



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2001

**Training Direct
(London) Limited**

SUMMARY

Training Direct (London) Limited provides good training in business administration and in retailing and customer service, with well-planned off-the-job training. Trainees receive thorough assessment in the workplace and there is good integration of key skills training with NVQs. There is a good understanding of equal opportunities among staff and trainees, but little monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. Trainees receive high levels of individual support and attention. There is, however, no basic skills training for trainees with poor literacy or numeracy skills. Management of training and quality assurance are satisfactory. Staff are well motivated and the company provides high levels of support to employers. Procedures for quality assurance are still being developed, but continuous improvement in training is apparent.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good assessment in administration
- ◆ good, well-planned training in customer service
- ◆ good use of additional qualifications
- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ successful recruitment of under-represented groups
- ◆ flexible training to meet individual needs
- ◆ well-designed and effective management-information system
- ◆ effective arrangements for monitoring quality

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unrealistic target-setting for some trainees
- ◆ weak monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ no staff training in equal opportunities
- ◆ ineffective initial assessment of basic and key skills
- ◆ lack of clarity about staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ weak system for internal verification

INTRODUCTION

1. Training Direct (London) Limited (Training Direct) is a small limited company which provides work-based training programmes for young people. The company was formed in March 1999 to provide training in customer service for trainees from other training providers. The company expanded in November 1999 to provide training for New Deal clients and again in June 2000 to offer modern apprenticeships in business administration and information technology. Training Direct is based in premises in Whitechapel, in East London. The company's operations are controlled by the owner, who is also the sole director and the head of training. He is responsible for policy decisions and strategic planning. The day-to-day running of the company is the responsibility of a small management team, which consists of the head of training, the recruitment manager and the quality manager. Four staff are employed on a part-time, self-employed basis to undertake the training, assessment and internal verification of government-funded learning programmes. A small team of part-time staff provides administrative support.

2. Training Direct provides work-based learning programmes for young people through contracts with London East Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). The company also contracts with a local college of further education to provide training for New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. Programmes are offered in the occupational areas of business administration and retailing and customer service. All off-the-job training takes place at the company's premises in Whitechapel. At the time of inspection, 34 young people were undertaking government-funded work-based training. Of these, 19 are modern apprentices and seven are following other work-based learning programmes. Eight clients are following the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. All trainees and clients are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs). All modern apprentices are permanently employed. Trainees on programmes of other work-based learning and New Deal clients undertake work placements as part of their training.

3. The unemployment rate in Tower Hamlets stood at 11.6 per cent in December 2000, compared with 5.8 per cent in the area served by the TEC and a national rate of 4.3 per cent. Tower Hamlets is one of the most deprived local authority areas in the country, ranking sixth in the national index of local deprivation. One in three homes has no wage earner and almost half of all homes receive council tax benefit. The main employment sectors in Tower Hamlets are financial and business services, mostly concentrated in Canary Wharf. These account for 35 per cent of total employment. Other services, predominantly public services, account for 26 per cent of total employment. Significant numbers of people are also employed in the distribution, hotel and catering sectors. The manufacturing and engineering sectors are expected to continue to decline as the service sector, particularly financial and business services, expands. The low level of educational achievement in the local workforce has resulted in skills shortages, especially in the business and financial sectors, which do not recruit locally but draw in



employees from elsewhere. Tower Hamlets has a culturally and ethnically diverse population. Minority ethnic groups make up 40.6 per cent of the population, compared with 25.1 per cent for the area served by the TEC and 24.9 per cent for London as a whole.

4. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Tower Hamlets achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 32.7 per cent, well below the national average of 49.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Training Direct completed its first self-assessment report in August 2000, in preparation for inspection. The process of self-assessment began in June 2000 and was co-ordinated by the head of training. The company was assisted by the TEC, which provided advice on the process of self-assessment and continuous improvement and commented on drafts of the report. Staff were involved in the process of self-assessment, collecting evidence for the occupational areas in which they worked and commenting on drafts of the report. Trainees, employers and parents' views on the quality of the training were obtained through the company's regular evaluation questionnaires. The self-assessment report and action plan to address identified areas for improvement followed the guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. Some of the strengths identified in the report were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the grades given in the self-assessment report for management of training and quality assurance. Inspectors awarded higher grades for business administration, retailing and customer service and trainee support. However, many of the weaknesses for equal opportunities were not identified in the report, and inspectors awarded a lower grade.

6. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Training Direct in January 2001. They inspected programmes in business administration and retailing and customer service. Inspectors viewed documents at the company's premises in Whitechapel. These included trainees' personal files, achievement and progression data, TEC contracts, audits by external agencies and management information. Inspectors visited 11 employers and observed 10 learning activities. Twenty-five interviews were held with trainees and nine trainees' portfolios were reviewed. Meetings were held with the head of training, the quality manager, the recruitment manager, trainers and administrative staff, as well as with staff from the local further education college, external agencies and parents. The following table shows the grades awarded to learning activities observed by inspectors:

Grades awarded to learning activities

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		4				4
Retailing & customer service		5	1			6
Total	0	9	1	0	0	10

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 2

7. Training Direct has 19 trainees following programmes in business administration. Eleven trainees are modern apprentices: six are working towards an NVQ in administration at levels 2 or 3 and five are working towards an NVQ in using information technology at levels 2 or 3. There are eight New Deal clients following the full-time education and training option. They are on a learning programme which includes communication skills, job-search modules and working towards a vocational qualification in information technology. On completion of initial assessments, an individual learning plan is drawn up, giving details of the learning programme and recording any prior learning or achievement. All trainees receive an induction to their occupational area and carry out an initial self-assessment in key skills. New Deal clients attend Training Direct's training centre for 30 hours each week for 20 weeks. Modern apprentices follow a two-year programme and are assessed in the workplace. They are employed mostly in small businesses. Off-the-job training, which covers the theoretical knowledge for administration and information technology, is offered on one half day every two weeks. On alternate weeks, key skills training is offered to trainees. One member of staff undertakes the training and assessment of administration and two staff undertake training and assessment on the information technology programmes. There are two internal verifiers. Trainers, assessors and internal verifiers hold appropriate qualifications and are experienced in their occupational areas. Trainers and assessors meet regularly and two trainers are following the key skills practitioners' development programme. Trainees' progress on modern apprenticeship programmes is reviewed at least every eight weeks by their assessor. Progress reviews of New Deal clients take place every four weeks. Inspectors agreed with three of the strengths in the self-assessment report relating to the high retention rates for modern apprentices, high rates of progression for New Deal clients and good learning resources for information technology. Aspects of the four remaining strengths were considered either to be normal practice or to be more appropriate to the generic aspects of training. Inspectors identified good assessment in administration as an additional strength and agreed that poor awareness of the NVQ requirements among employers was a weakness. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses. The grade awarded was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good resources in information technology
- ◆ good assessment in administration
- ◆ high rate of retention among modern apprentices
- ◆ good rates of progression for New Deal clients

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment for New Deal clients
- ◆ poor recording of achievement in administration
- ◆ poor awareness of NVQ requirements among some employers

8. Modern apprentices and New Deal clients use interesting and stimulating learning materials, designed by their trainer. All trainees can attend information-technology learning sessions according to need. These sessions take the form of a workshop. Trainees are well motivated and clearly focused on individual tasks and enjoy working at their own pace. Support is readily available from the trainer, who works with each trainee individually. The training room is equipped with 14 computers with up-to-date software. Trainees also have regular access to high-specification, information-technology systems owned by a partner organisation located in the same building, where they can use advanced graphics and Internet facilities. Training is offered in the evening and at weekends for trainees who are unable to attend at other times.

9. Assessments in administration are well planned. The assessor makes frequent visits to the workplace, discusses the NVQ standards with the trainee and helps with their interpretation. Ideas for evidence are elicited from the trainee, and verbal questions are used to draw out the trainee's knowledge. An assessment check list is completed for naturally occurring evidence observed in the workplace. Clear and positive feedback is given after the assessment and an action plan with realistic targets is completed and copied to the trainee. Training sessions in administration are well structured with clear objectives, which are communicated effectively to trainees and referenced to the NVQ standards. Good links are made between off-the-job learning sessions and workplace activities. Trainees complete relevant exercises and questions related to the NVQ units. Links are made between the evidence for the NVQ and for key skills. When trainees find it difficult to attend learning sessions, the assessor visits the workplace more frequently to ensure that they continue to make progress.

10. There are high retention and achievement rates on modern apprenticeship and New Deal programmes in administration and information technology. Of the 14 trainees joining the modern apprenticeship programme since it started in June 2000, 11 are still in training, one has achieved all the targets on the individual learning plan and two have left with no qualifications. Of the 60 clients on the New Deal since November 1999, eight are still in training. Thirty-one have achieved a qualification, 24 have progressed into employment and 15 into further education or training. Seventeen left early with four of these going into jobs.

11. New Deal clients follow a structured programme of job search, where they have access to good advice, support and resources in a partner organisation. They prepare a curriculum vitae, receive help with interview skills and have access to job-search materials. The training programme can be extended to 52 weeks for clients who need to progress at a slower pace. Those finishing their vocational

qualification more quickly are given support to find employment and are encouraged to consider converting to an advanced modern apprenticeship programme, where this is appropriate. Several have done so. Clients are encouraged to return to Training Direct on completion of their training to use the facilities for job search and to maintain their computing skills. Where appropriate, they are also encouraged to apply to study part-time at universities.

12. There are few opportunities for New Deal clients to undertake assessment in the workplace to meet the requirements of the level 2 NVQ in information technology, even though this is identified as the primary goal on their individual learning plans. Clients have a five-week extension to their programme provided by Training Direct to enable them to gain work-based evidence for the NVQ. However, this time allowance is insufficient to meet the new guidelines of the national training organisation for information technology, which advises that evidence should be gathered in the workplace for at least 12 months, to allow for the appropriate development of information-technology skills.

13. There is no record of units achieved on the individual learning plans of the administration trainees. There is also no recording of NVQ and key skills units achieved in the portfolios, nor is there evidence of internal verification of portfolios throughout the programme. Individual learning plans are updated for trainees on information-technology programmes, but no portfolios of evidence for the NVQ in information technology were available at the time of inspection.

14. Some employers have little knowledge of the NVQ or key skills, although Training Direct provides a booklet containing information about them. Some trainees have difficulty negotiating time to organise their portfolios and gaining release for training sessions. There has been no use of witness testimony from employers. Although most employers discuss trainees' progress with the assessor and sign the progress-review sheets, these are not copied to them to aid future planning of tasks to support achievement of the NVQ. However, employers are interested in the trainees' personal development and encourage them, sometimes by offering appropriate additional training or promotion.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

15. There are 15 trainees in this occupational area, all working towards NVQs in customer service. NVQs in retailing, warehousing and distribution are not offered. Seven trainees are on other work-based learning programmes for young people and eight are advanced modern apprentices. All trainees are registered for the level 2 NVQ in customer service, working towards the standards which were in force before January 2001. The customer service programme was first offered in June 1999 to 30 advanced modern apprentices who were transferred to Training Direct from another training provider. A second transfer of seven youth trainees took place in December 2000 when another local provider decided to cease to provide training in customer service. Other advanced modern apprentices have been

recruited directly. Training, assessment, internal verification and accreditation of prior learning are carried out by professionally and occupationally qualified staff. All trainees attend Training Direct one day each week for theory training, guidance on portfolio-building and learning support. Assessment is carried out in the workplace and takes place at least every six to eight weeks. Advanced modern apprentices begin their key skills training within four weeks of joining a training programme. All trainees have access to information technology and additional qualifications. All advanced modern apprentices are in full-time paid employment. All trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people are in work placements. Employers and work-placement providers include a cinema, an immigration advice centre, an administrative office, a carpet retailer, a large supermarket and a building-security control centre. The self-assessment report identified four strengths in this occupational area. Inspectors considered that these were more appropriate to generic aspects of the training. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded was higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, well-planned training
- ◆ extensive individual support for trainees
- ◆ good integration of key skills with NVQ training
- ◆ high level of progression to employment
- ◆ good opportunities to gain additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unrealistic target-setting for some trainees
- ◆ insufficient appraisal of workplaces for advanced modern apprentices
- ◆ inadequate preparation for new NVQ standards

16. Training is well planned and of good quality and takes full account of prior learning and achievement. Off-the-job training is timetabled in weekly sessions which are generally well attended. There is a clear, formal training plan for each session. The training includes detailed instruction in the theory of customer service and the structure and requirements of the NVQ. Training is well presented by trainers who make the subject interesting by drawing on the direct experience of trainees. Sensible links are made between on- and off-the-job training and trainees are asked to discuss their experiences of customers' problems during the training sessions. Trainers draw out important points from these examples in an imaginative way. Role-play and written exercises are also well used. Learning sessions are planned to take account of the continuous enrolment of trainees.

Assessors visit the workplace regularly and with appropriate frequency, to observe trainees working with customers. Assessment is performed expertly with accurate and relevant observations.

17. There is extensive individual support for trainees, both in off-the-job training and in the workplace. In each off-the-job learning session, there are two trainers and the ratio of trainers to trainees is one to four or better. Trainers work with each trainee in turn, ensuring that complete understanding of the theoretical aspects of customer service and key skills has been reached. This very good support and training results in all trainees in the group being able to complete tasks well and in time. At the workplace, assessors spend time with trainees giving guidance on particular workplace problems, for example, the application of NVQ standards to normal workplace practice and the use of computer software, to fill in any gaps in overall understanding. Employers are supportive of trainees. They understand the general principles of the NVQ and key skills and willingly provide witness testimony about trainees' performance. At the work placements visited, there was clear evidence of teamwork between the employer and assessor to support the trainees.

18. There is a good emphasis on integration of key skills with NVQs in the learning sessions on key skills. Key skills training and guidance is given in separate sessions during off-the-job training. Trainers use a variety of examples in the training room since some trainees in the group have more difficulty in understanding English than others. This careful approach is appreciated by trainees. Trainees are encouraged to view collecting evidence for key skills as a normal part of the working day. Trainees report that they understand the process and have no concerns about completing NVQ or key skills units. Learning sessions in key skills address the most complex aspects of some key skills to ensure that trainees do not encounter problems later on when in the workplace. For example, the theory and practice of constructing statistical tables and converting them to bar charts and graphs is presented in a detailed, clear and supportive manner.

19. Training Direct has been successful in helping trainees to gain jobs, sometimes under difficult or urgent circumstances. Of the 47 trainees who have started programmes in customer service without a job, 28 have been assisted into full-time paid employment. Of the 30 advanced modern apprentices who were transferred from another training provider, 17 were helped to gain new jobs. Of the 10 advanced modern apprentices who have been directly recruited since June 1999, all have been helped to gain a job before starting the programme. Of these, 80 per cent are still on programme. Of the seven trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people who were transferred in December 2000, all are still in training and one has been given support in gaining full-time employment.

20. Trainees have good opportunities to gain additional qualifications and additional NVQ or key skills units. Additional training in information technology is offered to all trainees, including New Deal clients. This training covers both key skills and the NVQ in information technology at level 2. It also includes keyboard

training. Key skills training is also offered to trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people even though key skills is not a requirement. Key skills, including problem solving, working with others and managing own learning and performance, are being offered to all trainees.

21. Most individual learning plans contain unrealistic targets for completion of NVQ and key skills units. Dates set for achieving NVQ units are generally one month apart and follow the numerical order of the units. This makes it difficult for assessors and trainees to meet targets, since evidence for the NVQ is collected as it occurs in the workplace and not in the numerical order of units. All trainees are working according to the same timescale for the achievement of targets, despite their different levels of experience and competence. As a consequence, some assessment is not keeping pace with the targets set. Nevertheless, assessments are taking place and trainees are making progress.

22. Trainees' workplaces and job roles have not been adequately assessed to ensure that they provide the range of experience needed to gather evidence to complete the NVQ in customer service at level 3. More than half of the trainees are advanced modern apprentices, who need to achieve the NVQ at level 3. Workplaces are currently assessed only to ensure that trainees are able to meet the requirements of the NVQ at level 2. The member of staff responsible for this assessment does not have a detailed knowledge of the NVQ at level 3 and has received no training to enable him to undertake an accurate assessment.

23. Training Direct staff have not received sufficient information from the awarding body to implement the new standards for customer service. The awarding body issued new standards for customer service NVQs at level 2 and 3 to come into effect on 1 January 2001. Trainees recruited after this date must be registered for the new NVQs. However, insufficient preparation has been made. Staff do not have copies of the new standards. There have been no training sessions to enable staff to become familiar with the new standards and the changed requirements for assessment.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

24. Training Direct is located in an area with a wide diversity of ethnic groups, including refugees. Ninety per cent of trainees are from minority ethnic groups. The company has an equal opportunities policy which meets statutory and contractual requirements. It is reviewed annually. There are procedures relating to the recruitment of staff, grievances and disciplinary action against employees. Overall responsibility for equal opportunities lies at senior level with the head of training, although this is not included in his job description. New staff, trainees and clients are given copies of the equal opportunities policy during induction. The

policy is also included in the handbooks given to trainees and employers. The company collects information on trainees and clients relating to age, ethnicity, gender and disabilities. Of the eight staff, two are women. Six of the eight staff are from minority ethnic groups. Of the 34 young people on government-funded learning programmes, 22 are men. Training Direct's premises are accessible to wheelchair users and those with mobility difficulties. There are currently no trainees with disabilities. The self-assessment report accurately identified as a strength the company's enthusiastic approach in encouraging disadvantaged groups to participate in training. Inspectors identified two further strengths. The self-assessment report accurately identified the weak monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. It did not identify as weaknesses the lack of staff training and the absence of a disciplinary procedure for trainees. The grade awarded by inspectors was lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ good understanding of equal opportunities among staff and trainees
- ◆ successful recruitment of under-represented groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ no disciplinary procedure for trainees
- ◆ no staff training in equal opportunities

25. Training Direct's equal opportunities policy covers all staff and trainees. As well as meeting legislative requirements, the policy protects individuals from discrimination on the grounds of age and sexual orientation. The equal opportunities policy provides clear explanations of direct and indirect discrimination and examples of harassment. The policy is included in the handbooks given to trainees and employers. These handbooks also outline the legislation relating to asylum and immigration and to sex and race discrimination in the workplace. The handbooks identify aspects of employment where discrimination may occur, for example selection procedures, interviews and opportunities for training and promotion. There are procedures to protect staff and trainees from harassment and discrimination, and procedures for complaints and grievances. The grievance procedure is described in the document setting out the terms and conditions which trainees agree to when they join a learning programme. It describes the steps to be taken as part of a three-stage process in the case of complaint or dissatisfaction. It does not, however, include a timescale with deadlines for the different stages of the complaints procedure.

26. All trainees have a good understanding of equal opportunities and are able to provide examples of what it means. Staff and trainees have a firm understanding of

trainees' rights and responsibilities and how to deal with harassment and discrimination in the workplace. Equal opportunities is discussed during induction and is a regular agenda item at the quarterly staff meetings. Understanding of equality of opportunity is developed through occupational and key skills training. For example, trainees use word-processing assignments in business administration and information technology to pursue cultural and religious interests. Training towards key skills, for example working with others, and towards the NVQ in customer service, for example training in dealing with complaints, is used to develop awareness of cultural differences and a better understanding of equal opportunities in the workplace. Rights and responsibilities are discussed in connection with standards of behaviour expected at work and how to cope with inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. There is regular discussion of equality of opportunity in progress reviews.

27. Training Direct has a good record of recruiting trainees from minority ethnic groups. Over 90 per cent of current trainees are from minority ethnic communities. The company employs staff who speak a range of languages and who are able to support trainees in their first language and talk to other members of their families about training opportunities. For example, Training Direct has good links with parents and carers within the local Bengali community and has had some success in promoting the benefits of training for young women. As part of its self-assessment process, the company has developed an action plan to increase participation in training by young women and people with disabilities.

28. Training Direct does not monitor equal opportunities in the workplace. Employers are required to undertake to meet the requirements of sex, race and disability legislation in the contract they agree with the company. Training Direct does not require employers to have an equal opportunities policy. This is not checked when contact is made with an employer and there are no arrangements for checking employers' equal opportunities practices and procedures. There is no systematic monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace and no expectation that staff will promote equality of opportunity to employers either during the initial meeting or during regular workplace-review visits.

29. Training Direct has a complaints and grievance procedure for staff and trainees and a disciplinary procedure for staff but no disciplinary procedure for trainees. There is, therefore, no guidance for staff or trainees on the procedures which will be followed in the event of a trainee breaching the company's rules or the terms of their training agreement. There is no guidance on the stages of the disciplinary process, the conduct of disciplinary hearings or the trainee's rights of representation and appeal.

30. There is no overall strategy for staff training and development in equal opportunities. There is no discussion of equal opportunities during the staff-appraisal process and none of the staff have taken part in any equal opportunities training since joining the company. Individual staff have a commitment to equal opportunities and are aware of many aspects of equal opportunities. However, there is a reliance within the organisation on the staff's previous experience and

personal understanding of equal opportunities. Opportunities to develop a greater awareness of equal opportunities and to consider good practice in this aspect of training have not been promoted. This has been identified as a weakness by the company and an action plan to promote equality of opportunity has recently been agreed. This includes plans for disability-awareness training and the promotion of information-technology training to young women.

Trainee support

Grade 2

31. The head of training has overall responsibility for trainee support. Prospective trainees and clients are recruited to Training Direct after referral by the careers service, the Employment Service and local agencies, by means of leaflets, advertisements and recruitment campaigns and by word-of-mouth recommendation from other trainees. Prospective clients and trainees are invited to a presentation, which forms the first phase of the induction process. Previous experience and achievements are recorded on an initial assessment form, and all trainees undertake an assessment of their basic skills. During this initial meeting, trainees are given information about the company, the training programmes, NVQs, health and safety and equal opportunities. Trainees also receive a handbook which contains this information, for future reference. Trainees can attend taster courses, use the company's facilities and receive support with job search before joining a learning programme. At the beginning of the programme, training staff devise an individual learning plan in consultation with the trainee. The plan outlines the NVQ units which the trainee will be taking, the target dates for completing each unit, and the arrangements for off-the-job training. Trainees and clients on the New Deal receive regular progress reviews, either in the training centre or in the workplace. Trainees undertake a final progress review on the last day of their training. Training Direct remains in contact with trainees after the end of their training and trainees continue to use the training centre's facilities. The self-assessment report identified four strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors considered that one strength was no more than normal practice and that another strength was more appropriate to an occupational area. The weakness was not agreed with by inspectors. Inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of individual support
- ◆ flexible training to meet individual needs
- ◆ well-structured job-search programme
- ◆ good links with external organisations

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective initial assessment of basic and key skills
- ◆ no structured literacy or numeracy support

32. The company offers a caring and supportive environment for all its trainees and clients. Staff are aware of the difficult circumstances faced by many of the New Deal clients and youth trainees and help individual trainees to overcome problems, continue training and achieve qualifications. Training Direct has an open-door policy and trainees can approach a member of staff at any time. Frequent personal contact and support contributes to high levels of motivation and retention. The response to trainees' problems is prompt and positive. Staff have good, informal links with parents and carers and work with them to address problems such as irregular attendance or problems trainees face at work. Trainees are also helped with housing, benefits and other issues. Staff encourage trainees to have high aspirations and provide practical support and guidance to enable them to progress to further training and education. Trainees continue to receive support from Training Direct after the end of their training programme. The facilities and resources at the company's training centre are available to trainees on a drop-in basis and staff contact trainees to check whether any further guidance and advice is required.

33. The company works hard to meet individual needs. Training and support are given outside normal hours to accommodate trainees whose work commitments make it difficult for them to attend the timetabled off-the-job learning sessions. For example, learning sessions have been arranged during the evening and on Saturdays to provide greater flexibility. Additional support in the workplace is arranged for trainees who are unable to attend off-the-job learning sessions. The frequency of visits by trainers to trainees in the workplace is determined by each trainee's needs. Some trainees are visited weekly when necessary. Visits to undertake work-based assessments and progress reviews are arranged promptly and at times which suit trainees and employers. For example, trainees in customer service working in supermarkets are visited at the weekend where this is appropriate.

GOOD PRACTICE

Job-search facilities and individual support from Training Direct's staff are available to prospective trainees to enable them to find the employment they need to be eligible for the apprenticeship programmes.

34. New Deal clients undertake well-structured weekly job-search sessions. The programme consists of a series of group sessions to develop the main job-search skills followed by regular, individual job-search activities. Each group session covers a different aspect of preparation for employment. The sessions are effectively organised and the trainer's input is reinforced by informative handouts which clients use as reference material and practical individual and small-group activities. The sessions include writing letters of application and curricula vitae, looking for jobs, completing application forms and practice interviews. On completion of this programme, clients continue researching job opportunities and applying for jobs. Trainees are also encouraged to register with an advice and guidance centre which is located in the same building as the training centre. The advice and guidance centre provides advice from qualified and experienced guidance workers, who help Training Direct's clients and trainees to develop an action plan. It also arranges additional workshops to support the development of job-search skills. Trainees and clients use the centre's extensive Internet facilities and job-search software to look for jobs and to research information about opportunities for further training and education.

35. Training Direct has developed effective links with external organisations to meet individual trainees and clients' additional support and training needs. The company has good contacts with several local advice and guidance agencies and with local community projects, which provide access for trainees to a range of additional computing facilities and training, including Internet access, graphics and webpage design. It maintains regular contact with the careers service and has good links with a local project supporting business start-up and self-employment. The head of training maintains regular and close contact with the college's staff responsible for the New Deal clients. The college and the company have clearly defined areas and levels of responsibility and they make six-weekly joint monitoring visits and are in weekly telephone contact. These well-established contacts enable Training Direct to address problems promptly and arrange any additional support which trainees or clients need.

36. Initial assessment of basic and key skills is inadequate. The assessment of basic skills undertaken during induction is not based on a reliable screening method and does not provide accurate information about trainees' levels of competence in literacy or numeracy. It is not effective in identifying the need for additional learning support and there are many examples of weaknesses in literacy or numeracy skills being discovered only during training. The assessments used are not standardised or matched to NVQ levels and they do not assess key skills beyond level 1, although all trainees follow learning programmes at levels 2 or 3. Initial assessments are not marked and the level achieved by the trainee is not recorded. The assessment of key skills is undertaken by trainees at home. It is not, therefore, completed under standard assessment conditions and there are poor rates of completion and return. The assessment does not accurately identify the most appropriate level of key skills for the trainee to start at.

37. There is no structured literacy or numeracy support for trainees or New Deal clients. The staff are not qualified to undertake diagnostic testing or to provide basic skills or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) training. They provide help informally when they can. Trainees are identifying the need for basic skills support in their initial self-assessment during induction, in progress reviews and in their evaluations of the course but this need is not being systematically addressed.

Management of training

Grade 3

38. Training Direct is a private limited company with a single shareholder and director. The company was registered in March 1999 when Training Direct started receiving trainees from other training providers in East London. Many of the trainees were part of the way through their learning programme when they were transferred. The director is the head of training and is supported by a recruitment manager and a quality manager, who is also the company secretary. The head of training is responsible for the overall management of the company, external contracts and the day-to-day operation of the learning programmes. The quality

manager has responsibility for a team of trainers and assessors. The recruitment manager is responsible for marketing and the recruitment of trainees and employers and arranges the placing of trainees with suitable employers. There is a small administrative team. Training Direct employs four staff and engages three other individuals on a part-time, self-employed basis, mostly as trainers and assessors. These individuals work under a subcontractual arrangement, but for practical purposes the company regards them as members of staff. The number of days worked by individual subcontracted members of staff varies from two to four days each week. All of the permanent staff members work on a part-time basis, apart from the head of training, who is the only full-time member of staff. The company has a three-year planning cycle, which it evaluates annually. At the time of the inspection, the company had almost reached its agreed target for 2000-01 of 25 enrolments on modern apprenticeship programmes. The self-assessment report gave four strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors considered that the four strengths were no more than normal practice. The weaknesses had been rectified by the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of support to employers
- ◆ high ratio of staff to trainees
- ◆ well-designed and effective management-information system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of clarity about staff roles and responsibilities
- ◆ poor maintenance of trainee records

39. Training Direct provides a high level of support to its employers. A detailed booklet outlining the role of the employer, the company's health and safety and equal opportunities policies and equal opportunities legislation is issued to prospective employers. The booklet also covers methods of gathering evidence for and assessing work towards NVQs and details of the requirements for key skills. Comprehensive additional support is available. In some cases Training Direct has assisted employers with obtaining employers' liability insurance, the provision of first-aid kits, up-to-date health and safety posters and, in one case, an accident book. Training Direct selects employers and work placements with care. Emphasis is placed on the ability of the employer to provide a safe and caring working environment. Training Direct also examines the range of training and working opportunities available, together with the level of support offered by the employer and the chance of permanent employment. Trainees are placed with employers only after detailed enquiries and thorough checks have been made.

40. There is a high ratio of staff, including subcontracted staff, to trainees. The total number of trainees and clients currently on programmes is 34. There are six trainers and assessors, of whom one is full time and the remaining five are part time. This represents the equivalent of four full-time posts. The high staff ratio enables trainees to be given off-the-job training in small groups, individual coaching, extensive assistance with portfolio-building on an individual basis and regular pastoral support. Trainers and assessors are well qualified and occupationally competent to provide good-quality training for trainees. Staff have had many years' experience in training and education gained in a variety of environments. They have adapted their training methods, progress-review and assessment activities to meet the needs of new groups of trainees and the expansion in the range of learning programmes offered by the company. All staff, including those who are self-employed, receives comprehensive annual appraisals. Appraisal has led to the identification of staff-development needs and these are being addressed so that staff can support trainees more effectively.

41. Training Direct has a well-designed and effective management-information system. The system was designed by the head of training and is used extensively. All information relating to trainees and New Deal clients is recorded at recruitment and the information is extensively analysed to achieve a detailed understanding. Data are routinely obtained relating to gender, disability and ethnicity, the length of time taken to obtain an NVQ, progression and early leavers. The system is easily interrogated to obtain other information. The main computer is in the general office and is easily accessible to staff, who have a high regard for the system. Each member of staff has a password to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Other parts of the system include comprehensive monitoring information on trainees, records of NVQ assessment and achievement, records of progress reviews and an automatic procedure for planning regular progress reviews.

42. The organisational structure of the company has been developed over the past two years and has needed to be flexible to meet new business opportunities. Unfortunately, this has led to considerable overlap and lack of clarity in staff responsibilities and roles. There is confusion about current levels of responsibilities and some duties are not clearly defined. When difficulties become apparent, the head of training normally resolves the issue personally. Most staff do not have detailed job descriptions which list the main responsibilities of their designated job role. Procedures where specified are not always followed and there are variations in the approach taken by different members of staff. An example of this is in relation to the issuing of records of progress reviews. The trainers conduct progress reviews and complete the records. One trainer copies the progress-review record to the trainee and to the employer and retains one copy for the trainee's personal file. In another case, a trainer issues the form only to the trainee and retains a copy for the file. In a third case, the trainer retains the only copy. These problems are compounded by almost all staff being part time. Communications on a personal level are good, but the staff meet regularly as a group only once every three months.

43. The quality of the training records, including important documents, is weak. Many individual learning plans have not been kept up to date and many contain insufficient information. For example, some individual learning plans have not been updated to include the revised key skills requirements for the new modern apprenticeship framework. Some attendance records have not been verified and in some cases there are documents in trainees' files which raise issues which appear to be outstanding.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

44. Training Direct has a system for quality assurance which is currently being developed by the head of training, who, together with the quality manager, is specifically responsible for overseeing the arrangements for quality assurance. The present system comprises a series of policy documents and procedures, together with appropriate forms, covering a range of quality assurance issues. The company's arrangements for quality assurance meet the requirements of the TEC and the awarding body. There is a programme of evaluation, which is a central part of quality assurance. The company undertakes surveys of trainees using questionnaires at periodic intervals and monitors the quality of subcontracted staff, together with new work placements and employers. The head of training has also produced a portfolio of business documents. Internal verification, which is largely undertaken by the head of training, is conducted at the training centre. There is a commitment to continuous improvement. The self-assessment report identified six strengths and one weakness. Inspectors considered that three of the strengths were no more than normal practice and did not agree with two of the other strengths. Inspectors agreed with the remaining strength, which related to the monitoring of the arrangements for quality assurance. The single weakness identified in the self assessment report had been rectified by the time of the inspection. Inspectors identified other strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective arrangements for monitoring quality
- ◆ well-developed process for evaluating training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate written procedures for quality assurance
- ◆ weak system of internal verification

45. As part of its process of quality assurance, Training Direct regularly and effectively monitors its staff and subcontracted trainers by direct observation of off-the-job learning sessions. These observations are systematically recorded and

assessed. Strengths and weaknesses in training performance are identified and the quality of handouts and exercises is also assessed. Trainers receive extensive feedback on their performance and these assessments assist the appraisal process and help to determine training needs. The company has started to analyse trends in the performance of its training staff to support action-planning and staff development. The head of training periodically undertakes additional monitoring visits to work-placement providers and employers to ensure that a good quality of work placements is maintained. During the recent transfers of trainees to Training Direct from other training providers, all work placements were visited to ensure that they were of an acceptable quality.

46. Training Direct conducts regular and highly effective surveys with trainees at strategic intervals as part of its evaluation process and its commitment to progressive and continuous improvement. Feedback in the form of a short questionnaire is obtained following the induction. Additional, extensive questionnaires are used at regular intervals during training to obtain the views of trainees. At the end of the training programme, staff obtain further information from trainees by means of a detailed interview before the trainee's departure. Follow-up questionnaires are sent to trainees three months after they leave Training Direct. The information obtained is collated and extensively and systematically analysed. The findings are discussed with trainers on an individual or group basis and learning programmes and other activities are revised in the light of the results. For example, surveys of employers identified the need to increase employers' understanding of the training process. This was discussed with staff and plans were drawn up to address the problem, which are now being implemented.

47. Although policies and procedures have been introduced for assuring the quality of many of the company's activities, there remain significant gaps in written procedures. Written procedures relate mainly to staffing and personnel issues and do not cover the main training activities of the company. For example, the well-presented personnel policies do not address issues relating to trainees or New Deal clients. Although some important procedures have been agreed between staff and the head of training many of these are not recorded. For example, staff use a consistent approach at initial interview, initial assessment and induction but these procedures are unrecorded. There is no internal audit of quality assurance and occasionally there are variations in the practice followed by staff. For example, although there is a form for the purpose, there is no procedure for determining the method to be used to identify the level of accreditation which can be awarded for prior learning. There is no standard method of issuing agreed procedures or updating existing ones. The head of training has recognised the need for a comprehensive reference document for the organisation, bringing together policies, procedures and other relevant information to provide a consistent reference for staff, and is currently planning to introduce one.

48. The internal verification system is weak. Four staff hold the internal verifiers' award but only two act as internal verifiers. A matrix is used to show that there is adequate coverage and individual reports are prepared but there is no written plan

for internal verification. Internal verification is not planned throughout the year and is generally done when a trainee has completed a unit of their qualification. Most internal verification takes place at the training centre. Internal verification focuses on the trainee's performance rather than the standards and the methods of the assessor. There is very little internal verification of assessors' observation in the workplace. There is no internal verifiers or assessors' training.

49. The self-assessment report was clear and concise in its analysis and accurate in its identification of the evidence. In general, the strengths were accurately stated although some were normal practice and others appeared in inappropriate sections of the report. The self-assessment report contains an action plan to address weaknesses. This plan identifies staff responsibilities, procedures for monitoring progress and target dates for implementation but contains no performance indicators. The time between the preparation of the self-assessment report and the inspection allowed for many of the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report to be corrected. Self-assessment is now an integral part of the company's quality assurance system and staff believe that self-assessment has made them focus on important aspects of training.