trainees' progress. There is a lot of ongoing training by employers which, though not always directly planned to link with NVQ standards, enables trainees to compile their evidence of work-based competence. Employers countersign trainees' work and provide witness statements of their competence in the workplace. Some trainees have been promoted to supervisory positions, resulting in an easier progression to an NVQ at level 3. Frequent visits by assessors result in trainees receiving good advice on the best way of using available evidence. Trainees are especially appreciative of the way that assessors explain NVQ requirements in simple terms. Trainees' feedback also shows a high level of satisfaction with the way the assessors work. A significant amount of workplace assessment is collected by direct observation of trainees' performance. Paragon Training's assessors and employers work well together and, although there is little direct involvement of employers in the assessment process, the good working relationships mean that there is sufficient co-operation to enable assessors to assess trainees by a variety of means. Assessors are well respected by both trainees and employers.

21. Paragon Training's staff have done a lot of work to overcome the lack of commitment to training by some employers which was identified as a weakness in the first inspection. In spite of this, some trainees have to do most or all of their NVQ work in their own time. Paragon Training offers off-the-job workshops to assist trainees with both portfolio building and key skills work. Feedback from trainees, both verbal and in completed questionnaires, shows a high level of satisfaction with the support given during these off-the-job sessions. The information technology sessions are held in a well-equipped training room. In addition to these sessions, trainees receive individual guidance on the other key

skills and assistance in building their portfolios of evidence. All sessions are run on an individual basis to meet trainees' needs. There are lesson plans to be used as guidelines, and also some worksheets. There have been evening and specially arranged sessions to suit trainees. Currently, 34 trainees are attending these workshop sessions. This number represents approximately 40 per cent of those trainees who live within the Dorset area and can easily travel to the workshops in Weymouth or Poole. An agreement has been reached with a local TEC to part fund the cost of a laptop computer so that those trainees who cannot attend the off-the-job training sessions can receive tuition in information technology in the workplace.

22. A total of 107 trainees have started an advanced modern apprenticeship since April 1998. One trainee has completed the apprenticeship framework and 78 trainees remain in training, representing a satisfactory overall retention rate of 74 per cent. A group of 17 trainees started NVQs at level 2 in 1999. All of these trainees have completed NVQs at level 2 and 13 have begun training towards NVQs at level 3. A total of 95 foundation modern apprentices have begun training since April 1998. Twelve trainees have completed the apprenticeship framework and 46 trainees remain in training, representing a satisfactory overall retention rate of 61 per cent. In 1998, 30 young people started on other work-based training programmes. Six of these trainees transferred to other programmes and 14 trainees completed their individual training plans. The remaining trainees left before completing the programme. Since 1999, there have been seven young people on other work-based training programmes. One trainee has completed the individual training plan, one left before completion and five remain in training.

23. The first inspection identified some weak assessment practice. Although the overall standard of assessment is now satisfactory, there are still some missed opportunities for assessment. In one work placement, there has been no assessment by observation or use of witness testimony, although there are plans to do this. In another work placement, two trainees have had a total of four observations in the last six months. Remedial action has now been taken, but the trainees have missed assessment opportunities in this time. There have been a few instances of trainees having no witness statements in their portfolios. Although these are isolated incidents, these trainees have taken longer to amass suitable evidence. There is also some late recognition of trainees' achievements. One trainee has 11 assignments awaiting assessment. Another trainee has completed an NVQ at level 2 but not enough attention has been given to possibly adding to work to upgrade some evidence to the standards for units of an NVQ at level 3. This situation is contrary to Paragon Training's policy and in variance with good practice elsewhere in the organisation. A trainee, who has been on a programme for two years, is also taking another qualification. In this case, there has been little cross-referencing of evidence between the two qualifications. A trainee who changed assessor in June had compiled a lot of evidence but had no units assessed. The new assessor was able to accept the evidence for two units on the next visit. The remaining three units were assessed two months later. The first inspection identified slow progress by trainees as a weakness and, although a lot of effective action has been taken, some pockets of poor practice remain.



## Hospitality

## Grade 2

24. There are currently 61 trainees in catering and hospitality following modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training programmes. Twenty-four are modern apprentices, 30 are national trainees and seven are youth trainees. Training leads to qualifications in food preparation, food service, bar service, reception and bakery. All trainees are in employment in the hospitality industry. Paragon Training has links with employers throughout Dorset and has developed a register of potential employers and work-placement providers. Present trainees are placed with over 40 employers. Those on food preparation programmes attend the company's catering training centre at Winfrith on a weekly basis for off-the-job training. Because of its rural location, the company provides trainees with transport to this training centre, where necessary. Assessment of practical skills is carried out weekly in the working kitchens at Winfrith training centre. Other trainees are visited fortnightly in the workplace by trainers for theory training and support. Trainees' progress is reviewed routinely every 12 weeks in the workplace, but more often, where appropriate. Training in bakery is subcontracted to local further education colleges. The company's self assessment report is detailed and thorough and inspectors agreed with the identified strengths and weaknesses. The report, however, did not refer to the trainees' contribution to the development and planning of their training or mention the insufficiency of formal action planning. Inspectors awarded the same grade as did by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good-quality work placements
- ◆ well-resourced training centre for practical food preparation
- ◆ productive partnership with employers
- ◆ frequent access to supportive training staff
- ◆ active involvement of trainees in developing individual programmes

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped formal action planning
- ◆ lack of information technology facilities at the catering training centre

25. Trainees are employed in good-quality establishments in which work supervisors are supportive. Frequent opportunities are provided for trainees to acquire essential vocational knowledge and occupational skills. Standards of work achieved by trainees reflect good occupational competence. Communication between Paragon Training staff and employers/workplace supervisors is good. Trainers work closely with each other and with employers to maintain productive working partnerships. Employers are kept well informed about training matters and they have good understanding of the NVQ training and assessment processes.

Trainees have frequent contact with training staff who provide good levels of guidance and advice. Review of trainees' progress is routine and fully involves trainees and employers. Trainees are enabled to work at a pace suited to their needs and abilities. Procedures for action planning, as part of trainees' reviews, are not formally written. Present arrangements do not ensure that all plans are recorded fully and, in some cases, short-term action plans with clear achievement objectives are not well recorded. Trainees contribute effectively to the planning of training and assessment schedules. They are actively involved in determining when assessment is undertaken. Assessments are conducted fairly and meet the required occupational standards. Recording of assessments is routine and detailed. There is, however, no written schedule for internal verification.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*This is a good example of using projects to integrate key skills into training.*

*Modern apprentices in food preparation combine as a group on a joint project to plan, prepare and produce a buffet. This project is used to encompass all key skills contained within the programme and offers a well-structured opportunity for their assessment.*

26. Resources at the training centre for food preparation are good and the company provides protective clothing for trainees. Trainees are provided with a range of good-quality learning materials at the training centre and equipment for trainees' use in workplaces is modern and reflects current industrial practice. Provision of transport for trainees to the rurally located training centre helps to maintain high attendance. Good attendance at work is maintained and closely monitored by the company. The classroom accommodation for theory teaching at the Winfrith centre is barely satisfactory and lack of adequate information technology facilities slows the rate of trainees' achievement of key skills.

27. Trainers are appropriately qualified and have good industrial experience. Staff have well-established links in the hospitality industry which enable them to keep abreast of current industrial practice. At the catering training centre, the involvement of trainees in a commercial operation serving over 250 customers daily enables them to acquire skills and be assessed under realistic working conditions. Trainees are making good progress and achieving well. In 1998-99, 69 per cent of leavers achieved a NVQ and retention was 72 per cent. Trainees' successes are celebrated publicly at presentation ceremonies at the catering training centre. All trainees undertake the basic food hygiene and basic health and safety certificates.

**Foundation for work****Grade 3**

28. Paragon Training offers prevocational training to long-term unemployed adults on a basic employability programme and to young people on a foundation for lifeskills programme. Basic employability training is a 28-week programme for adults who are over 25 years old and who do not possess the necessary skills to enter employment. There are 20 men and four women on the basic employability programme. Numbers on this programme have increased from 9 since the first inspection. All trainees are referred to Paragon Training by the Employment Service and join at set dates during the year. Trainees attend one of the training centres in Weymouth, Bridport or Blandford for three days a week. The aim of the training is to provide employment skills through increasing trainees' confidence and independence, improving their ability to work as part of a team, and by improving their communication, literacy and information technology skills.

Trainees work towards individual targets in order to improve their self-confidence. These targets may include key skills or other agreed qualifications, a work taster and/or a 28-day work placement. A foundation for lifeskills programme is offered to young people who have previously disengaged from education. The programme is run in a converted retail outlet near the centre of Weymouth. All trainees are referred to the programme by the careers service. The duration of the programme is planned to meet trainees' individual needs and, in some cases, exceeds 12 months. These young people are given the opportunity of having work tasters and longer periods of work experience supplemented with supportive training. There are currently 29 trainees on the programme. This has increased from 13 at the time of the first inspection. Seven of the current trainees are on work experience. Trainees follow a programme which includes personal and social development, job preparation skills, and key skills including communication, application of number, information technology and working with others. One trainee is on a training, access, guidance and support programme for young people and requires a greater level of individual support than those on other programmes. There are eight staff directly involved in the guidance, training and assessment of trainees on foundation for work programmes.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficiently planned and inadequately recorded youth training
- ◆ insufficient learning materials for youth programmes
- ◆ failure to update individual training plans for youth trainees
- ◆ no central system for monitoring or assessing progress of youth trainees
- ◆ lack of qualifications and insufficient experience of some staff
- ◆ accommodation for youth programmes unsuitable for training

29. Since the first inspection, progress has been made in rectifying four of the original weaknesses. Learning materials for youth programmes have been developed. The progress of young people is monitored centrally, in accordance with current procedures for all occupational areas. Well-qualified and occupationally experienced staff from the basic employability programme are now involved with running the programme for young people. More suitable accommodation has been found for the youth training programmes. The recent self-assessment report identified three strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the identified weaknesses and found other, more significant strengths. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good encouragement to progress given by trainers to trainees
- ◆ good use of external training resources
- ◆ good resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ supportive work-experience placements

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of formal plans for work-based training
- ◆ inadequate records kept in individual training plans
- ◆ inconsistent training of young people

30. Between April 1999 and March 2000, 42 adults started the basic employability programme. Of these, 22 trainees completed their individual training plans and 10 trainees went into employment on leaving, which is a satisfactory achievement. The remaining 20 trainees left the programme before completing their individual training plans. Since April 2000, a further 59 adults have joined the programme. Of these, 24 trainees are still in training and 12 trainees have completed their individual training plans. Nine trainees have progressed into employment. The other 23 trainees left the programme before completing their individual training plans.

31. Between April 1998 and March 2000, 108 trainees started the programmes for young people. Of these, 92 trainees (85 per cent) left the programme early, before completing their individual training plans. Thirteen trainees completed their individual training plans. After leaving, 25 trainees went into employment. Since the first inspection, the retention of trainees on the programmes for young people has improved. Since April 2000, 71 trainees have started training. Of these, 30 trainees are still in training and eight trainees have completed their individual training plans. Also, 10 trainees have progressed into employment. The other 33 trainees (46 per cent) left the programme before completing their individual training plans.

32. Trainees recruited to all the foundation for work programmes have a wide range of social disadvantages and emotional difficulties. A number of adults have experienced long-term unemployment, mental health problems and additional social problems. Young people have a history of school exclusion and disengagement from the education process. In all training, excellent working relationships between trainers and trainees encourage trainees' learning and progression. All trainees are given a comprehensive range of support both during and after training. Trainees are happy with the support they receive and the training opportunities available.

33. All trainees in the training centres participate in an induction period which comprises basic skills assessment, establishing trainees' levels of personal effectiveness, and providing general advice and guidance. This process identifies areas for personal development and improving work-related skills. These targets are discussed with trainees but are not adequately used to produce individual training plans. Opportunities to provide specific training to improve employability are sometimes missed. Training is complemented by effective links with external agencies which support the training programmes and the individual trainees' abilities to take part in training. For example, some young people are working with

a local theatre group which has motivated them, widened their learning experiences, increased their self-confidence, and enabled them to develop skills in working with others. Other external organisations support trainees through a range of personal issues. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is well developed through the training programmes.

34. All trainees follow a programme which is designed to develop both job-related and occupational skills. Off-the-job training sessions use a range of resources to maintain trainees' interest. Paragon Training has developed a comprehensive range of resources and learning materials to improve trainees' communication skills and employability. These materials are used across all foundation for work programmes. Trainees have access to networked computing resources in Weymouth and to laptop computers in Bridport and Blandford. Competence with information technology equipment is reinforced through the use of interactive CD-ROMs, digital cameras and colour printers. Trainees take the opportunity to use information technology as a means of developing a range of job-related skills. Trainees can use computers to produce their curricula vitae and letters of application for jobs. If required, trainees' handwritten curricula vitae are put into a standard electronic format by office-based staff. Job-search facilities are good and adult trainees receive support, guidance and advice in their search for employment. Since the first inspection the accommodation for youth programmes has been improved. Training is given in a newly acquired, good training unit, built in an old retail outlet close to the main office of Paragon Training. Techniques employed by some trainers do not fully engage all young people during off-the-job training sessions.

35. Workplace training is offered to trainees on all foundation for work programmes. This training makes a valuable contribution to improving trainees' chances of future employment. Employers are supportive of the needs of trainees and adapt their expectation of trainees to take account of their specific needs. All employers are aware that some trainees are unfamiliar with the environment of a workplace but are prepared to provide support and guidance to enable trainees to become more employable. Employers and trainers are unaware of any planned structure for on-the-job training, so this training is not directed towards the achievement of trainees' targets in the workplace. Paragon Training's staff visit trainees in the workplace on a weekly basis, but they do not write formal reports on these visits, and do not ask employers for reports on trainees' progress.

36. The basic employability training for adults is well planned and provided effectively within a structured framework. Programmes are individual and incorporate targets for achievement agreed on with each trainee. The standards of training are satisfactory, with trainees' interest maintained by the training. Trainees all work towards individual goals, although these are not always recorded. Some adult trainees are working towards key skills in information technology but the qualification aims are not clearly identified during training sessions and they are taught computing skills more generally.

37. The contents of portfolios for trainees on programmes for young people are of a good standard and the progression and development made by trainees is clearly evident. However, training programmes for young people are not adequately planned. Trainees have little awareness of how the content of training programmes link to their individual training plans. Trainees can identify that the main target of their training is to become more employable, but they are unaware of their progress against their own achievement targets. Assessment of key skills is not formally structured. It takes place within workshop sessions, but trainees are unaware of when and how they will be assessed. Most trainees do not know in advance what the training will encompass or when to expect work experience as part of their programmes. Staffing difficulties on the programmes for young people have led to a lack of consistency in the planning of training and in recording trainees' achievements.

38. Trainees' progress is monitored by Paragon Training through weekly reports on their achievements. These reports are based more on social rather than vocational targets. These reports are not discussed with trainees. Formal progress reviews are held with trainees on a monthly basis and are recorded in trainees' files. Data from progress reviews are not systematically used to amend their individual training plans.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

**Grade 3**

39. Responsibility for development and implementation of the equal opportunities policy lies at senior level with the director of operations. The company has an equal opportunities policy and statement. Copies of the policy are distributed routinely to all new members of staff and all trainees receive a copy of the equal opportunities statement as part of the trainee handbook. Company practices detailed within the policy meet the requirements of legislation and arrangements for equal opportunities are compliant with the TEC contract. Evaluation and review of equal opportunities are included in the quality assurance operating manual. An evaluative report of company performance in equal opportunities is completed annually and presented to the board of directors at the annual general meeting. Three per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups and 30 per cent have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The self-assessment report is accurate in its overview of equal opportunities provision. However, the report is more descriptive than evaluative and consideration of the company's performance in equal opportunities has not clearly identified those strengths and weaknesses highlighted by inspectors. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.



### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective training support for disadvantaged people
- ◆ selection procedures ensure equality of opportunity for all
- ◆ school liaison initiatives to address gender imbalances
- ◆ intolerance of discrimination and harassment
- ◆ promotion of understanding equal opportunities within adult training

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor awareness of equal opportunities by youth trainees
- ◆ insufficient staff training in equal opportunities issues
- ◆ equal opportunities not included within subcontractors' agreements
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of equal opportunities within training environments

40. Open access to training is a strategic aim of the company. Prior learning and achievement is not a pre-requisite for training and acceptance of trainees is based on their suitability for a chosen programme. Additional support for disadvantaged people, funded through the TEC, is effective in removing potential barriers to access training and enable trainees to achieve. Through these support mechanisms equality of opportunity in training is available to all, regardless of status and ability. Access to the training centre is difficult for people with restricted mobility. The present premises are on the first floor of a former quayside brewery. Long-term strategic plans include moving to new premises with better access. The company has clear policies and procedures for the selection of staff and trainees. Responsibility lies with all interviewing staff to ensure that no forms of discrimination are present in interviewing and selection processes. Objectives for promoting fairness in selection procedures are written into the guidelines used by staff. Intolerance of discrimination and harassment is strongly promoted in the company. Close monitoring of trainees at all stages of training is used effectively in the detection of discrimination and appropriate action is taken promptly, where necessary. Complaints and grievance procedures are included in the trainees' handbook. There are no records of the complaints system having been used to far. Written agreements between the company and employers ensure mandatory implementation of Paragon Training's equal opportunities policy. However, similar written agreements for subcontractors fail to include a signed undertaking to comply with Paragon Training's policy. Evaluation of employers and subcontractors' arrangements for equality of opportunity is not systematic. Rigorous initial assessment and frequent monitoring of health and safety measures by Paragon Training staff in off-site provision were not used to monitor the implementation of equal opportunities.

41. Discussion of equal opportunities is included in trainees' induction programmes. However, youth trainees have little understanding of equal opportunities issues or awareness of arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity throughout training. Adult trainees on basic employability

programmes, however, have a good understanding of equal opportunities. Induction includes thorough discussion of equal opportunities and training sessions are used effectively to raise awareness of discrimination in the workplace and encourage mutual respect between colleagues. There is a company expectation that all staff, at all times, will adhere to the requirements of the equal opportunities policy. Staff are told of this expectation during induction programmes when discussions of the equal opportunities policy and grievance code takes place. Formal staff training in equal opportunities, however, is not routine and present programmes are insufficient to give staff a full understanding and awareness of the issues and implications of legislation.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*The company has a designated member of staff who manages applications to the TEC for additional funding. This additional funding enables trainees with a wide variety of additional learning needs to overcome barriers to training. Trainees with learning difficulties have extra tutorials, those with domestic and social problems receive advice and counselling sessions, others get help with travel expenses to and from training and specialist equipment is provided to aid those who need it.*

42. Collection of data relating to equal opportunities is routine. Feedback gathered from trainees during monitoring sessions and from questionnaires issued to trainees and employers is collated and analysed using computer software. However, collected data covers only a narrow range of issues and does not extend beyond contractual compliance. Detailed analysis of data has not been fully developed. Processing of information does not lead to full evaluation of the effectiveness of procedures or to systematic implementation of action plans for improvement. Analysis of collected data on the gender of trainees, however, prompted an improvement in trainee-recruitment strategies. In horse management, 88 per cent of trainees are women and in engineering, 90 per cent of trainees are men. The company has sought to address gender stereotyping through increased liaison with schools. Direct contact with schools' careers teachers and the holding of open days at local hotels to inform teachers and pupils of opportunities in work-based training has been effective in redressing gender imbalance and encouraging under-represented groups into training.

**Trainee support****Grade 3**

43. Many trainees are recruited through referral from the careers service, the Employment Service and schools and employers. Initial information and guidance is provided through careers events and broadcasting of training opportunities in a variety of ways. Information materials have been developed as part of the marketing strategy. Training 'taster' days are provided for prospective trainees. All prospective trainees are interviewed by programme staff at centres and offices throughout Dorset to facilitate good access to training. Frequent use is made of local careers offices for interviewing. All trainees receive induction training at training centres or in work placements during the first week of training. Support for trainees is an integral part of the job roles of all staff. Trainees are assigned to members of staff who monitor and review their progress and provide the first point of contact for support needs. A designated member of staff has responsibility for co-ordinating trainee support and external support services and accessing appropriate funding. Where trainees experience difficulty with travelling to training venues transport is provided by the company. The self-assessment report provided comprehensive information of trainee support arrangements. The report was accurate in its appraisal of the strengths of the provision and identified areas



of good practice which the company considered to be normal practice. The report was less accurate in its assessment of weaknesses and failed to identify ineffective induction and insufficient use of accreditation of trainees' prior learning. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of additional support services
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ well-documented individual trainee support
- ◆ effective use of external support agencies and funding

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent initial assessment of basic skills
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ ineffective induction except in the basic employability for adults programme
- ◆ insufficient use of accreditation of trainees' prior learning

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*An engineering trainee with poor literacy skills was assessed as having the practical skills required for level 2 NVQ training. An inability by the trainee to record evidence and build a portfolio acted as a barrier to his achieving this. Staff obtained permission from the awarding body for evidence of competencies to be dictated by the trainee for recording by supervisors and assessors. The trainee is making good progress towards successful completion of the NVQ2 programme.*

44. Initial interviews of applicants for training are thorough and well recorded. Interviews, which are conducted by training programme leaders, offer trainees good advice and guidance. Use of initial assessment to evaluate trainees' basic skills is not standardised and varies across programme areas. Some trainees undertake nationally recognised basic skills diagnostic tests, while other trainees are assessed using less formal approaches without clearly identified performance criteria. Routine use of initial diagnostic assessments of key skills has not been introduced. Some trainees receive 'taster' days, aptitude testing and vocational skills testing, but this is not universal throughout training. Systematic accreditation of trainees' prior learning or achievement is not carried out, although one member of Paragon Training's staff is qualified to do so. Appropriate use of the accreditation of prior learning to advance trainees' progression is not made, and, in some cases, where account of prior achievement has not been taken, trainees have duplicated work and their achievement of qualifications has been delayed.

45. Induction training is unimaginative and trainees' awareness of the issues covered and their retention of information given is poor. Induction covers all the necessary information to comply with TEC requirements but its bland delivery does not engage trainees' attention and much of the process is ineffective. Procedures for work-based induction are not written and it is not of the same quality in all occupational areas. Induction for the adult basic employability programme is well planned and effectively uses assignments and group work to impart information. In engineering, catering and horse care programmes, procedures for initial assessment and for induction are being revised to become more occupationally specific. Evaluation of induction is not routine and

reinforcement of issues covered by induction is not included in training programmes.

46. All staff demonstrate a high commitment to the support of trainees. Many staff provide support to trainees out of working hours. Trainees have telephone access to staff at home for urgent help. Formal review and monitoring visits take place every 13 weeks to comply with TEC contract requirements. In some programme areas, trainees are visited by staff on a fortnightly basis to assist portfolio development, provide support, make assessments and help trainees progress towards achievement of their qualification. However, the frequency and effectiveness of reviews varies between programmes. Where trainees have been unhappy in work placements staff have acted promptly to find appropriate solutions. A central file recording trainee support indicates high levels of additional support for trainees' needs. Recording of trainee support is routine, although individual training plans are not always kept up to date to indicate where additional support is required or has been provided. Support is recorded on a separate sheet and kept in trainees' files. Effective use is made of the experience of a designated member of staff to help colleagues in the identification of trainees' support needs and to access funding through the TEC for additional support. The provision of additional support is comprehensive. Advice and guidance are given in a wide range of personal and work-related matters, including drug abuse rehabilitation, accommodation problems, transport needs, housekeeping difficulties, careers advice and basic skills support. TEC funding is supplemented, where appropriate, by company funds to ensure adequate support for trainees. Generally, the learning support facilities provided by the company are good.

### **Management of training**

### **Grade 3**

47. Paragon Training is governed by a board of five directors, each with executive powers. Board meetings are held monthly. Four of the five directors, including the chairman, are shareholders in the company. Apart from the chairman, directors are employees of the company and fulfil the roles of managing director, contracts director, operations director, and finance and commercial director. The operations director has overall responsibility for the management and provision of training and assessment. Directors undertake the key roles of quality assurance manager, health and safety officer, equal opportunities officer, staff development officer and year 2000 compliance officer. Directors are supported in their roles by a designated team for finances and administration. At training programme level daily responsibility for training falls to the occupational team leaders. The company has seen rapid expansion since its inception in April 1998 with a corresponding increase in staffing from 13 to over 30. The self-assessment report provided accurate detail of the management of training. Many examples of good operational procedures were accurately adjudged as normal practices. The self-assessment process had initiated action planning and led to strengthening of management control of subcontracted training. Inspectors agreed with the findings of self-assessment and awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

*STRENGTHS*

- ◆ productive working with employers and external organisations
- ◆ open and effective management at senior level
- ◆ good strategic management

*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor awareness by staff of some training issues
- ◆ failure to meet some operational targets
- ◆ no formal appraisal for senior managers.

48. Managers have been effective in the formation and development of the company. Strategic management is good and detailed long-term business plans have been developed to take account of market forces and respond to the training needs of local employers and the community. Operational targets are set against funding contracts and company performance is routinely monitored and evaluated. Strategic plans are kept constantly under review and revisions and action plans are disseminated to staff. Efficient use is made of computer software to generate management information. Corporate targets were met during the company's first year of operation, although some targets for trainee recruitment and development of commercial contracts have not been achieved recently. Senior managers have been effective in creating a cohesive workforce. Staff are mutually supportive and fully understand their roles within the organisation. Induction of new staff is thorough and followed by a review after six months to evaluate performance and progress. All staff are well supported. Opinions of staff are welcomed and valued and the openness of the management style has contributed to effective and efficient deployment of staff. All staff understand the values of the company and support its aims and objectives as encompassed within the company's mission statement.

49. Working relationships of company staff and managers with employers and outside organisations are strong. Managers have good control of on- and off-the-job training, although management control of training provided by some colleges is weak. Managers are seeking to address this and have been effective in implementing strategies to involve employers and subcontractors in all aspects of training. Managers make frequent and productive contact with external organisations to raise awareness of the company and its training provision. The management structure of the company has undergone considerable change in response to its rapid expansion. Greater responsibility for the management of programme training has been devolved to occupational area team leaders and has enabled senior managers to devote more time to corporate matters. The managerial

role of team leaders is yet to become fully effective. Staff responsible for training have a poor awareness of some training issues, especially in subcontracted provision, the development of key skills and training provided entirely on-the-job.

50. The company has a written staff training and development policy. Responsibility for staff appraisal and development lies with the directors. All staff undergo a formal appraisal, apart from the directors of the company. Directors have appraisal meetings with the company Chairman, but the process does not adhere to formal procedures. Outcomes and action plans are not recorded. Arrangements for staff appraisal are adequate and the results of appraisal are linked to staff development needs. There is no annual budget for staff training and training events are provided, as appropriate, in response to the perceived needs of the company and the individual. Lines of communication within the company are effective. Daily dialogue for the dissemination of information is supplemented by regular staff meetings. General staff meetings occur monthly and minutes are circulated to all staff. The minutes are detailed and matters arising from previous meetings are discussed routinely, action taken is evaluated and staff responsibilities clearly identified. Within occupational areas, team meetings are held several times a year to discuss matters specific to training. Outcomes of team meetings are passed on to staff at general meetings and encourage the sharing of good practice.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

51. Paragon Training has developed a quality assurance manual and a range of operational procedures to act as guidelines for staff in their duties. Work instructions and defined quality assurance standards cover the management and provision of training and areas of administration of the company. An internal auditing procedure forms part of the company's quality assurance systems. All staff are made aware of quality assurance procedures during their induction when they discuss the practices contained within the quality assurance manual. Copies of the manual are available to staff for reference. All staff working outside the main training centre are provided with copies of those sections of the manual appropriate to their work. Overall responsibility for quality assurance lies at senior level with the managing director, who acts as the quality assurance manager. Quality assurance issues are discussed at monthly meetings of the designated quality circle group. The quality circle comprises the quality assurance manager, the operations director and the leader of each occupational team. As an accredited centre for a range of vocational qualifications, Paragon Training meets the requirements of seven awarding bodies. Most of these awarding bodies have awarded Paragon Training self-certification status. Staff from Dorset TEC undertake six-monthly audits of the financial and administrative arrangements. The last audit, in August 2000, identified no major concerns with these aspects. The TEC contracts external specialists to conduct six-monthly audits of the health and safety arrangements made by Paragon Training. In December 1999, the company was assessed and subsequently accredited with the Investors in People Standard.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ quality assurance paperwork not fully up to date
- ◆ failure of quality assurance system to ensure consistent quality of provision
- ◆ absence of framework for formal evaluation
- ◆ failure to use collected data to further continuous improvement

52. Since the first inspection, arrangements have been made to update quality assurance documents systematically. The revised quality assurance arrangements have established increased consistency in the quality of training. Trainees' and employers' feedback and data on trainees' progression rates are considered when developing plans for improvement. The self-assessment report written for reinspection identified three strengths and two weaknesses in quality assurance. One strength, related to the audit process, was also found by inspectors. The other two strengths were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. The two weaknesses referred to a need for greater involvement of all staff in quality assurance matters. Inspectors found two other strengths and weaknesses of greater significance and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ clearly written quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ good and effective action to promote continuous improvement
- ◆ systematic monitoring of trainees' views

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of training
- ◆ insufficient sharing of good practice

53. The quality assurance system is clearly recorded, and written in a format which enables staff to refer to and understand procedures and to use them effectively as working instructions. The procedures cover a wide range of activity undertaken by staff. Particular emphasis is placed on procedures directly related to trainees, such as initial assessment, preparing individual training plans and conducting progress reviews in the workplace. Written procedures include clear reference to the use of standard internal forms for daily procedures and actions, and copies of these are included in the quality assurance manual. Clear guidelines are given to staff in the use of documents required by the TEC and the Employment Service. As quality assurance documents are provided for staff working outside the main training centre, they are able to implement standard procedures in line with company policy wherever they meet with trainees. Staff are invited to suggest modifications and additions to the set of standard procedures.

Attention is paid to record and communicate all changes in the procedures to the staff. Major changes to procedures are explained at staff meetings.

54. Implementation of action plans produced after the first inspection have resulted in improvements. This process has been managed effectively by the operations director. This director chairs all of the meetings about the action plan of each individual occupational area and is a member of the quality circle. Action required to address weaknesses has been given a high priority at occupational team meetings. In some areas where common weaknesses were found across occupational areas, a standard strategy has been employed. Staff have been well informed and well involved in action to improve the training provided in their areas. The major focus of improvement has been in those areas subject to reinspection.

55. Following the last inspection, the operations director has taken responsibility for managing a trainees' database. Monitoring of data on trainees' performance and achievement is now routinely undertaken at each monthly meeting of the occupational teams. The data are updated following reviews of trainees' progress. Currently, this incremental tracking of trainees' progress is still done on a paper-based system. A software system, with links to the TEC's database, is in the latter stage of development. Overall achievement of qualifications against targets set in the TEC contract continues to be monitored at each meeting of the quality circle. Any concerns about poor performance are taken back to the team meeting by the operations director and the relevant team leader becomes responsible for addressing these.

56. Internal auditing of activity against the recorded procedures is carried out routinely. The quality assurance manager does most of the audit work. The focus of audit activity is changed to address any concerns raised. Individual staff are graded to a set standard which is dependent on their experience and their past performance. This grading also extends to individual occupational areas. Individuals and areas designated as needing improvement are audited more frequently to monitor the actions being taken. The emphasis of audit activity since the first inspection has been on the completion of individual training plans and action-planning during the reviews of trainees' progress. Audits routinely involve the examination of the records in trainees' files and, in a few cases, the quality assurance manager has directly observed staff, particularly new staff, undertaking progress reviews with trainees in the workplace. Verbal feedback is provided to individual staff following an observation, but a written report is not made. Audits of records in trainees' files normally results in written feedback being added to the file. A common theme at the early stage of the audits was that progress reviews lacked depth in their questioning about trainees' work. In the few instances when non-compliance with procedures is discovered, a formal record is made. There were 16 non-conformance reports issued between the first inspection and October 2000. To follow up these reports, the individual staff member is interviewed and the team leader is notified. Staff are given positive feedback when improvements have been noted through the audit process. The audits are leading to improved consistency in the quality of training. In the hospitality occupational area, action



has been taken by trainers at the off-the-job training centre to supply weekly reports on trainees' progress to the staff undertaking trainees' reviews in the workplace. This good practice is helping staff and trainees alike.

57. Following the development of links with the managers of a local trust fund, Paragon Training is to open, in January 2001, a new off-the-job training centre for engineering. This training centre is well equipped with a range of new machine tools, measuring instruments and associated equipment. The training centre has excellent resources for welding and fabrication. During the first inspection, inspectors expressed concern over the lack of off-the-job training in welding at the local subcontracted college. Staff from Paragon Training are continuing to develop effective working relationships with this subcontractor through discussions on joint use of the new training centre. As part of the contractual arrangements with the trust fund managers, Paragon Training will be offering use of the training resources to local schools and community groups as part of a strategy to promote engineering to local young people. Dorset TEC has agreed a contract for 10 unemployed young people to start training at this training centre in late January 2001.

58. The quality assurance manager logs all written complaints to the company, from trainees or employers. Each complaint is investigated through examination of records and interviews with staff and trainees. In each case, the quality assurance manager makes a written response to the complainant and discusses appropriate action with relevant people.

59. The views of trainees are systematically obtained by the use of a well-structured set of questionnaires. The use of these questionnaires is standard practice by training providers contracting with Dorset TEC. The quality assurance manager of Paragon Training is a member of the TEC's steering group on the use of the questionnaires. Trainees are asked to respond on completion of six weeks of training and again after one year of training. The questionnaire is normally completed during a workplace visit by a member of the training staff. Software systems are used to analyse the responses to the questions. The quality assurance manager produces a report based on each occupational area and highlights any specific responses which give cause for concern. The individual reports are sent to the relevant team leader for discussion at the quality circle and team meetings. Questionnaires have also been issued to employers. In some occupational areas, the number of questionnaires returned has been low, and overall statistical analysis is at an early stage. However, the feedback has resulted in some changes. The timing and location of the off-the-job training for retail trainees has been modified, some off-the-job resources for catering trainees have been refurbished and new promotional materials for horse management programmes have been developed. Since the first inspection, the quality assurance manager has made in excess of 30 monitoring visits to work placements. During these visits, verbal feedback has been invited and obtained from employers, workplace supervisors and trainees.

60. The arrangements for monitoring the quality of the training given in on- and off-the-job locations are inadequate. There is no systematic observation of

trainers' performance during the training sessions at the training centres. Training staff are appraised, but the appraisals do not include direct observation of their performance. There are no formal arrangements for Paragon Training's staff to monitor the training undertaken in the workplace by employers and workplace supervisors.

61. Until recently, there has been little formal sharing of good practice among the training staff. Some issues from the first inspection, such as delays in assessment of key skills, had a common theme across a number of occupational areas. The improvement process did not adequately manage the sharing of good practice across the occupational teams. Some teams were left in isolation to develop their own solutions. The findings from the evaluation of training activity are not always shared across the occupational teams. For example, the analysis of responses to questionnaires is not shared across the occupational teams. The results of audits are not systematically communicated to all staff.

62. There have been some examples of effective sharing of good practice. For instance, the procedures for internal verification and the specific requirements of differing awarding bodies have been discussed across occupational teams. A standard framework for internal verification has now been established by Paragon Training. The framework involves planning for continuous monitoring of the assessment process, including direct observation of the assessment process. In another recent development, a working group, drawn from representatives of occupational teams, has been established to develop a common strategy for the training and assessment of key skills in line with recommendations brought out in 2000.

63. Self-assessment has been integrated with the quality assurance management system. Processes adopted for self-assessment are good and all staff are involved. The self-assessment reports provide a detailed picture of the company and give a clear indication of its aims and objectives. However, several sections of the report written for reinspection are insufficiently self-critical and fail to identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses in the training. However, inspectors did agree with all the grades awarded in the self-assessment report written for the reinspection.