



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 2001

NRS Training Limited

## SUMMARY

NRS Training Limited provides good training in business administration and outstanding training in retailing and customer service. There is a high rate of achievement of NVQs in customer service and the rate of retention is high. Key skills are well taught. The foundation modern apprentices in administration have yet to achieve. Equal opportunities is monitored well and staff have had good training. There is good initial assessment and induction. Trainees' progress reviews do not always involve trainees and their employers. Training is extremely well managed, with good communication and frequent reviews of performance. There are missed opportunities to co-ordinate the on- and off-the-job training. The quality assurance system is good, with clear procedures and thorough assessment and internal verification. The quality of foundation modern apprenticeships has not been evaluated.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	2
Management of training	1
Quality assurance	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ♦ high rate of achievement of trainees in customer service
- ♦ regular review of data on equal opportunities
- ♦ good initial assessment and induction
- ♦ innovative training in key skills
- ♦ well-managed training
- ♦ very effective reviews of staff performance
- ♦ thorough assessment and internal verification
- ♦ systematic gathering of feedback from trainees and employers

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ♦ low retention rate of foundation modern apprentices in business administration
- ♦ insufficient involvement of trainees in progress reviews
- ♦ no systematic updating of individual learning plans
- ♦ missed opportunities to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training

## INTRODUCTION

1. NRS Training Limited (NRS Training) was established in August 1998 as the training arm of Nova Recruitment Services Limited. Nova Recruitment Services Limited has been operating for 21 years in Dudley in the West Midlands. The company provides temporary and permanent staff in a wide range of occupations. NRS Training started a contract with Dudley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) in January 1999 for the training of modern apprentices and national trainees in business administration and customer service. Work-based training was new to the company. NRS Training also provides commercial training in management, administration, sales and marketing, health and safety, quality assurance and information technology. NRS Training has six full-time staff and three subcontracted assessors who also act as trainers and internal verifiers. There are 38 business administration and customer service modern apprentices, based in a variety of local companies around the West Midlands. Trainees attend off-the-job training workshops at the premises of NRS Training.

2. Dudley has an unemployment rate of 4.9 per cent, compared with the West Midlands average of 5.6 per cent and 3.9 per cent nationally. The rate of long-term unemployment is high: in some areas of the borough, it is 28 per cent. Approximately 35 per cent of those unemployed have no qualifications. Engineering has declined in the area and there is growth in the service and technology sectors. The area has many small engineering firms, which are second- and third-tier suppliers to large automotive manufacturers. The proportion of employment in high-technology industries is low. In Dudley 1.3 per cent of the workforce is employed in such industries. People from minority ethnic groups make up 4 per cent of the population.

3. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in the Borough of Dudley was 38.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. NRS Training produced its first self-assessment report in November 2001, with support from the employer development unit of Dudley TEC. The report was updated for the inspection. The report was produced by the training manager in consultation with the staff and using feedback from trainees and employers. NRS Training identified separate grades for training and assessment, achievement, and resources, in addition to the four generic aspects. NRS Training did not identify separate strengths and weaknesses for the two occupational areas. The report contained many strengths and few weaknesses. Several of the strengths were regarded as no more than normal practice by inspectors. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and grades but awarded higher grades for retailing and customer service and management of training.

5. Three inspectors spent a total of 12 days with NRS Training in April 2001. They interviewed 17 trainees (49 per cent), visited 18 employers, interviewed 13 employers' staff and held 10 interviews with members of NRS Training's staff. Inspectors reviewed a range of evidence, including quality assurance procedures, minutes of meetings, data on performance, trainees' files, records of assessment and verification, the TEC's audit reports, records of staff training and 16 trainees' portfolios. Inspectors observed four learning sessions and awarded the grades shown in the following table.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		2				2
Retailing & customer service		2				2
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 2

6. There are 11 trainees in business administration. Ten are advanced modern apprentices and one is a foundation modern apprentice. Trainees are working towards NVQs in administration at levels 2 and 3. All trainees are employed, by a range of primarily small and medium-sized organisations, including construction, electrical, information-technology and facilities-management companies. Most of the trainees are referred to NRS Training by their employers. A trainer/assessor visits the trainees every four weeks. Trainees attend a series of five workshops held at NRS Training's training centre during the evenings. NRS Training does not currently have a computer room. Individual information-technology training is offered at the training centre if the need arises. Trainees' progress is reviewed

every eight weeks by discussion with the employer. There is no certification of individual NVQ units and trainees have not yet completed either their framework or their NVQs in administration. The self-assessment report identified combined strengths and weaknesses for retailing and customer service and business administration. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good evidence from the workplace
- ◆ good target-setting
- ◆ good opportunities for additional training
- ◆ high rate of retention on advanced modern apprenticeship

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low rate of retention of foundation modern apprentices
- ◆ slow rates of progress for some trainees

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*One apprentice has applied key skills to his occupational work. He has used desktop publishing and information technology to produce promotional flyers for cast-iron mailboxes. He has also generated accurate drawings for an eyebolt spanner, which is used by his company, and added a logo to the company's adhesive tape. The trainee has provided good evidence and is very well motivated by his work.*

7. Trainees produce evidence for their portfolios which is of a good quality. Trainer/assessors carry out observations whenever possible and question trainees on their understanding of their experiences. Trainer/assessors maintain detailed records of the progress of trainees towards the NVQ in administration and key skills. One trainee, entering data on accounting software, identified a discrepancy caused by a missing invoice. The trainer/assessors questioned the trainee closely to confirm that they were able to take appropriate remedial action. Trainees are given good advice on cross-referencing, personal statements, observations and witness testimonies, reinforcing information given initially at induction. Advanced modern apprentices are provided with opportunities to have supervisory experience which are appropriate to their level of NVQ. One trainee is a team leader responsible for organising and delivering training connected with facilities management, including manual handling, safety awareness, evacuation and fire procedures. Another trainee is responsible for a member of staff's training in information technology. Trainees produce good evidence for key skills from their occupational work. A trainee, who assembled and evaluated data relating to sickness and accidents initially as part of his training, now submits these to his manager quarterly. At the same company, as a result of research into office layout by the trainee, two recommendations are to be followed through, including the installation of an air-conditioning unit. A further trainee has recently assumed responsibility for auctions of computer hardware on the Internet. He is able to work unsupervised, taking photos with a digital camera, which he then puts into a computer. He subsequently notifies the customer with the winning bid by e-mail, and sees the sale through to completion by processing the credit-card payment.

8. Trainees are fully involved in setting targets, at the start of their training and at the action-planning meetings with the trainer/assessors. Trainer/assessors

emphasise to the trainees the importance of time management and adhering to schedules, at the same time warning that these may change to take account of the flow of work and unforeseen circumstances. Trainees remain focused on their NVQ training in the intervening periods between the trainer/assessors' visits.

9. Trainees have access to a range of relevant additional courses offered by Nova Recruitment Services Limited. These include courses in assertiveness, time and stress management, and supervisory and management skills, and training in health and safety. One trainee who had previously taken a first-aid course had just embarked on the first day of a four-day training course in health and safety. She was clearly delighted to be able to consolidate and extend her previous training in this area. Another trainee, who felt he would benefit from more extensive training in communications, had been offered a course in telephone skills. Off-the-job training in information technology is offered to trainees when the need arises. Trainees are encouraged to identify personal achievements at their four-weekly progress reviews to provide further evidence for their NVQ, such as presentations to customers, regular attendance at a gymnasium, or producing leaflets. The retention rate for advanced modern apprentices is high. Four trainees started in 1999 and only one left with no qualification. Seven trainees started in 2000 and all are still in training.

10. The retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is low. Of the four trainees who started training in 2000, three left early with no qualification and only one is still in training. In 1999, two trainees started the programme; one left with no qualification and one completed the framework. Progress by advanced modern apprentices is slow. Two trainees began their training in April 1999 and have not yet completed it, almost two years later. A third began her training in September 1999 and experienced some problems with a trainer/assessor, who is no longer working with NRS Training. The trainer/assessors are new to the business administration standards and not yet familiar with all the opportunities to cross-reference evidence for trainees. This has slowed the progress of some trainees.

## **Retailing & customer service**

## **Grade 1**

11. There are 27 advanced modern apprentices working towards NVQs in customer service at level 3, with additional units from the business administration NVQ at level 3 and five key skills. All trainees are recruited through the sales team of Nova Recruitment Services Limited. Trainees work in companies which range from small engineering distributors and marketing designers, to large mail-order logistics companies. Trainees attend induction and key skills workshops at NRS Training's training centre. The workshops are offered during the first 12 weeks of the programme and trainees can repeat the workshops if required. Assessments are carried out once a month in the workplace. Progress reviews are carried out at eight-weekly intervals. Three subcontracted trainer/assessors assess the trainees. The self-assessment report identified 27 strengths, of which some were considered no more than normal practice and some were more appropriate to generic areas.

Inspectors agreed with many of these but considered the most important strengths to relate to retention and achievement, and the experience of the trainees and employers. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good rate of achievement of NVQs by trainees
- ◆ good rate of retention
- ◆ well-designed learning materials
- ◆ benefits to employers of trainees' work
- ◆ well-planned assessment

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

12. The rates of achievement and retention of trainees are high. In the first year of the customer service modern apprenticeship, two years ago, 78 per cent of trainees achieved the level 3 NVQ in customer service. There has been an increase in the number of trainees starting the programme, with nine in 1998-99, 14 in 1999-2000 and 22 in 2000-01. Trainees' retention rates have increased from 33 per cent in 1998-99 and 43 per cent in 1999-2000, to 82 per cent in 2000-01. Four trainees from the 1998-99 recruits completed their full modern apprenticeship and from the 1999-2000 recruits, three have completed their full awards. Three trainees from the current year's intake have completed their customer service NVQ at level 3. Trainees are encouraged to work towards the NVQ as a whole, rather than individual units. The proportion of trainees who have left the programme early without qualifications has dropped from 33 per cent to 18 per cent. In 1998-99, only one foundation modern apprentice left early.

13. Trainees are provided with well-written learning materials. The use of these materials helps them to produce good work-based evidence. Trainees have a good understanding of the use of these materials and their relevance to both the NVQ they are following and their jobs. Key skills have been well integrated with occupational learning materials, which ensures trainees work on communication, application of number and, where possible, information technology. The project work also covers working with others and improving own learning and performance. Trainees gather evidence from surveys of customers and effectively cover the whole range of key skills.

14. The trainees have produced some good work, which has benefited their employers. The trainees' analysis and feedback has helped to improve many employers' customer service procedures. One trainee created a customer complaints procedure for his company and another trainee designed a welcome pack for potential customers. Trainees' surveys of customers have proved particularly useful in measuring the level of service which their company provides.

Trainees carry out surveys of both internal and external customers. Trainees' confidence has increased from experiences, such as presenting their findings to management and receiving feedback, questioning customers and requesting information from colleagues. Trainees are highly motivated and are making good progress in the workplace.

15. A team of three excellent self-employed trainer/assessors visits the trainees every four weeks, to coach and assess them on the job. Trainees are encouraged to produce a portfolio of evidence, which is based on the learning materials in the workplace and the trainer/assessor's observations of the trainee's customer service skills on the job. The trainer/assessors are very experienced and hold the relevant trainers and assessors' qualifications. Key skills are continually reinforced throughout the training. One of the trainer/assessors holds the key skills practitioners' award; the other two are working towards the award, which includes a qualification to assess all the five key skills which are part of the programme at level 3. All three trainer/assessors are working towards, or have achieved, a level 4 NVQ in training and development. Trainer/assessors make good use of action-planning at their monthly meetings with trainees and challenging targets are set. A wide range of assessment techniques is used and trainees are stimulated by the content of the NVQ and the support of their trainer/assessors. Trainees have a good understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship framework.

16. NRS Training's training centre is well equipped and spacious. The subcontracted trainer/assessors deliver the induction and key skills workshops. Off-the-job training workshops are well planned and include creative exercises which encourage participation and accelerate learning in key skills. Off-the-job learning takes place in the evenings and trainees have the option of attending on alternative dates if they cannot attend within the first 12 weeks of training. Trainers work as a team and cover sickness and absence between themselves, which means workshops are rarely cancelled. Trainees can contact their trainers at any time and they are given the trainer/assessors' office, mobile and home telephone numbers. Trainees are encouraged to contact the trainer/assessors out of hours if required. The trainer/assessors offer additional assistance with information-technology training by offering trainees the use of their own personal laptop computers during their four-weekly visits. Trainees take additional training through Nova Recruitment Services Limited, such as in telephone techniques, presentation skills and first aid.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

17. NRS Training has an equal opportunities policy which meets the TEC's requirements and is reviewed regularly. It is issued to staff and to trainees at their induction, along with the grievance procedure. Employers receive a copy of a guide to work-based training at the start of their trainee's programme. This contains the equal opportunities policy and guidance on the role of both the employer and the training provider. Application forms include an equal



opportunities statement. NRS Training maintains records of trainees' ethnicity, gender, age and disabilities. There is a complaints and grievance procedure. Interview rooms and initial testing facilities are easily accessible to trainees, on the ground floor of the centre. The self-assessment report identified mostly strengths. Inspectors agreed with these and identified an additional weakness. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ good equal opportunities training for staff
- ◆ regular review of data on equal opportunities
- ◆ prompt and effective response to complaints

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient reinforcement of equal opportunities with trainees and employers

18. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, covering gender, ethnicity, belief, educational background, sexual orientation, marital status, age and disability. It refers specifically to recruitment, initial assessment, training and development, for both employers and trainees. There is a commitment to review the policy at least annually. Inspectors observed an induction, where the concept of equal opportunities, including discrimination and harassment, was discussed in detail. There is an induction check list for staff and trainees. The associate director, the training and development manager and the manager of NRS Training's training centre have all attended training in equal opportunities. This has included courses on employing people with disabilities and on awareness of cultural diversity. A certificate in the reception area acknowledges NRS Training's pledge, as part of a national initiative, to place one extra person with a disability in employment during the course of the initiative. This has been achieved.

19. Data on equal opportunities are reviewed regularly and action is taken to improve trainees' experience. Trainees' files record discussions and acknowledge any disability. A trainer/assessor visited a trainee who was off work and allowed the trainee to use their own laptop computer to enable her to progress with training on key skills. Those attending meetings held monthly until October 2000 between NRS Training and the TEC discussed the proportion of trainees with health problems and those from minority ethnic groups. Equal opportunities has recently become a standard agenda item for assessors' meetings. Targets are set to increase recruitment of trainees from minority ethnic groups. A campaign to attract potential trainees from minority ethnic groups, involving estate agents, mobile phone shops, housing associations and car dealers, successfully attracted further trainees, one of whom is following an advanced modern apprenticeship in business administration. The number of men entering the programme increased in 1999-2000. Of 11 business administration trainees, six are men. NRS Training ensured

that a male trainee participated in a recent publicity event. Thirty per cent of all trainees are men, 9 per cent have a disability and 9 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. These proportions have increased over the past year and compare favourably with local statistics for the area.

20. Complaints are responded to promptly and effectively. Any complaints are discussed at monthly meetings and a summary report is compiled every six months. In one instance, a trainee complained that he had not had sufficient training in key skills. This resulted in the trainee attending training in telephone skills to improve his communication skills. NRS Training also pointed out that the trainee had, in fact, achieved high percentages in the key skills assessments on which the workshops focused. The situation was handled well and was resolved to the satisfaction of both the trainee and the workplace supervisor.

21. Equal opportunities is not reinforced with trainees in the workplace. The progress review does not systematically identify whether the trainee has been subjected to discrimination or harassment, nor does it promote strong awareness of equal opportunities. The progress-review form was revised during the inspection to capture information on equal opportunities. NRS Training regularly monitors comments made in the progress reviews; this monitoring has identified that only health and safety issues have arisen to date.

22. NRS Training issues a guide for employers on work-based training, produced by the TEC. It is clear and well set out. However, most employers are not fully aware of NRS Training's equal opportunities policy. Equal opportunities are not reinforced with employers. Employers' policies are not formally monitored to ensure compliance with the training provider's own policy and commitment to equality of opportunity. One company involved in the training did not have its own equal opportunities policy. Some of NRS Training's marketing materials do not have a statement of commitment to equal opportunities, notably its website, which was produced before the contract for government-funded training started, and its training leaflet.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 2**

23. Trainees are recruited from employers, through the careers service or by Nova Recruitment Services Limited's sales team. Trainees complete an initial assessment which includes analysis of their basic, key and occupational skills. Trainees are registered as foundation or advanced modern apprentices after they have completed an induction and training workshop. Trainees who are not already employed gain work experience at Nova Recruitment Services Limited until they gain employment. Trainees are coached and assessed in the workplace every four weeks. The off-the-job training mainly consists of key skills workshops, which are held during the first 12 weeks of training. Trainees' progress reviews take place every eight weeks. NRS Training identified 11 strengths and no weaknesses in the self-assessment report, many of which inspectors regarded as no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and identified additional

strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a grade equal to that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good initial assessment and induction
- ◆ innovative training in key skills
- ◆ frequent contact with trainees

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic updating of individual learning plans
- ◆ insufficient involvement of trainees in progress reviews

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*As part of their induction, new recruits are given a presentation by current trainees. This presentation fulfils both key skills and NVQ requirements for the trainees and increases their confidence in speaking in public. The new recruits are impressed that young people of their own age demonstrate such skills and are motivated to start their own training.*

24. Initial assessment is comprehensive and consistent. Trainees are interviewed and their key skills, basic skills and occupational interest are assessed. Trainees also attend an induction and a training workshop on improving own learning and performance within two weeks of enrolment. The trainers continue the initial assessment informally by observing the trainees and giving them feedback on issues of concern and on their levels of understanding. Induction is well planned and delivered and offered at times to suit the trainees. Induction takes place in small groups. Sometimes the trainer carries out one-to-one inductions for individual trainees in the workplace. All the costs of initial assessment and induction are covered by NRS Training, even if trainees do not wish to continue with their training.

25. NRS Training promotes good training in key skills. Trainees are given a self-assessment, which asks them to think about their current level of key skills. Trainees are asked if they wish to undertake half-hour tests based on three key skills: application of number, communication and information technology. Trainees take a practice level 1 or level 2 test paper. The papers are marked internally and the results are sent by letter to the trainee. Trainees benefit from this testing of the level of their key skills. They are confident in their understanding of key skills and appreciate the relevance of key skills to the workplace. The key skills workshops are well planned, stimulating and well taught. Trainer/assessors regularly emphasise the learning and assessment of key skills at their monthly meetings.

26. Trainees have frequent contact with the provider through the monthly meetings with their trainer/assessors, the workshops and telephone contact. The monthly meetings encourage trainees to comment on their previous work, agree actions, discuss issues and raise any concerns. These meetings are recorded by the trainer/assessor, together with comments written by the trainees. Trainees receive a copy of this information for their files, to refer to between meetings.

27. NRS Training takes effective steps to motivate trainees to succeed. Trainees' achievements are celebrated through photographs, the award of framed certificates and publicity materials. There are good relationships between the trainees and the support staff. The trainer/assessors offer good advice and guidance to the trainees on both occupational and personal issues. Trainees also receive advice, if appropriate, on how to look for a job and how to further their careers. In most cases, trainees are already employed when they start training.

28. The record of meetings is not used to involve the trainee in updating the individual learning plan. It is updated on NRS Training's management-information system. Action plans are updated monthly during the meeting of the trainer/assessor and the trainee but there is no overall review of the individual learning plan. Progress reviews take place every eight weeks but do not always involve the trainees. Opportunities are missed to involve trainees, employers and NRS Training's staff in three-way meetings.

## Management of training

## Grade 1

29. NRS Training is part of Nova Recruitment Services Limited. NRS Training was established two years ago to provide job opportunities and training for young people. The company has six staff: an associate director, a centre manager, an accounts manager, an administration manager who is also responsible for quality assurance, the training and development manager and the training consultant. The company was awarded the Investors in People Standard for the third time in 2000. NRS Training has three subcontracted assessors, who also act as trainers and internal verifiers. The company is based on a single site in Dudley in the same building as Nova Recruitment Services Limited. NRS Training has held a contract with the TEC for two years. The self-assessment report identified nine strengths and no weaknesses for management of training. Some of the strengths were regarded as no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified one weakness and awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good business-planning
- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ very effective reviews of performance
- ◆ good communications within the company

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training

30. NRS Training has a strategic business plan, which is part of the Nova Recruitment Services Limited's plan. Nova Recruitment Services Limited has had a business plan for many years. The plan clearly sets out qualitative and quantitative targets for the government-funded training. The business plan is developed through analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the company. All staff are involved in this analysis, including the three subcontracted trainer/assessors. A copy of the plan is given to each member of staff. The plan is reviewed at the monthly managers' meetings. Progress against the plan's targets is conveyed to and discussed with staff at the regular team meetings, which also involve the three trainer/assessors. The plan identifies the growth expected for the NVQ training and emphasises that growth must take place in parallel with the delivery of a good-quality service.

31. Staff development is good. Staff are encouraged to develop their skills according to the needs of the business. Several of the staff have themselves been modern apprentices and have achieved NVQs in business administration, customer service and information technology. Two members of staff of NRS Training are working towards training qualifications. There is extensive informal staff development through team meetings. Staff coach each other and disseminate information gleaned from training courses attended. The staff are being trained to work across a range of jobs in the company and to be multiskilled and flexible. There is a structured programme of in-house training courses for sales consultants, which clearly identifies the knowledge required of the company's products. Staff are able to attend the commercial training offered by Nova Recruitment Services Limited and take full advantage of any training provided by the TEC. The company has also trained the TEC's staff in quality assurance.

32. Performance reviews for all staff take place every three months. Members of staff produce a three-monthly action plan, which identifies their specific objectives for the time until the next performance review. The action plans, which are monitored by line managers, are detailed and realistic and focus the attention of the staff on the business's objectives. All staff have written job descriptions and are clear about their roles and responsibilities.

33. Communications, both within the company and with Nova Recruitment Services Limited, are good. There are regular team meetings and meetings of managers and trainer/assessors. Management information is very satisfactory and is used to demonstrate achievements and identify problems. An analysis of trainees' performance by yearly intake was produced at the request of inspectors. Staff review contractual performance by referring to management information. Meetings are recorded and the minutes are distributed to staff. There are clear lines of accountability between the staff and the management team. The managers are open and encouraging with the staff, who are comfortable and secure with NRS Training's personnel procedures.

34. NRS Training does not always take sufficient account of the formal and informal training given in the workplace, nor does it combine this with the off-the-job training to produce an overall plan for the trainee. Some staff identify the on-

the-job training and record it in trainees' action plans. There is not enough discussion with some employers about how they can help fulfil the trainees' objectives.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 2

35. NRS Training has a quality assurance system based on ISO 9002. There is a quality assurance manual which sets out procedures for all aspects of training. There are procedures to control its issue and updating. There are internal audits by the administration manager and external audits by the TEC and the ISO auditors. The company is a member of a foundation to promote excellence in British companies. NRS Training works with one awarding body for both the government-funded and the commercial training it offers. NRS Training has held a contract with the TEC for two years. The company uses subcontracted trainer/assessors to deliver training workshops and to assess the trainees' work for their NVQs. The self-assessment report was both well presented and comprehensive. Self-assessment involved all members of staff and the subcontractors. The report included an action plan. There were many more strengths in the report than weaknesses and some of these were statements of facts and standard practice. Inspectors agreed with the grades given in the self-assessment report in all areas except retailing and customer service and management of training, where higher grades were awarded.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ systematic feedback from trainees and employers
- ◆ thorough assessment and internal verification
- ◆ continuous improvement

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor performance against contract in some areas

36. A variety of methods is used to obtain feedback from trainees and employers. Trainees are asked to give their views, after induction, after each training workshop and at each meeting with their trainer/assessor. Questionnaires are sent to trainees and employers every six months. The results are analysed by NRS Training and then discussed in team meetings and with the assessors. During the inspection, NRS Training produced a summary of the results arising from the most recent questionnaire which was to be given to trainees and employers. No other feedback had been given previously. The trainees' destinations are also monitored. Trainees are asked to identify their long-term professional goals during training and they are contacted three months after completing their training to see how far they have met those goals. Records of trainees' destinations are maintained and discussed at team meetings.

37. The procedures for assessment and internal verification are particularly thorough. The assessors and internal verifiers meet regularly to discuss their practice, review the standards, consider information from the awarding body and monitor the trainees' progress. There are clear sampling plans for assessment and internal verification. Observations of assessment are planned well in advance. Portfolios are assessed throughout the programme and the internal verifiers give comprehensive written feedback to the assessors. The assessors work closely with the staff of NRS Training and give frequent feedback on issues relating to assessment as they arise. The assessors ensure that a variety of evidence is made available for assessment to meet the requirements of the awarding body.

38. There are many examples of continuous improvement. Since NRS Training first obtained the TEC contract, the programme has been restructured to emphasise the importance of key skills; trainees have been encouraged to self-assess their own level of ability in key skills; more frequent feedback has been gathered; forms have been tested and revised; new systems have been developed and evaluated. During the inspection, NRS Training's staff received the inspectors' findings with enthusiasm and responded promptly to issues as they arose. They revised the progress-review record to make it more useful and summarised the feedback in a booklet for the use of trainees and employers.

39. Generally, NRS Training has shown good contractual performance and high rates of achievement and retention in customer service training. However, its performance in foundation modern apprenticeship training and in business administration has been less successful. The foundation modern apprenticeship has yet to be fully evaluated. NRS Training does not monitor trainees' progress in achieving individual NVQ units and its overall monitoring document is inadequate.