



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

J T L  
National

## SUMMARY

JTL operates throughout England and Wales as the major provider of electrical installation training through modern apprenticeships to graded electrician status. Employers provide good opportunities in the workplace and arrange transfers to ensure trainees receive adequate experience in all aspects of the qualification. Committed training officers effectively support trainees. Applicants to the scheme undertake good aptitude tests to assess suitability for the trade but assessment of basic and key skills ability are not formally undertaken. Off-the-job training at colleges is rigorously managed and dedicated course materials ensure consistency of presentation. Equal opportunities is routinely addressed and good promotional materials are widely distributed, but monitoring in the workplace is not well developed. Comprehensive reporting through a powerful management-information system, which can be accessed by all staff, helps management decisions. Quality assurance is a routine aspect of provision but internal verification procedures lack rigour.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good standardised training materials
- ◆ effective pastoral support
- ◆ wide range of good promotional materials used
- ◆ effective monitoring of qualification progression
- ◆ good use of management-information system
- ◆ effective management of subcontractors
- ◆ well-established quality assurance arrangements

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of initial assessment of basic and key skills
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ little monitoring of equality of opportunity in workplace
- ◆ internal verification underdeveloped

## INTRODUCTION

1. JTL is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status and is the largest national training provider for electrical installation in England and Wales. The company was set up in 1990 by the Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) and the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union (AEEU) following the sector's withdrawal from the statutory levy and training arrangements of the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB). The modern apprenticeship programme operates to standards determined by National Electrotechnical Training (NET), the national training organisation (NTO), and is recognised by the Joint Industry Board (JIB) under its industrial terms and conditions of employment agreements. The electrical installation industry undertakes a wide range of electrical and electronics-based tasks both on and offshore. Companies vary from large multi-nationals to small employers with just a few operatives. Eighty-three per cent of the workforce operates in firms with 30 or fewer employees. About 21,000 firms in the United Kingdom are registered as electrical contracting companies for VAT purposes and about 60 per cent employs less than 10 employees. Eighty per cent of all recorded electrical installation work is placed with the 2,000 member companies of the ECA, which in turn employs over 30,000 operatives with a collective turnover in excess of £2.7 billion

2. The company contracts with 74 training and enterprise councils (TECs) or chambers of commerce, training and enterprise (CCTEs) across England and Wales including a regional contract for the whole of London. A third of contracts are negotiated locally and the remainder through a single contract with the National Training Partnership (NTP). The co-ordinating TEC for this inspection is London East TEC representing the interests of both English and Welsh TECs. Off-the-job training is provided through 83 colleges of further education and four private-sector training companies. JTL also has its own training centre in London providing facilities for independent achievement measurement 2 (AM2) testing under contract to the NTO. Non government-funded training is also undertaken at this centre. A total of 167 college lecturers provide the off-the-job scheme under copyright. There are nearly 7,000 employed status trainees, referred to as registered apprentices, with more than 2,000 employers across an average four-year training programme. Older apprentices are completing their training under the JIB 1983 apprenticeship scheme. It allowed assessment to be carried out under simulated conditions requiring a pass in another awarding body's Part 2 examination, completion of three work-based projects and success in the three-day industry-based achievement measurement 2 test (AM2). All recent recruits are advanced modern apprentices placed on the 1999 JIB training scheme for electrical installation, which requires all assessment to be completed on the job, theory examinations, certification of identified key skills and success in the AM2 test. Successful achievement of the full package entitles apprentices to graded electrician status and registration into the electrotechnical certification scheme.

3. A board consists of four nominated employers' representatives, four union representatives and a nomination from the JIB, by invitation. The chairman is

elected from among members of the board. The chief executive and director of finance are ex-officio members. The company head office is located in Orpington, Kent where senior management, accounts, quality assurance and development teams are based. A national administration centre, located in Wrexham, North Wales, provides support services to the field staff and is where all auditable apprentices, employers and TEC's files are kept. A central claims unit at Mexborough, South Yorkshire deals with all financial claims to the TECs. A total staffing of 129 includes a senior management team of four, including the chief executive. JTL monitors apprentices through six teams of full-time home-based training officers each led by a senior training officer. The 58 full-time field staff are allocated responsibility for a number of apprentices, employers and colleges. Additionally, 29 part-time reviewers, able to undertake assessment on demand and one full-time visiting training officer, are in post.

4. A pilot scheme to directly provide off-the-job electrical installation training of theory and key skills is being developed. It is targeted towards those who reside in areas where college or training-centre support is difficult to access. The company is also embarking on providing a pilot cable-jointing scheme leading to NVQs at level 3 and completion of the advanced modern apprenticeship framework. As both schemes have only just started they were excluded from the evidence base of this inspection.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The company participated in a pilot inspection for the Training Standards Council (TSC) in January 1998 with both parties gaining helpful experience of the process and its implications. The internal report prepared by inspectors was shared with the company which has developed the issues raised within its own self-assessment and action-planning procedures. A series of company self-assessment reports and action plans have been produced subsequently as part of the regular quality assurance arrangements for continuous improvement. All staff contributed to the development of the self-assessment report and received copies through the company's intranet. Judgements were supported by appropriate evidence, which is increasingly held in electronic format. Inspectors found the report to be a realistic reflection of the current situation but overgraded in all cases except quality assurance.

6. A team of 11 inspectors spent a total of 55 days sampling the activities of JTL in England and Wales. On the first day, they met with senior managers of the company for an introductory briefing before travelling to various parts of England and Wales to shadow the work of 23 of the 59 training officers. They visited 15 of the 84 colleges of further education and two of the four private training centres, which provide off-the-job-training facilities. A total of 170 apprentices were observed in off-the-job situations and 92 were visited at their place of work. Inspectors interviewed 32 employers or their representatives. They also interviewed two chairs of local training groups and the chairman of the board. Inspectors interviewed all senior managers of the company and examined a wide range of company documents. They reviewed assessment records, trainees' field-evidence records, portfolios and work-based projects. A demonstration of the company-developed management-information system was given to inspectors while at the Wrexham offices.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		5	3			8
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 2

7. JTL has 6,268 advanced electrical installation modern apprentices in England and Wales of whom 2,846 are working towards the 1993 framework and 3,413 are on the framework introduced in 1999. Nine trainees are on other construction programmes. A further 700 trainees have recently started training and have yet to

be registered with the awarding body. A network of over 2,000 employers, ranging from sole traders undertaking domestic electrical installations and maintenance to national contractors involved in industrial and commercial contracts, provide training opportunities. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to colleges of further education and four private-sector training companies. Trainees attend college for a total of 700 hours during the first three years of training, either on a block- or day-release basis. Training officers work in six regional teams, each led by a senior training officer. They visit trainees in the workplace and at college to review progress. Most training officers are occupationally competent and experienced and have appropriate assessors and verifiers' qualifications. Training officers carry out some workplace assessment of trainees' competence. The self-assessment report accurately identified strengths and weaknesses, although some strengths were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ effective use of employer networks
- ◆ good resources for off-the-job training
- ◆ effective monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ training exceeds requirements of framework

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills assessment
- ◆ poor understanding of standards by work-based recorders

8. Employers are committed to the development of trainees and provide a wide range of good opportunities to develop skills and learning. Those responsible for the day-to-day activities of trainees ensure they experience as many aspects of the industry as possible. One of the larger companies, which has several separate departments, ensures trainees regularly move between sections when new opportunities arise. Work placements vary from house wiring and installation of smoke and fire alarm detection systems to the maintenance of large electrical schemes in industrial situations and at nuclear power stations. When companies can only offer a very narrow range of activity, training officers arrange for trainees to be placed with other employers for a short time so that the full range of work situations can be covered. Employers' training groups are well supported in some parts of England and Wales. Representatives from companies meet regularly with training officers and discuss training issues. They also support local and national prize-giving awards. JTL rewards the best regional apprentices of the year at a prestigious ceremony held annually in the House of Lords, and from that list, a national winner is selected who receives a substantial reward. Companies have significant input into the training scheme and, through training group meetings, regional JIB meetings and regional ECA meetings, meet with some colleges to discuss off-the-job elements of training and ways in which local training might be

improved.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*Working with the nominated training officer a college uses its block-release programmes to assist companies and full-time students. When JTL's apprentices attend college, full-time students fill the gap and gain essential work experience required for level 2 NVQ. This exchange also helps smaller employers to maintain staffing levels. Many of the full-time students go on to secure employment with their placements and subsequently register with JTL.*

9. The performance of each college is carefully monitored with 24 colleges being identified as centres of excellence. General resources for practical and theory training are good at the subcontracted centres. Trainees value their time at college and most take full advantage of the opportunities to research topics for assignments and practical activities. JTL produces good training materials for college staff to use. Comprehensive training packs, specially designed for trainees, consist of clear study notes and provide opportunities for trainees to assess their own learning. Lecturer packs include clear schemes of work and good training notes, visual aids and handouts. Allowances are made for different methods of teaching and some instructors add additional materials which they feel benefit trainees. Most trainees and teachers value the packs as a helpful resource, which ensures consistency of subject matter being given, and allows easy transition between groups and colleges if required. College resources are good, meeting the agreed criteria which are systematically monitored during training officers and employers' visits.

10. Trainees have an acute understanding of their progress and what they need to do to complete the occupational aspects of the award. The modern apprenticeship framework consists of many elements, with specific requirements for both on- and off-the-job aspects of the programme. Trainees are aware of both their long- and short-term targets and are able to initiate opportunities for collecting evidence by negotiating tasks in the workplace with their supervisors. Reviews are well focused on progress towards qualifications, and, in many cases, capture tasks which can be used as evidence towards the qualification. Computer-based records of trainees' progress and information kept by home-based training officers are comprehensive and regularly updated. Records of progress reviews and assessments are passed to a central processing centre where data are promptly entered. Performance of individual trainees is easily accessed and updated onto the management-information system so that all parties can monitor progress. Many trainees also undertake additional in-house qualifications arranged by their employer. Training undertaken by JTL exceeds the requirements of the electrotechnical modern apprenticeship framework. Of those who have joined the programme between 1994 and 1999, 72 per cent have achieved their NVQ at level 2 while 45 per cent of those on programme who started between 1992 and 1995 achieved the NVQ at level 3. On completion of JTL's training programme, trainees are eligible for registration as graded electricians as it includes the AM2 test, but some employers delay trainees attempting the test until they have gained more site experience. This attitude delays completion of the targets in the trainees' individual training plans, frustrates trainees as they cannot achieve graded electrician status, and diminishes the final achievement outcomes of the provider. Trainees' retention has been successfully targeted for improvement and has improved from 50 per cent in 1996 to an average retention rate over the past four years' intake of trainees to 77 per cent. Ninety per cent of trainees recruited in the contracting year to April 2000 are still in training.

11. Most trainees have a poor knowledge of key skills. There is no comprehensive initial assessment of their key skills ability at the outset of the programme. First year trainees are aware of some of the key skill requirements, but those above first year have little awareness other than the information technology sessions given at college during off-the-job training sessions. There is little emphasis on gathering evidence for key skills' competencies in the workplace. Training officers mainly concentrate on gathering evidence for occupational competencies, even though many trainees carry out high-level communication and application of number tasks at work. Workplace supervisors are used as expert witnesses and recorders to assist in gathering evidence from the workplace, but they receive no training for this role and little guidance is provided by training officers. Many supervisors sign worksheets and witness-testimony forms without sufficient knowledge of the standards. The company has recently introduced new logbooks, but many trainees who have changed scheme lack guidance on their completion. Many trainees leave completion of logbooks until the latter stages of training and rely heavily upon training officers to assist them. The number of trainees training officers look after has been high and some visits have gone beyond the 13-week contractual requirement. This has improved considerably in recent times with the appointment of several new full-time training officers.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 3

12. The equal opportunities policy and procedures embraces all staff and trainees and are reviewed annually or when new legislation comes into effect. The practices are reviewed by an equal opportunities working party before being recommended to senior management for approval. The policy and procedures are issued to all trainees, full- and part-time members of staff and employers. All potential trainees complete an application form, which asks questions about gender and ethnicity. These data are analysed through the management-information system and reports are circulated to staff. At the time of the inspection, 95 (1.5 per cent) trainees are from minority ethnic communities and 14 are women. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but the report failed to recognise the lack of equal opportunities monitoring in the workplace. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of training to under-represented groups
- ◆ good use of role models to influence gender imbalance
- ◆ effective use of equal opportunities data



### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little staff training in equal opportunities
- ◆ lack of understanding of equal opportunities issues by trainees and employers
- ◆ little equal opportunities monitoring in the workplace

13. The company actively promotes training opportunities to under-represented groups. They advertise opportunities widely, including displays in national minority ethnic newspapers. A good range of informative leaflets is available including one specifically aimed to attract women into the industry and another is published in Welsh. Further leaflets are produced in minority ethnic languages including Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Bengali and distributed among local communities. Leaflets are well designed and use a good range of images featuring trainees of diverse ethnicity and gender. JTL also works closely with the national training organisation for the electrotechnical sector to produce leaflets promoting the industry, which are used in schools, and these challenge stereotypical images. Some of these materials feature on JTL's website. Four training officers are women including one who has progressed from being a qualified electrical apprentice through JTL's scheme. They make presentations to groups of potential trainees and discuss opportunities in the industry based on their own experiences. Existing female trainees are also involved in some of the presentations.

14. Equal opportunities data are collected and entered on the company's comprehensive company management-information system. Progress of applicants is recorded throughout recruitment and selection and, for those who become trainees, to completion of their training plan. Reports are generated and used to good effect in providing management with trends and current situations. An officer has recently been appointed to develop proposals to secure additional European funding to support this work. A project to address gender under-representation in the North of England and the West and East Yorkshire regions is about to start. Another application for funding has been submitted aimed at addressing employability of minority ethnic school leavers as electricians in deprived London areas. JTL's selection test was developed using consultants and introduced after piloting it in 1999. Data on achievements of ethnic minority groups has been prepared and the test is being evaluated for bias.

15. As part of their two-week induction programme new training officers attend a half-day session on equality of opportunity. Existing training officers attended a full-day training session in 1996 but have not received update training since. Most trainees and employers display a lack of understanding of equal opportunities issues. Trainees' awareness is not tested or reinforced during training, although they do receive a thorough session on equal opportunities during induction. Potential employers are supplied with a clear guide to recruitment which directs them to good selection procedures and interview techniques that do not breach equality legislation. An interview checklist is also supplied, but beyond this, the company has little influence over selection. No monitoring is undertaken by JTL's staff to check that employers are using best practice. When reviewing trainees in the workplace, training officers do not routinely monitor employers' compliance

with equal opportunities requirements, and do not formally enquire of situations arising.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 3**

16. JTL recruits trainees through a variety of sources including schools, careers service, employers and through direct advertising in local and national press. Approximately half of all new recruits are referred to JTL through the careers service. A dedicated Internet website provides information about career and training opportunities in the electrical installation industry. All applicants are asked to complete a questionnaire and a paper-based practical problem-solving exercise designed to be self-assessed by the applicant and producing a score at the end. Scores indicate applicants' understanding of the industry while at the same time providing a realistic impression of life as an electrician and the associated training requirements. Applicants wishing to continue with their application are invited for interview and given a formal numeracy and mechanical-aptitude test designed to select those applicants who are likely to succeed within the electrical contracting industry. A list of successful applicants is circulated to all local and regional employers recommending applicants for employment and modern apprenticeship training. At the start of training, trainees are assigned to a training officer, who is responsible for their on-the-job assessments, final assessment of NVQ logbooks, reviews and pastoral care. The self-assessment report accurately identified a number of strengths but failed to recognise shortcomings in JTL's procedures for initially assessing basic and key skills and accrediting trainees' prior learning and achievements. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective pastoral support
- ◆ good advice and information at recruitment
- ◆ comprehensive induction programme
- ◆ good qualification progress reviews

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment of basic and key skills
- ◆ failure of reviews to effectively monitor additional support
- ◆ ineffective accreditation of prior achievement arrangements

17. Individual pastoral care and commitment by training officers, employers and instructors is good, helping to maintain trainees' interest in college training and on-site learning. Training officers provide clear and helpful advice to trainees and maintain frequent and effective links with college tutors. Together, they provide understanding pastoral support and a detailed monitoring of trainees' qualification progression. Training officers meet most trainees weekly while they attend college

and every 10 to 12 weeks when at work. More frequent visits during the first three months of training are common. All trainees are provided with contact points for their allocated training officer and many calls are made while training officers are at home. Trainees often have three different induction sessions, some of which are not co-ordinated. Induction in the workplace is routinely undertaken by employers and provides a broad understanding of employment conditions and concentrate heavily upon health and safety issues on site. College induction comprehensively covers key issues such as health and safety, equal opportunities, rights, roles and responsibilities both as a trainee and a college student. Training officers usually carry out an induction to JTL at the same time as the college induction and carefully explain how the scheme operates and what is required to achieve the full package of qualifications and completion of the modern apprenticeship framework.

18. Applicants wishing to enter training with JTL go through a series of aptitude exercises which both inform potential trainees and discourage those not committed to a career in electrical contracting. This pre-entry screening has been developed by the company to reduce the dropout rate during the first two years of training and to provide all applicants with unambiguous advice and information about the industry. All new trainees receive a comprehensive information pack telling them about their rights and responsibilities as an employee and as an apprentice in the industry. Trainees' also receive a good set of lesson notes which are distributed by college tutors to support progressive learning. They include detailed diagrams and supporting handouts. Training officers maintain good records of training undertaken and progression made by each trainee. Review forms are well used to record NVQ unit progression and most set realistic targets for trainees to achieve. Reviews often involve college tutors and training officers routinely ensure all activities are accurately recorded. The management-information system is comprehensive and each trainee's progress can be readily monitored by both management and training officers. If a trainee is struggling to meet targets, officers regularly discuss alternative strategies. For example, one trainee was finding it difficult to complete certain parts of his on-the-job logbook of practical evidence. The officer and employer identified another work site and the trainee was moved to allow a fuller range of skills to be experienced.

19. Selection tests have been specifically designed by an independent testing agency to identify trainees who show a real aptitude and strong interest in becoming an electrician, but they do not provide appropriate information to identify any additional support needs. There are no systematic arrangements to routinely assess trainees' basic or key skill abilities when they enter training. Some colleges routinely initially assess trainees' basic skill levels but this information is not always shared with training officers and no records are maintained by the company to identify how many trainees are receiving additional learning support. Some trainees have support needs for dyslexia, deafness and basic numeracy and literacy problems, but there is no strategy to formally support them. Training officers have no clear brief on these matters and colleges are not contracted to identify or provide support needs. When support needs become apparent, JTL is quick to respond but the process is reactive. Trainees' reviews are focused on qualification progression and fail to consider effectively the support needs of trainees or monitor the effectiveness of any additional support being provided.

Training officers informally maintain a good overview of the support being given to trainees, but these data are not collected centrally. No effective means of accrediting trainees' prior learning or achievement has been developed. Some trainees, who had already achieved higher key skill levels than is required for their modern apprenticeship framework, have not had these achievements recognised or recorded on their training plans, and, in a few cases, are repeating training already done.

## Management of training

## Grade 2

20. JTL has a strategic plan to identify the objectives of the business over the next three years. This plan is reviewed annually and used as the basis of an annual business plan which defines the mechanisms and targets by which strategic objectives will be met. Many of the objectives relate to improvements in the quality of training. Staff contribute to the business-planning process. A general manager of operations and his deputy are responsible for six, regionally based teams of training officers. A senior training officer is responsible for each team. There are 53 training officers. Ten full-time assessors and 29 part-time assessors and reviewers work nationally, providing support for all the teams. A full-time performance development manager has recently been appointed to assist new officers and to provide additional help. All staff have clear job descriptions and every six months they make an assessment of their own performance which forms the basis of an annual appraisal in person by a senior manager. Individual development and training plans are reviewed and updated at each appraisal. The company has been recognised as an Investor in People since 1995 and was last accredited in May 1999.

21. Management information is held on a central database. Senior training officers and training officers have access to the information through a personal computer in their homes. Managers and all staff who work from home have access to electronic mail. The senior management team meets every other week. Senior operations managers meet every six weeks. There are monthly team meetings. Minutes of all meetings are recorded identifying actions and those responsible for implementing them. The minutes of all meetings are made available to all staff through the company's intranet. All subcontractors are required to use JTL-developed training programmes and the company provides standardised course materials to its approved centres. An annual conference, to which all subcontractors are invited, is used to introduce new training opportunities and to disseminate good practice. Employers, subcontractors and company representatives meet regularly at electrical training group meetings throughout England and Wales. Meetings are usually held quarterly. Minutes of the meetings are recorded and made available to company staff. All staff receive a copy of a quarterly briefing by the company's chief executive. The self-assessment report provides an accurate description of management of training. Inspectors agreed with all but one of the strengths, which was considered to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with one of the weaknesses, found the other had been resolved but identified further issues. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

*STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective use of targets for individual staff and teams
- ◆ good internal and external communications
- ◆ good use of management information
- ◆ effective management of subcontractors

*WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped process for assessment and review of transient trainees
- ◆ weak management of support arrangements
- ◆ little co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training

22. Effective use is made of targets both for individual staff and teams. Targets are related to training performance and inclusion including trainees' recruitment, progress, retention and achievement. Targets are also set for meeting trainees' review dates. Senior managers frequently review individuals and team performance against targets to meet the objectives of the business plan. Under performance is identified and appropriate actions taken which has resulted in retention rates improving annually by an average of 7 per cent over the past four years. JTL has a clear management structure with defined roles and responsibilities for the implementation of its plans. There are good internal and external communications. Training officers are well supported by administrative assistants based in the Wrexham office. Assistants are responsible for three training officers while senior administration assistants look after two officers each. They communicate regularly with each other, with all telephone calls being channelled through the Wrexham office and messages relayed promptly by mobile telephone or electronic mail. Staff, employers and subcontractors are fully informed of developments in the company and the training it offers. Staff make effective use of the ample opportunities to make their views known to senior managers. Management decisions are effectively communicated to staff through minutes which are published on the company's intranet. Employers and subcontractors work in partnership with JTL. This is facilitated by the frequent visits from JTL's staff, the written information they receive and the regular opportunities to meet as groups. JTL's staff, employers and subcontractors meet regularly at meetings of electrical training groups although representation of employers is not always complete, nor does the network cover all regions. Training officers generate comprehensive reports on trainees' progress and achievements, which are shared with employers. Senior training officers access reports which identify their team's performance against its targets and these are systematically reviewed at team meetings. Senior managers frequently review individual, team and company performance, actions are identified and promptly implemented where appropriate. There is effective management of subcontractors and focused monitoring visits are frequently made.

23. Many trainees are working on sites which are long distances away from their employers' premises. Assessments and reviews for these transient trainees do not

always take place when they should. Responsibility for their assessment and review still rests with their training officer, who is based near the employer. Informal arrangements are usually made by the trainees' training officer with another officer based nearer to the trainees' place of work to carry out assessments and reviews as they become due. There is little management control of these informal arrangements and they are not always effective. The company has identified this problem through its self-assessment process and appropriate corrective actions are being implemented. Where trainees' initial assessment identifies the need for the company to provide additional learning support, this is not always communicated to all those who need to know. The take-up of additional support is not routinely recorded and management is unable to quantify the full extent of it. Off-the-job training follows a schedule developed by JTL and is the same for all trainees. Most employers are unaware of this schedule. They are not able to direct trainees' on-the-job training to match off-the-job learning. When employers have the opportunity to choose which job a trainee should be sent to next, they are not able to make informed choices as to the best link available to complement their off-the-job training. Training officers help identify any gaps in trainees' experience and work with employers to fill them, rather than identifying and planning trainees' requirements with employers in advance.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

24. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with the quality assurance manager who reports to the general manager of corporate services, who in turn reports to the chief executive. A full-time internal auditor and an audit administrator are in post. A quality assurance manual, procedures and work instructions are available to all staff through the company's intranet. A quality assurance working party meets quarterly to discuss and ratify any proposed changes to policy, procedures and work instructions. The quality assurance manager audits procedures in line with a scheduled plan and any corrective actions identified are monitored to ensure compliance with the procedures. Performance and progress towards targets are discussed during the general managers' operations advisory group which usually meets immediately before the working party's meetings. Senior training officers are part of the working party and the advisory group and they cascade information to training officers through area team meetings. The company benchmarks itself against performance data produced by the contracted TECs and the NTP. In addition, it uses its own historic data of achievement of NVQs in the industry since 1994. Staff are set targets and apprentices' progress and achievements are monitored regularly. Managerial staff have access to summary reports giving details of achievements and performance across the country. The contracting TECs and the NTP regularly carry out external audits. In addition, external verifiers visit from the awarding body regularly. The company has held ISO 9002 accreditation since 1996 and it is currently evaluating the implications of the new ISO 9001 standards. All colleges and training centres are subject to annual inspection by JTL and bi-annually in conjunction with the JIB. All complaints received are copied to the quality assurance manager, who checks that the procedures are being followed. The training officers, senior training officers or the operations manager deal with



the actual complaint. Inspectors agreed with the content of the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-established quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ good improvements in performance and outcomes
- ◆ effective monitoring of off-the-job training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification
- ◆ some timescales for action not always met

25. There is a clear and comprehensive set of arrangements established, which assure the quality of training. The importance of quality assurance is widely understood at all levels throughout the company. Business and strategic planning meetings recognise the impact of quality assurance arrangements in respect of the development of a continuous improvement approach. At regular quarterly meetings of senior training officers and managers, they rigorously review operational and contractual issues and good minutes are available to all staff through the company's intranet. Feedback is formally obtained from apprentices using questionnaires and the results have been analysed carefully with required actions developed by senior managers. They include responses on regularity and effectiveness of reviews, quality of on- and off-the-job training, understanding of assessment processes, timescales for completion, and pastoral issues. Employers' questionnaires have been introduced more recently, but are not yet fully analysed. Employers also have the opportunity to give feedback through their trade association and through employer-group training meetings. An independent body carried out a comprehensive evaluation of early leavers in November 1998 and appropriate actions have been taken as a result of their report, resulting in improved achievement and retention rates of trainees. All company activities are subject to sound internal audit procedures and non-compliance reports are dealt with promptly. Progress of trainees is carefully evaluated through a comprehensive summary of individual training plans which include milestones, targets, assessment and achievement data.

26. Following involvement in the national pilot inspection undertaken by the TSC in January 1998, the company incorporated the results of the inspection to develop a regular library of half-yearly self-assessment reports. All staff are given the opportunity to contribute to the judgements contained in the report through conferences and meetings. The self-assessment report gave useful background information and was cross-referenced to clearly identified supporting evidence. A one-day conference was held for all staff to confirm the conclusions in the report. Employers, trainees and work-based recorders were not involved. The report was realistic in its judgements and inspectors agreed with most of the strengths, but some of the weaknesses in trainee support had not been recognised.

27. JTL views its subcontractors and employers as partners in its framework for providing effective, good-quality training. Subcontractors are subject to regular, formal monitoring of their performance against a range of standards designed to meet framework requirements. The checklist used includes; workshop facilities, tools and equipment, standards of practical and theory work, induction, health and safety, first aid, subcontractor staffing arrangements, portfolio and progress records. In order to influence consistency of what is taught in colleges, the company has designed its own scheme of work and learning packs which lecturers are required to follow. A centre-of-excellence scheme, involving colleges and training centres, is being developed to help share and celebrate best practice.

28. Internal verification is underdeveloped and not totally robust. Not all staff have completed their appropriate assessors' awards and most of the verification is undertaken at the end of training, rather than ongoing throughout training. Some of the timescales scheduled in action plans are not met and have to be rescheduled. Not all training officers submit information or paperwork at the required times, although actions have been taken to address the issues and improvements identified. All managers have attended courses on project management and give helpful feedback to senior managers if targets are missed.