



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2001

# eTraining

## SUMMARY

eTraining provides well-structured and effective training in customer service, which trainees enjoy. Trainees are successful in gaining their NVQs and in completing their advanced modern apprenticeship framework. The company provides good guidance for trainees and employers on equal opportunities. Trainees receive an effective induction. They have detailed individual training plans, which take into account both their personal and training needs. Training is well managed. Quality assurance is satisfactory. Feedback from trainees is acted upon effectively. The self-assessment process is thorough but is not an integral part of the quality assurance system.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Retailing & customer service	2

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

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent achievement rates
- ◆ well designed and imaginative training materials
- ◆ effective coaching sessions
- ◆ good guidance on equal opportunities for trainees and employers
- ◆ thorough and comprehensive induction
- ◆ well-devised individual training plans for trainees
- ◆ careful vetting of prospective employers
- ◆ well-managed training
- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees
- ◆ thorough and well-presented self-assessment report

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no clear objectives for trainees' progress reviews
- ◆ inadequate staff appraisal
- ◆ unsatisfactory arrangements for obtaining feedback from employers

## INTRODUCTION

1. eTraining was created in 1998 by its owner manager. In addition to the owner manager, who is the managing director, there are four members of staff, of whom one is full time and three are part time. Four staff are qualified as assessors. The company was originally involved in working with car retailers but has extended its work in customer service training to other sectors. It now offers training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in customer service, vehicle sales, information technology and business administration at levels 2 and 3. The company has 21 trainees. Of these 20 are working towards an NVQ in customer service at level 3 and one is on an advanced modern apprenticeship in information technology. As there was only one trainee in the area of information technology, it was not inspected.

2. The company is based in Beckenham in the London Borough of Bromley. It contracts with SOLOTEC, the South London Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and Business Link, to provide advanced modern apprenticeships for young people in the areas of north Kent, east Surrey and Southeast London. Most of the working population in this area commutes to London. Most of the employment in the local area is provided by small companies employing fewer than 60 people. The unemployment rate in the Borough of Bromley is 3 per cent, compared with the rate in the Greater London area of 3.4 per cent. The unemployment rate in some other boroughs in the area served by the TEC is as high as 8 per cent. In the area served by the TEC as a whole, 11.8 per cent of the population is from minority ethnic groups. In some London boroughs, this proportion is as high as 23 per cent and in the county of Kent as a whole, it is only 2.5 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of 16 year olds in Bromley who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 47.9 per cent, compared with 50.3 per cent in Kent, and the national average of 49.2 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The company produced its first self-assessment report in July 2000. An updated report was produced in September 2000 and further amendments were made to it just before the inspection in January 2001. The owner manager wrote the report after consultation with staff, trainees and employers. The TEC provided advice and guidance on the format of the self-assessment report. The company drew up an action plan to rectify weaknesses identified through self-assessment.

4. Two inspectors spent eight days with the company in January 2001. They interviewed nine trainees, including the one trainee taking information technology, five employers and all members of staff. Inspectors looked at internal and external verifiers' reports, the company's business plan, trainees' files and action plans, eight trainees' portfolios, training materials and documents relating to quality assurance.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### **Retailing & customer service**

**Grade 2**

5. There are 20 trainees on advanced modern apprenticeships in customer service. All are working towards an NVQ in customer service at level 3 and key skills. The trainees receive coaching in customer service skills in the workplace from two members of staff, who are also responsible for assessing them and carrying out their progress reviews. The assessors usually visit trainees fortnightly. The trainees work through a training manual, which is divided into 10 sections or 'challenges'. Trainees are employed in a wide range of small companies in the car sales and the service sectors. In 1998-99, seven trainees started advanced modern apprenticeship programmes. All achieved their NVQ at level 3 and six completed the apprenticeship framework. In 1999-2000, of 16 trainees who started their programme, 15 completed the apprenticeship framework, and one trainee left the programme early. The self-assessment report identified 14 strengths. Inspectors agreed with eight of them. They did not agree with one of the strengths, considered two strengths to be no more than normal practice and considered three others more appropriate to the areas of trainee support and quality assurance. Inspectors agreed with one of the five weaknesses identified in the report and identified a further weakness. Two weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection. The other two weaknesses were more relevant to the company's marketing strategy than to trainees' experience. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ excellent achievement rates
- ◆ well-designed and imaginative training materials
- ◆ effective coaching sessions
- ◆ detailed assessors' notes

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no responsibility given to trainees for managing their evidence and portfolios

6. The trainees work through well-designed and imaginative training materials based upon the 10 challenges set out in the training manual. The 10 challenges take trainees through all of the theory and practical work necessary to demonstrate customer service competently in the workplace. The trainees are required to draw up their own detailed personal development plan, which is then used to guide their training throughout the programme. The materials include a section on the type of work activities trainees undertake. These materials incorporate quizzes and check lists for trainees to complete at the end of each section to test their own knowledge and understanding. Trainees have fortnightly meetings with their assessor. At each meeting, they agree targets for working through the challenges, which they have to achieve before the next meeting. The trainees make good progress in acquiring customer service skills and their assessor monitors their performance closely. Trainees enjoy using and working through the challenges and recognise that they help them to improve their performance.

7. The training manual has chapters on different aspects of customer service. The manual is well written and broken into short sections which trainees can easily work through. The manual provides excellent examples of how customer service can be applied in everyday circumstances. Trainees can apply the lessons they learn to their own experience in the workplace. eTraining's assessors also coach the trainees individually on customer service skills and provide guidance in areas such as using the telephone and understanding customers' body language. The assessors liaise closely with employers to provide the most suitable method of training. Assessors give their time unstintingly. For example, one assessor visits a trainee on Saturday mornings to provide training when the employer is less busy. The employers and trainees have a high regard for the skill and expertise which the assessors have as trainers, and for their knowledge of customer service techniques.

8. On their fortnightly visits to trainees, assessors also carry out observations of trainees' performance in the workplace. Detailed records of these observations are kept and are used as evidence in the trainees' NVQ portfolios. These records show how the trainees meet the NVQ standards. They provide an accurate picture of how the trainees operate at work, their level of expertise and the extent of their progress. Trainees make rapid progress towards achieving their NVQ and acquiring key skills. The average length of time for trainees to complete their advanced modern apprenticeship framework is 29 weeks.

9. The assessors do not enable the trainees to exercise enough initiative in the assessment process. Although assessors plan some assessments together with trainees, this is not always recorded. The trainees are not given responsibility for managing their portfolios. The assessors keep the portfolios. Some trainees have access to their portfolios only during their fortnightly meetings with their assessors. The assessor places the evidence in the portfolio and cross-references it to the NVQ standards. One assessor regularly takes the notes which trainees provide on how he or she has demonstrated the NVQ competencies and word processes them for the trainee. These notes are then presented as a record of an observation of an NVQ assessment. The assessor does not enable the trainees to exercise enough responsibility for producing evidence for their portfolios. The trainees are not always able to identify how much progress they have made towards achievement of their NVQ.

10. Trainees' retention and achievement rates have been excellent over the past two years. Trainees usually achieve all the targets on their individual training plan within six months. In 1998-99, 86 per cent of trainees completed their advanced modern apprenticeship framework. In 1999-2000, this proportion rose to 94 per cent.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 2**

11. eTraining has an equal opportunities policy which meets contractual requirements. The current policy was recently reviewed and updated. The policy has been issued to all trainees and employers. Prospective employers are vetted in terms of their promotion of equal opportunities and their policies are kept on file. The principles of equal opportunities are explained to trainees during their induction. Assessors check trainees' understanding of equal opportunities when they visit the trainees in the workplace. The company's promotional literature contains a statement of commitment to equal opportunities. The company aims to meet the targets for equal opportunities set by the TEC and these are referred to in the self-assessment report. In the period from March 2000 until the beginning of the year 2001, 48 per cent of those starting programmes were young men and 52 per cent were young women. Sixteen per cent of trainees were from minority ethnic groups. There were no trainees who had declared themselves as having a disability. The premises of all employers which were visited were accessible to those with mobility problems. Equal opportunities is a standing agenda item at staff meetings. Inspectors agreed with three of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. They found two additional strengths and awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough vetting of equal opportunities practices of prospective employers
- ◆ good guidance on equal opportunities for employers
- ◆ effective guidance for trainees on equal opportunities

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no staff training programme on equal opportunities

12. In the past year, the company has made the effective promotion of equal opportunities a priority. One member of staff has special responsibility for promoting equal opportunities. He has produced procedures for vetting prospective employers, guidance for trainees and employers and induction materials for trainees. All new employers are vetted to ensure they are committed to promoting equal opportunities effectively. The equal opportunities assessor goes through a questionnaire with the employer. This relates to equal opportunities in terms of management, performance, policy, recruitment and selection, staff development and attitude. A record of discussion with the employer, and the employers' equal opportunities policy, are kept on file. If eTraining's staff consider there are shortcomings in the employer's attitude towards equal opportunities, the employer is required to draw up an action plan for improving promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace.

13. eTraining provides good guidance to employers and trainees. All employers are given a good practice guide on working with modern apprentices. This covers: fair and equitable recruitment, flexible working arrangements for trainees with young children, dress codes for trainees from particular minority ethnic groups, and ways of helping trainees who feel isolated because they are, for instance, the only representative of a particular group. Trainees respond to questionnaires entitled 'getting equal'. These relate to the policies and procedures in the trainees' workplace. Questions are clear, easy to follow and comprehensive in their coverage of equal opportunities. During induction, all trainees, as well as their employers, are given a copy of a good practice guide on race, sex and disability produced by the Commission for Racial Equality. Trainees have copies of the grievance and appeals procedures and the equal opportunities policy of eTraining. All trainees interviewed demonstrated a good understanding of equal opportunities, within their companies and in a wider context. For example, trainees working with estate agents were fully aware of the need to use language carefully when showing wheelchair users around properties.

14. Assessors are issued with guidelines on ways of overcoming any barriers to assessment which trainees might have. The guidelines cover the use of interpreters, scribes, dictionaries, signers or specialist equipment. The company maintains data on trainees in terms of their gender, ethnicity and disabilities. In some of the areas covered by the local TEC, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is low, at 4 or 5 per cent. The company has exceeded the TEC's targets for

recruitment of women trainees and trainees from minority ethnic groups and has met those for trainees with disabilities.

15. There is no staff training programme related to equal opportunities. The company does not take specific action to ensure all staff are kept up to date with equal opportunities legislation.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

16. Trainees are recruited by employers and word of mouth. Trainees are given an initial assessment based on an audit of their skills, including their key skills. If they score less than 70 per cent in this, they have to take a basic skills test. There are currently no trainees who need additional learning support. Trainees receive induction to their programme progressively from the owner manager and then their assessor, who visit them in the workplace. In accordance with the terms of the TEC contract, trainees receive two reviews of their progress in their first six weeks, and subsequently one every two months. Of the five strengths identified in the self-assessment report, inspectors considered two to be no more than normal practice, agreed with two, and disagreed with one. Three of the five weaknesses which were identified in the report were being addressed at the time of the inspection and inspectors agreed with the other two. Inspectors identified a further weakness. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough and comprehensive induction
- ◆ effective individual training plans for trainees

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient progress reviews
- ◆ lack of information about specialist guidance agencies for trainees

17. Applicants for programmes are carefully interviewed and are given a skills test. Applicants are made fully aware of what the programme involves and the type of activities which they will undertake. It is made clear to applicants that they must work hard if they are to be successful. They are told that, although they are given time off at work to engage in study, they must also be prepared to work in their own time. The company has staff who are trained in the accreditation of prior learning. There is, however, no systematic identification of trainees' prior learning and experience. Trainees with relevant experience are able to make rapid progress through their programme.

18. The induction provided for trainees is both thorough and effective. Trainees receive several visits at their workplace from the owner manager and their assessors, which cover a range of matters, including the completion of forms from



the TEC, training in health and safety and risk assessment and equal opportunities. The induction lasts as long as it is necessary for trainees to become fully informed about the training programme. Trainees also complete checklists to show that they have not only received relevant information, but can also apply their learning in their own workplace. Trainees remember the content of the induction well. They could, for example, demonstrate effectively how to carry out risk assessments.

19. During the first part of their programme, trainees work with their assessors to produce a personal development plan. This reflects the findings of the initial audit of their skills and identifies their training needs. The trainees' personal development plans are then translated into detailed individual training plans, which take account of the trainees' activities at work. The plan covers both on- and off-the-job training.

20. Trainees' progress reviews are held every two months in accordance with the TEC contract. The trainees' assessors carry out the reviews. In some cases, they fill in the section on the progress-review record, for trainees and employers' comments. Employers, however, are not always involved in the progress reviews. Records show that the progress reviews are mainly concerned with trainees' attendance, punctuality and general welfare. During their progress reviews, trainees are not set medium-term targets and assessors do not review trainees' specific progress towards achievement of their NVQ. The trainees are, however, set short-term goals during the fortnightly meetings they have with their assessors.

21. The company's staff take a close interest in the welfare of trainees and ask about this during the progress reviews. However, they do not have any information about specialist agencies to which trainees could be referred if they have particular problems or need specific guidance on careers and progression.

## Grade 2

### Management of training

22. eTraining has a clearly defined management structure, which identifies roles and responsibilities across the company. There are a managing director, an office co-ordinator, a business development manager and two assessors. At the time of the inspection, a vacant post for an assessor was in the process of being filled. One assessor has responsibility for health and safety and equal opportunities. Staff have appropriate occupational qualifications and relevant assessors' qualifications. Three staff are qualified as external verifiers. Two members of staff are qualified to act as advisors on the accreditation of prior learning. There is a brief business plan which outlines the objectives of the company in terms of government-funded training, commercial training and consultancy. The plan sets out the company's short-term goals. These are communicated to staff at regular meetings. Targets for training are set and met. Inspectors considered the strengths identified in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice. They found three strengths the company had not identified. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses, two of which had been rectified. They awarded a grade higher than that given in the company's self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good, comprehensive guidance for employers
- ◆ good vetting of prospective employers
- ◆ well-managed training

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inadequate staff appraisal

23. A comprehensive set of guidelines for employers on work-based training has been developed and is in use. These guidelines are clearly written and place proper emphasis on the roles of both the training provider and the employer in each area covered. The guidelines are up to date and cover the rights of 16 and 17 year old employees to have time off from work for study. They begin with an overview of work-based training, NVQs, key skills, foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships, recruitment and selection, induction, and individual training plans. They then cover the training process, trainees' progress reviews, assessment, equality of opportunity and health and safety. The final section deals with standards and covers feedback from employers as part of the training provider's self-assessment process and the role of the training provider in external inspection. There is also detailed written guidance on the training programmes for advanced modern apprenticeships. This includes a summary of views of trainees who have finished their training, timescales for each part of the programme, and the suggested frequency and duration of visits from assessors.

24. Prospective employers are vetted effectively in terms of their ability to meet health and safety requirements and to provide support for trainees. The vetting covers employers' procedures for risk assessments, accident reporting, emergency evacuation, provision of protective equipment and policies. For health and safety, employers receive a risk banding of low, medium or high for the occupational area in which the trainee will be working and for the organisation as a whole. A further category of unsatisfactory can be used. The frequency of health and safety monitoring visits by eTraining's staff depends upon the banding received. For example, employers categorised as high risk are visited every three months, those as medium risk every six months, and those as low risk once each year. If an employer fails to meet health and safety requirements, eTraining draws up an action plan to improve the employer's health and safety practices. If the employer then fails to implement the action plan, the employer is categorised as unsatisfactory and is not allowed to receive trainees. There are several examples of companies which have been rejected and of other companies which have taken the action required of them. For example, one employer complied with a request to develop emergency evacuation procedures and display emergency exit signs and a poster on health and safety legislation. Employers are also required to respond to a questionnaire about how they will provide trainees with support and ensure trainees have the same rights and responsibilities as other employees.

25. The training process is well managed. There is a manual on the management of training procedures. It is comprehensive and clearly written, and covers the needs of trainees. The manual outlines what is expected of employers if trainees are placed with them. It covers induction, initial assessment and the training and assessment processes in detail. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace frequently, usually every two weeks. Key skills are fully integrated into the programme and trainees make rapid progress in developing them. The NVQ process has been broken down into a series of challenges to help trainees to understand it. All new employers are offered an induction and training programme to help them understand the needs of trainees. The induction takes place at the employer's premises, and where possible, involves more than one member of the employer's staff. eTraining's staff examine employers' in-house training programmes to identify what additional training needs to be provided in order to ensure trainees develop key skills and the competencies required for levels 2 and 3. The staff of each employer are subject to a training needs analysis. This focuses in particular on information-technology skills. Following this analysis, some employers' staff are now receiving guidance on information-technology training in order that they may be able to help and support trainees effectively.

26. The staff at eTraining usually meet every two to four weeks. Meetings are well attended and minutes are kept. Staff discuss their trainees and find it useful to share ideas about training and assessment. Staff feel free to contribute their ideas at meetings. Action points are agreed on at meetings. Data on trainees are available. Data on trainees' retention and achievement are analysed and reasons are sought for rates which are low. Staff monitor and record the progress of trainees using charts.

27. There is no formal staff-appraisal system. Although training needs of staff are met in some areas, such as health and safety and key skills, there is no training in other areas, such as support for trainees with learning difficulties. There is no systematic identification of the training needs of staff. Although staff receive training, they do so by taking advantage of available courses, rather than through a planned training programme. The company intends to introduce six-monthly appraisals for staff. Details of an appraisal system are included in the updated procedures and operations manual for 2001.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

28. eTraining meets the TEC and the awarding body's requirements in respect of quality assurance. Quality assurance procedures are covered in the company's procedures and operations manual. This contains a quality assurance policy and guidelines on internal verification. Quality assurance matters are discussed regularly at staff meetings. Two self-assessment reports have been produced. Feedback is obtained from trainees at the end of their training through a questionnaire, and during progress reviews in the workplace. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good use of feedback from trainees
- ◆ well-produced self-assessment report

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to evaluate the quality assurance process
- ◆ no systematic arrangements for obtaining feedback from employers

29. All trainees respond to a questionnaire at the end of their programme which requires them to indicate satisfaction on a five-point scale. Questions are particularly relevant to the training. Trainees can say what they liked, disliked or would like to see improved. Responses to questionnaires are analysed every six months. Emerging trends are identified and satisfaction scores are averaged. Action plans are drawn up to deal with negative responses. Staff use the most recent version of the analysis when making presentations to employers. When assessors visit the workplace, they seek feedback on induction from trainees. They gather the feedback during their first few visits to trainees. Problems which the trainees raise are addressed in staff meetings.

30. All staff made contributions to the self-assessment report. The managing director led its production. The self-assessment report was well organised and gave a clear account of how the company operates. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements in the self-assessment report. The company was taking appropriate action to rectify weaknesses and build on strengths identified through self-assessment.

31. A procedures and operations manual covers the quality assurance procedures of eTraining. It is well written, easy to read and concise. The manual also covers initial assessment, training and assessment processes well. The internal verification policy covers observation of assessors, sampling finished portfolios and feedback to assessors. Internal verification is rigorous. When internal verifiers observe assessors, they provide them with written feedback on their performance. Staff discuss external verifiers' reports and take appropriate action to implement recommendations made in them. eTraining's staff hold meetings at least once a month to review programmes. Standard agenda items cover the running of the programme, feedback from internal and external verifiers, points raised by assessors in discussion, administrative issues and quality assurance issues.

32. The procedures and operations manual does not show self-assessment as part of an annual cycle of quality assurance. There are no clear objectives for the annual review process. There are no systematic arrangements for gathering feedback from employers. eTraining's staff gather feedback from employers informally when they visit companies. Currently, employers are not asked to respond to questionnaires about the quality of the company's services.