



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 2000

BL Hairdressing Training

SUMMARY

BL Hairdressing Training offers good training in hairdressing, assessing trainees as soon as they are ready. Equal opportunities is satisfactory, being promoted well by staff throughout the company. Trainee support is good with clearly recorded and effective reviews, although trainees have inconsistent access to basic skills training. Management of training is good, with an excellent system for staff appraisal. Quality assurance is good with well-established quality assurance systems, although the planning of internal verification has not been fully introduced in all of the company's training centres.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good availability of assessment in the workplace
- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities throughout company
- ◆ well-recorded and effective reviews
- ◆ excellent staff appraisal system
- ◆ effective and well-established quality assurance procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ late introduction of key skills training
- ◆ inconsistent availability of basic skills training
- ◆ inconsistent internal verification practice

INTRODUCTION

1. BL Hairdressing Training (BLHT) is a privately owned company which was established in 1984 to provide training for trainees in its own group of six hairdressing salons. In 1997, the company expanded to take more government-funded trainees. It contracts with three training and enterprise councils (TECs) to provide work-based training. These are Tees Valley, County Durham and Northumberland TECs. For the purposes of this inspection, Northumberland is the co-ordinating TEC. The company employs 19 staff within its training centres. The managing director has overall responsibility for the training within the company. The company has three training centres, in Darlington, Middlesbrough and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Training centres at both Newcastle upon Tyne and Darlington have specialist training salons which operate on a commercial basis. All training is given within the company's training centres and within the work placements trainees have in salons. The company has no subcontracting arrangements for training. There are 222 trainees working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 1, 2 and 3. They are foundation and advanced modern apprentices or on other work-based training programmes for young people. The managing director manages the TEC contracts. The company recruits its trainees from the Northeast of England, which includes Northumberland, Tyneside, County Durham and Teesside. County Durham covers an area of 862 square miles, and has a population of 507,000. Most of the county is rural, with more than half of its residents living in settlements of less than 38,000. The county stretches from the North Sea in the east to the Pennines in the west. To the north of the county are the urban areas of Tyneside and Wearside; to the south are Tees Valley and North Yorkshire. The county has a variety of economic difficulties, such as those associated with rural areas and with areas of long-term unemployment. For many years, County Durham was a centre for traditional industries like coal mining, steel production, railway engineering and heavy engineering. Since their decline, the local economy has become quite diverse, with a greater balance between manufacturing and service industries. Less than 1 per cent of the total population of County Durham are from minority ethnic groups, according to the 1991 census figures. In October 2000, the unemployment rate in the area was 5.4 per cent in comparison with the national rate of 3.4 per cent. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 35.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

2. Northumberland is largely rural, covering an area of over 5,000 square miles with a population of 307,500. Population density is low. People from minority ethnic groups in the area represent less than 1 per cent of the population. The economic heartland of the county is concentrated in the south-eastern corner and the transport infrastructure is focused heavily in this area. The manufacturing base of the county has suffered badly in recent years, owing to the collapse of traditional industries such as coal mining and fishing. Most employment opportunities in Northumberland are in the public sector, manufacturing and retail. Much employment is seasonal in nature, owing to the reliance on tourism as a

source of revenue and employment. In October 2000, the unemployment rate was 4.8 per cent. In 1999 the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above was 45.1 per cent.

3. Tees Valley covers the authorities of Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Hartlepool and Darlington. The total population of the Tees Valley area is 653,700. Unemployment in these authorities in October 2000 was 8.4 per cent, 8.9 per cent, 6.2 per cent, 7.4 per cent and 4.8 per cent respectively. The Tees Valley district has a higher level of social deprivation than the rest of County Durham. Middlesbrough is ranked at 24 in the list of 366 districts in England for social deprivation, with Hartlepool at 37 in the list. The service sector accounts for 67 per cent of employment in the Tees Valley. However, manufacturing continues to provide 22 per cent of employment opportunities in the area. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs at grade C and above in the constituent areas of the Tees Valley region were between 31 and 45 per cent. Overall, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups account for less than 2 per cent of the population in the Tees Valley.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The company has been producing a self-assessment report for the last three years. The managing director produced the self-assessment report for this inspection with contributions from staff, some trainees and some employers. The self-assessment report accurately identified many of the company's weaknesses. However, many of the strengths given were found by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses which were not identified within the self-assessment report. They agreed with the grades given for hairdressing, equal opportunities, trainee support and management of training, and they awarded a higher grade for quality assurance.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at the company's premises in October 2000. They met with the company's chairman, managers, staff, trainees and employers. Inspectors interviewed 55 trainees, visited 14 work placements, and interviewed 16 employers. They also conducted 26 interviews with staff and observed 15 training sessions, four assessments and eight reviews. The grades for these training sessions, assessments and reviews are included in the following table.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Hair & beauty		23	4			27
Total	0	23	4	0	0	27

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hairdressing

Grade 2

6. BLHT has 222 trainees working towards hairdressing NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. Of these, there are 124 advanced modern apprentices, 91 foundation modern apprentices and seven trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people. All trainees are employed. Three trainees are on NVQs at level 1, 173 on NVQs at level 2 and 46 on NVQs at level 3 in hairdressing. Most of the trainees also undertake customer service NVQs at levels 2 or 3 and sometimes achieve both qualifications. There are currently 130 work placements. Trainees choose to attend one of the three training centres for off-the-job training. The Newcastle and Darlington training centres offer off-the-job training in both practical and theory work. The Middlesbrough training centre offers theory training, and practical work is undertaken in the work placements. Trainees attend the training centres once a fortnight in Newcastle and Darlington and every four weeks at Middlesbrough. Trainees are assessed during the practical off-the-job training, and in the work placements in Newcastle and Darlington. In the Middlesbrough area, all trainees are assessed in the workplace. There are 12 salons with staff who have assessors'

awards who can assess some trainees. Trainees are employed in a variety of salons, ranging from small village salons to large regional chains. There are three full-time training centre managers who co-ordinate the training in each training centre. Each training centre manager works with a number of tutor/assessors. There are four full-time and five part-time tutor/assessors. Of the 12 members of the training team, 10 have teaching qualifications, all are trained assessors and four are trained as internal verifiers. Also, some staff have achieved, or are working towards, the key skills practitioner/assessor awards. All training centre managers are qualified as basic skills tutors. In 1998, 53 per cent of trainees stayed until the end of their programmes and, of these, 62 per cent completed their individual training plans. In 1997, BLHT took responsibility for trainees from another local training provider which was closing. Some of these trainees left during the transition. This meant that 49 per cent of all BLHT's trainees stayed until the end of their programmes that year. Of these, 66 per cent completed their individual training programmes and 30 per cent remained in training. The retention rate since April 2000 is 91 per cent. The inspectors agreed with three of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but two relating to qualifications and working relationships were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified two new strengths. They did not find three weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report but did find a new weakness concerning key skills. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned off-the-job training
- ◆ flexible programmes to meet individuals' needs
- ◆ good availability of assessment in the workplace
- ◆ good ratio of trainers to trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient range of hairdressing clients for practical sessions
- ◆ late introduction of key skills training

7. Training is well structured to facilitate and encourage learning and ensure trainees develop the necessary practical skills for their NVQs. The training centre providing both practical and theory training produces an annual timetable of this training, a copy of which trainees receive during their induction. This is also used as a checklist by trainees to monitor their achievement of units as they progress through the training programme. There are clear, detailed lesson plans for theory sessions for the level 2 NVQ programme which are linked to the practical skills training. These plans define the objectives for the sessions, the resources to be used and the methods of training. There are detailed and well-produced guidance

notes for tutors for the level 3 NVQ programme, designed to enable individual trainees to progress at their own rate. There is effective use of a wide range of learning packs which have been developed by the company. These materials are used across the company to assist in consistency in training. The learning packs are well designed and use an appropriate learning strategy for each subject to be covered. They incorporate good diagrams and systems to check and reinforce learning. There is a pack for each of the NVQ units in the hairdressing programmes. There is also a series of projects linked with these packs. Trainees use these for revision purposes and they find them useful and informative. Theory sessions are designed to interest and motivate trainees with the use of videos, flip charts, overhead projectors and interactive work. Visiting speakers with specialist knowledge are used to provide additional training in colouring and perming techniques. Trainees are invited to evaluate these courses and this evaluation is included in their portfolios. There is an annual competition for trainees to prepare a model to be photographed, and the winner participates in a professional photo-shoot session. Trainees are also encouraged to participate in regional competitions, and have considerable success. All this helps to motivate trainees and build their confidence.

8. The accommodation at all the training centres is pleasant and welcoming. However, some of the practical areas and classrooms become crowded when all trainees are in attendance. There are sufficient resources for all trainees and good commercial products are used for all treatments. Teaching resources are varied and of a good professional standard. Staff work very effectively as a team. They share ideas and uphold high professional standards to set a good example for the trainees.

9. Attendance for off-the-job training is flexible to meet the varying needs of both trainees and employers. Days of attendance can be changed during programmes. This is helpful to employers who have more than one trainee and have difficulties in releasing them all on the same day. Trainees can also attend for extra sessions in either theory or practical work if they need to. Trainees may choose which of the three training centres to attend. Attendance patterns can be varied at the different training centres, with trainees electing to attend more or less frequently, depending upon their progress and needs. Those trainees using the Middlesbrough training centre to learn theory while having practical training and assessment in the workplace can attend another training centre if they want extra support for practical training.

10. BLHT has a clearly defined policy on group size. This identifies that there should be a minimum of four and a maximum of 10 trainees for every trainer in any training session. This is seen in theory sessions and achieved by several staff teaching in practical sessions. These small groups ensure that trainees receive individual tuition. This ratio of trainers to trainees in practical sessions ensures that trainees do not have to wait for help and support when working with hairdressing clients. It enables trainees to progress more effectively because they receive constant attention. Trainees also have regular tutorial sessions in their work placements, when they receive extra theory or practical training as required.

11. Assessments are carried out both on and off the job. Review visits can also be extended to include assessments. Trainees are aware that they can contact their assessor to be assessed in their work placements. BLHT's assessors are always available and respond quickly to trainees' requests. Trainees understand the assessment process and their roles and responsibilities within it. They are quick to recognise assessment opportunities in the workplace when suitable hairdressing clients are available. The trainees work with the assessor and their employer to set both long- and short-term targets, and agree how and when they will be assessed. Assessments are well planned with clear written and verbal feedback given to trainees. Logbooks of assessments are well maintained, and trainees are encouraged to begin their assessments early on in their programmes. Some trainees have completed assessments on basic tasks within their first month on their programmes. During the last two years, both retention and achievement rates have improved. Achievement rates have increased from 62 to 66 per cent from 1998 to 1999. In the current year, 91 per cent of trainees are still in training, and this is well above the average for the hair and beauty sector. BLHT has designed a new Internet site. This site allows the tracking, on a unit basis, of each trainees' progress for training and assessments. Currently, the system is having security codes added, and when this is completed all employers and trainees should be able to track individuals' progress. Some employers can already use this facility.

12. Although many hairdressing clients use the training centres, the range of clients is small and does not always provide the necessary practice for trainees across a wide number of treatments. This results in trainees practising on each other or using hairdressers' head blocks for practical work. BLHT offers free treatments on a regular basis and encourages trainees to bring friends and family to the training centres to receive these. It has a promotional campaign to increase the number and variety of hairdressing clients, but currently it is difficult for trainees to gain sufficient practice in some skills at the training centres.

13. Trainees who have recently started training are introduced to key skills at the beginning of the programme and receive guidance on how they will collect and cross-reference information. However, this is a very recent development experienced only by trainees who started training within the last few weeks. For other trainees, training in key skills has started late in their programme. Some foundation and advanced modern apprentices have completed 12 months of training before beginning work towards accreditation of key skills, despite the fact that key skills training is a mandatory requirement. Naturally occurring evidence generated during the first months of the programme is not being used towards key skills accreditation. Trainees have a poor understanding of key skills. They are unsure which ones they are undertaking and how they relate to their occupational activities. Although they regularly undertake activities in the workplace related to key skills, trainees have a poor understanding of how to relate them to their qualifications. Trainers undertake cross-referencing of key skills evidence with the necessary standards for the trainees, which further exacerbates trainees' lack of understanding.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. BLHT has an equal opportunities policy which is reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in legislation. There are further amendments to take account of the results of internal audits. The policy was originally published in 1996 and has been amended and reissued twice since then. Employers are supplied with an information pack, which includes a copy of BLHT's own equal opportunities policy together with a complaints and harassment policy. Equal opportunities is a standard agenda item at monthly staff meetings. There is an equal opportunities co-ordinator among the staff, who is part of the equal opportunities network groups in both Northumberland and Durham TECs. The equal opportunities co-ordinator, along with the managing director, attends equal opportunities training events. A written evaluation of these events is prepared, summarising important information, which is shared with all staff during monthly meetings. The Middlesbrough training centre is on the ground floor of a multi-occupancy building, so access for those with mobility difficulties is good. However, the other two centres have stairs to access the buildings.

15. Less than 2 per cent of the population within the area covered by BLHT are from minority ethnic communities, and there are currently no trainees from minority ethnic groups. There are 10 men training with BLHT, which gives a lower proportion than the national average in the hairdressing industry, which is around 8 per cent. The self-assessment report has a balance of strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors found some of the strengths given to be no more than normal practice, such as those about the detailed action plan and providing equal opportunities training during induction. Inspectors found other strengths and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective complaints and harassment procedure
- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities throughout company

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ little monitoring of equal opportunities

16. The complaints and harassment procedure is clearly understood by all trainees and is rigorously applied by staff. A full and clear explanation of the policy is given to trainees at their induction and they are encouraged to use it should the need arise, at any time during their training. Examples of complaints indicate that trainees have confidence in the procedure and a strong belief in the support

provided to them by BLHT's training staff. All complaints are investigated immediately. Trainees are confident that their complaints are taken seriously from the outset. Examples of complaints against employers show that the contract with the employer may be temporarily suspended while an investigation into a complaint is carried out. If an employer is found not to be conforming to the requirements of BLHT's own equal opportunities policy, the contract is cancelled and no trainees are placed with that employer again.

17. Equality of opportunity is given a high profile by BLHT's staff. It is emphasised to trainees at their induction when they receive a copy of BLHT's equal opportunities policy. There is a standard equal opportunities training session which is given at each of BLHT's three training centres. All trainees have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues. Employers are well aware of BLHT's policy. Many have adopted BLHT's policy for their own use. Good use is made of a video and accompanying case studies purchased from the TEC as a training resource in order to promote equal opportunities among trainees. This training method aids trainees' understanding of equal opportunities issues and makes the training more memorable. Achievements connected with equal opportunities issues are publicised by BLHT, such as the story of one trainee with BLHT who had a genetic disability affecting her hands and who succeeded in achieving both her intended qualifications and employment. This was reported in local newspapers as well as in the TEC's newsletter to promote equal access to training for people with disabilities. Publicity leaflets carry a note advising that BLHT is an equal opportunities employer. This message had been omitted from the latest leaflets received from the printers, so the company is currently correcting this error by recalling the leaflets and attaching a sticker to the back of them with this information.

18. Equal opportunities data are satisfactorily recorded on a database. Statistical details relating to gender, disability, and ethnicity are broken down into separate columns and printed out each month for the managing director. No further analysis of the data is undertaken. This information is only available about trainees beginning training since April 2000 and so as yet no comparisons can be made with data on trainees who began training before that date.

19. There is some equal opportunities monitoring, but procedures are new and have only recently been implemented. The monitoring activities cannot yet be judged for effectiveness as they have yielded insufficient information. The equal opportunities co-ordinator has also been appointed only recently from among the staff team at one training centre. The equal opportunities co-ordinator has instigated both an audit of the suitability of premises to provide equal access and equal opportunities becoming a standard agenda item in all staff meetings. Some actions becoming apparent as necessary from the monitoring procedures so far, such as meeting with a national body for racial equality to discuss the recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic communities, has not taken place. The equal opportunities co-ordinator plans to attend staff meetings at the other two training centres in order to improve staff's awareness of equal opportunities but this has not yet happened.

20. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is reviewed approximately every two months as part of the review of progress undertaken with each trainee. At that time, employers' awareness is also reviewed and recorded on the trainees' review sheet. As yet, this review is vague and mainly results in a general comment, or a note stating that there are no equal opportunities issues to be addressed with the employer.

21. Two of BLHT's training centres are accessible only by stairs and so, in order to accommodate anyone with mobility difficulties, a statement has been added to the initial application forms. This statement advises potential trainees to contact the training centre if they wish to arrange to meet a staff member at a more convenient location. However, no examples of this option having been used are yet available.

22. BLHT has an action plan, which identifies improvements it is to make to its equal opportunity practices. Implementation of this plan is currently on target and stages of achievement for each identified action are clearly described, together with results of early reviews of the action plan. BLHT is self-critical and not complacent about equal opportunities issues. The action plan drives forward continuous improvement in this aspect.

Trainee support

Grade 2

23. Trainees are recruited onto the programmes through referrals from the careers service and salon employers, or by trainees contacting BLHT directly. The company promotes its programmes at careers conventions and in schools. Some trainees are placed in salons for work trials, so that they can consider whether they are making the right career choice and the employers can assess whether the trainees could continue training at the salons. All trainees are employed. They attend an induction programme which includes information on the foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship programmes, health and safety, NVQ work-based assessment, progress reviews, and also includes equal opportunities training. All trainees receive an initial assessment of their basic skills, which is graded and used to determine a suitable programme for each individual trainee. Prior learning, qualifications and experience are also identified during the initial assessment. An individual training plan is agreed with each trainee. Trainees are visited in their workplace, at least every four weeks, by a tutor/assessor who carries out work-based assessments and progress reviews. Additional support arrangements for trainees are flexible to meet each individual's needs. The self-assessment report was accurate in describing some of the strengths found, such as the comprehensive induction and initial assessment, and effective progress reviews. Others were found by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified an additional strength. The self-assessment report was also accurate in recognising BLHT's weaknesses. All weaknesses have now begun to be addressed. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive recruitment procedures
- ◆ thorough and memorable induction
- ◆ well-recorded, effective reviews
- ◆ various additional measures to support trainees' progress
- ◆ regular and varied celebration of trainees' achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills abilities
- ◆ inconsistent availability of basic skills training

24. The company has an extensive marketing strategy to recruit trainees. It has good links with local schools and the careers services. The company's recruitment advisor arranges and, with the tutor/assessors, attends recruitment events which promote hairdressing as a professional career to young people. The activities emphasise the benefits of the foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks, additional qualifications and key skills. Both schools and the careers services have been issued with copies of the company's hairdressing CD-ROM which contains examples of the company's Internet site pages and mock interview sessions. The company has also worked with disaffected school pupils in year 10 to encourage them to consider training while working as a route of progression. It supports various local initiatives which involve pupils at risk of exclusion, or who have been excluded. These young people attend the training centre for half a day each week, for 20 weeks, and train towards a hairdressing NVQ at level 1. The programme also includes employability skills such as interview techniques, mock interviews, completing application forms and developing a curriculum vitae.

25. Trainees may obtain their own employment in a salon, or are assisted in finding a suitable position by BLHT's staff. Some trainees undertake a trial period of between four and six weeks, which is carefully monitored by the staff and the potential employer. It enables both employers and trainees to assess the trainees' suitability for employment and their occupational skills. After successfully securing employment, trainees receive a thorough, comprehensive induction at one of the company's three training centres. Induction is well planned and structured to cover all aspects of trainees' experience while on their programmes. It includes health and safety, employment conditions, pay and details of the company's organisational structure with key contact names and telephone numbers. It also covers details of the foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks, NVQ assessment procedures, and the role of the assessors and internal verifiers. Equal opportunities is covered, together with details of the company's grievance and complaints procedures. Once on their programmes, trainees have a further induction at their salons which involves the employer. This is to ensure that the relevant health and safety checks are made in the workplace and that both the employer and trainees are aware of the requirements of the training programme.

26. All trainees undertake a thorough initial assessment. It includes basic numeracy, reading and writing, spelling and grammar, and hand to eye co-ordination, but it does not include an assessment of practical skills or key skills. A new system has been developed and is about to be introduced, which cross-references the assessment of the trainee to the key skills requirements of the hairdressing programmes. Prior relevant experience and qualifications are also noted, and some attention is paid to prior learning. For example, if trainees have achieved NVQs at level 1 and are progressing to level 2, then a note is made of this earlier achievement, and if trainees have some salon experience then any previous assessments are recorded.

27. Additional learning support needs are recorded on trainees' individual training plans at the induction, but there is no systematic approach to providing basic skills or key skills training. At one training centre, there are some planned basic or key skills support sessions to which trainees can be referred. Although additional learning support is being given by the tutor/assessors, this is not linked with the initial assessment and so some time passes before some trainees' learning needs are addressed. The training centre managers are trained as basic skills tutors and work packs have recently been designed to support basic skills and key skills training. It is too early to evaluate their effectiveness. There are plans to address the inconsistency in learning support between the training centres.

28. Progress reviews are frequent and thorough. The tutor/assessors visit the trainees in their salons every three to four weeks. The visits may be more frequent, for example, when a trainee needs additional assessments or further training. The reviews are well recorded and used to set both short- and long-term targets for training and assessment. Trainees are encouraged to identify both their strengths and weaknesses, and appropriate targets are set to build upon and address them. Any additional learning, such as attending a manufacturer's cutting or colouring courses, is recorded separately and trainees are asked to write an account of the learning and skills they gained. A summative report of the review is drawn up by the tutor/assessor and agreed with the employer and trainee. The trainees' individual training plans are also updated at each review. Trainees, generally, are aware of their progress towards their qualifications. There is a section in the review form for recording advice and guidance on career or training progression for those trainees completing their programmes.

29. There are many varied examples of additional support being provided to enable trainees to complete their qualifications. They include extra off-the-job training days with individual tutorial support for trainees who are at risk of not achieving their learning targets. Other examples include additional visits by tutor/assessors to carry out both practical training and additional work-based assessments in the trainees' salons. There are also examples of intervention by training staff where trainees are dissatisfied with their on-the-job salon training to give trainees more practical training in the training centres. Pastoral support is confidentially recorded, where appropriate. Other, more personal, problems affecting trainees are also dealt with and trainees can be referred confidentially to specialist agencies for support.

30. Certificates of merit are awarded to trainees for outstanding performance. Some trainees have received certificates for excellence in theory or practical work, and have been nominated for a 'trainee of the year' award with Teeside TEC and with a national professional hairdressing body. Individual trainees' case studies are published on the company's Internet site and displayed prominently within the training centres, explaining their achievement. NVQ certificates are awarded at BLHT's awards ceremony.

Management of training

Grade 2

31. BLHT was established in 1984, and currently operates from three sites in Newcastle upon Tyne, Middlesbrough and Darlington. In addition to the chairman and managing director, there are 17 staff responsible for the administration and provision of training. A full-time member of staff responsible to the managing director manages each training centre. Monthly staff meetings are held at each training centre, and there are also monthly meetings of the training centre managers with the managing director. Meetings are used to review targets, and to share ideas and suggestions for improvement. All meetings are minuted. The management structure is clear and fully understood by all staff. Training staff have appropriate occupational experience, and hold relevant qualifications. There are quarterly appraisals for all staff, and this process is linked to staff development. Staff attend courses and workshops organised by a number of external companies, including local TECs. There is also in-house training for staff organised by BLHT's managers. All staff receive personal targets each year in the form of a job plan. Each member of staff has a written job description, and established procedures for the selection and appointment of staff are used for recruitment. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report identified similar strengths and weaknesses to those found by inspectors. Inspectors re-worded the strengths given and found an additional strength. They also found an additional weakness regarding the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent appraisal practice
- ◆ effective use of staff resources
- ◆ good use of team and individual targets for staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of established system for extracting management information
- ◆ insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training.

32. The style of management is open and supportive, and communication is good and regular. Staff meetings, for example, are effective in providing a forum for both giving and receiving information required to enable staff and managers to carry out their responsibilities. Staff are clear about their job roles, and line management responsibilities are well defined. The managing director remains close to the training and assessment activities, and is accessible to all staff. There is an open approach to communication across BLHT, and staff feel comfortable in contributing suggestions and ideas to managers for improvement to training practices.

33. The importance of staff as a key resource of the company is clearly recognised by managers, and a high priority is given to staff development. The system used to appraise and promote staff performance is well developed, rigorous, and closely linked to short- and long-term staff training targets. Each member of staff has a quarterly appraisal with their line manager. The appraisal is conducted against clear criteria, and their performance is graded, with agreed remedial action in instances where performance is judged to be less than satisfactory. The process is conducted in a fair and constructive manner. Staff being appraised are given appropriate opportunity to offer additional information to assist the process and discuss the development of their job role and related training in the context of the company's targets and objectives.

34. The staff development programme is designed to increase the professional competence of staff, and their value to the company. A number of staff are currently working towards key skills practitioners and assessors' awards. Training centre managers have undertaken training in audit techniques, and equal opportunities training is planned for a member of staff with a new role in the promotion of equal opportunities. Staff roles utilise staff's experience and interests, and include responsibilities for recruitment, equal opportunities, and key skills. The deployment of staff on behalf of the company is effective, and is a good use of staff resources.

35. Team targets set are mainly in the context of compliance with the TECs' contracts. However, BLHT also has a marketing plan with identified strategies and tactics for achieving objectives. This plan helps identify both team and individual targets, examples being the allocation to each assessor of a target to recruit one new work placement salon each month, and to liaise with and promote the company to designated schools. Targets are measurable, and are monitored through monthly staff and management meetings.

36. The company has recently introduced a new management information system, part of an innovative Internet site. The system is just becoming useful as a method of monitoring trainees' progress and cannot yet be used to provide evidence for managers to reach reliable decisions about annual performance, or to establish realistic targets against which to measure future performance. Further development work is being done on the Internet site to expand its usefulness.

37. Communication with employers is good, and there are visits to salons by training staff at least once every month. Such contact does not, however, always lead to an increase in employers' involvement in training. Nor does it improve employers' understanding of the training programmes. Employers do not receive a copy of the annual training plan, and there are no formal meetings with employers by staff to discuss issues such as key skills or other framework requirements. There is little co-ordination between practical salon-based training and theoretical training provided in the training centres. The company has introduced strategies to improve employers' understanding of government-funded training, including by putting together an informative information pack for employers. At two of the training centres there is poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Trainees receive practical training in the work placements, and employers are insufficiently informed about trainees' theoretical training given at the training centres to make links with trainees' daily experiences in the salons.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

38. Quality assurance arrangements within the company have been developed over a number of years, and currently meet the quality standards required by the three TECs with which BLHT contracts. The national quality standard ISO 9001 was achieved in 1993, and has been re-accredited every three years to date. The company is working towards the Investors in People Standard. The quality assurance policy and procedures are issued to all staff, and revisions are dated and recorded. Where appropriate, working procedures have been cross-referenced to *Raising the Standard*. Responsibility for quality assurance rests with the managing director, and staff are clear about this role, and their responsibilities. The training centre managers carry out an annual internal audit, and this results in changes to, and updating of, the quality assurance manual. All staff were involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report, with individual training centres being allocated responsibility for taking a lead in preparing an aspect of the report. At the time of inspection, some of the weaknesses had been rectified, and progress had been made on all others. Inspectors identified additional strengths to those in the self-assessment report, and awarded a higher grade than the grade given by the company for quality assurance.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective and well-established quality assurance procedures
- ◆ good use of internal audit
- ◆ thorough and realistic self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inconsistent internal verification practice
- ◆ insufficient use of observations of training to improve quality

39. The quality assurance framework of policies and working procedures is mature and central to training. Managers clearly recognise the importance of a quality assurance system which is understood and used by staff as a working document to maintain its policies and procedures and meet targets. All staff receive a copy of the quality assurance manual, and use it for the areas of training in which they are involved. Each training centre manager is responsible to the managing director for the operation of the quality assurance system within their training centres, and minutes of staff meetings at each training centre confirm the importance of quality assurance procedures in contributing towards successful adherence to policies. BLHT has recently appointed a quality assurance co-ordinator to oversee the administration of the quality assurance system on a day-to-day basis. The effectiveness of the quality assurance system is enhanced by good understanding of procedures and working practices by staff. All staff are required to self-assess their own performance. Monthly meetings at each training centre are used to identify and share good practice. Working procedures in one training centre will be discussed by staff throughout the company to find out if the practice is good and can be shared elsewhere. There are, however, no joint meetings of staff from all training centres, and there is a lost opportunity here for further sharing of good practice.

40. An internal audit system monitors adherence to quality assurance procedures. The managing director plans an annual audit programme, which is carried out by the managing director and the training centre managers. Training centre managers have received training in audit practice. A selection of procedures are subject to audit each month in training centres, and where non-compliance is identified, corrective action is agreed and monitored, with target dates for implementation. The findings of all audit activity are recorded centrally by the quality assurance co-ordinator, and are used as a source of information to influence change and to update quality assurance procedures.

41. The practice of self-assessment is thorough, and is well established within the company. As with other quality assurance processes, its purpose and value are promoted by managers, and understood by staff. The first self-assessment report was produced by the company in 1998, and was structured using the quality standards and guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. Staff are genuine partners in the process of identifying strengths and weaknesses across the company. The report produced in August 2000 and used as part of the current inspection process included input from all staff, with each training centre taking responsibility for examining and reporting on specific aspects. All three training centre managers contributed to the occupational areas of the report. A sample of trainees from each training centre contributed to the judgements on the company, and input from employers was also included in the evidence prepared for the report. The self-assessment report was well presented, with helpful introductions to each area. Supporting evidence was sufficient and, where appropriate, accurately cross-referenced. Following the preparation of the self-assessment report, an action plan was produced to remedy the weaknesses identified, and consolidate the strengths.

42. One training centre does not pre-plan internal verification. There is an overall strategy for the planning and implementation of internal verification in the company, but this has not been fully introduced in all the training centres. The importance of ongoing internal verification is not reflected in the internal verification carried out in one training centre during the current contract year. There is no evidence of internal verification of the work of salon staff responsible for assessing trainees in the workplace. Good practice in the best use of internal verifiers' time has not been shared between training centres. The external verifier has not identified this.

43. There is no overall system for evaluating training programmes, or for assessing their benefit to trainees and employers. Training is observed as part of the annual audit programme to ensure that procedures are followed correctly, but this does not focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the training programmes. Some information is gathered from trainees, but the questions asked produce data which are often not directly relevant to the quality of training.