



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2001

# Omega Training Services Limited

## SUMMARY

Omega Training Services Limited offers training programmes in care. Assessment is well planned. Trainees' retention and achievement rates are poor. Training opportunities are well promoted to under-represented groups in the local community but no monitoring of equal opportunities takes place in the workplace. Trainees receive a poor induction to their training. Reviews of trainees' progress take place infrequently and there is little initial assessment to shape their individual training plans. Staff-development opportunities are good. Management of training is less than satisfactory. There are no systems to assure the quality of the work-based training and aspects of the assessment process are poorly managed.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	5

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support of NVQ process by co-ordinators
- ◆ good staff-development opportunities

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poorly planned training
- ◆ poor training in key skills
- ◆ low retention and achievement rates
- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient use of initial assessment
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ no management of on-the-job training
- ◆ no systems to assure the quality of work-based training

## INTRODUCTION

1. Omega Training Services Limited (Omega) is a privately owned company based in Birmingham. The company was formed in April 1996, with two equal share holders and directors, who continue to own and manage it. Omega provides training for young people in care for older people, care for people with learning difficulties and care for people with physical disabilities. The company has contracts with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). Birmingham and Solihull TEC was the co-ordinating TEC for the purposes of the inspection. In addition, the company has subcontracted with Birmingham and Solihull TEC to provide training for clients on the voluntary sector option of the New Deal. Omega also provides training for approximately 200 adults, which is funded through the European Social Fund (ESF), and to approximately 30 privately funded trainees. The private and ESF-funded training did not form part of the inspection.

2. There are 95 TEC-funded trainees. Eighty-six are foundation and advanced modern apprentices from the Birmingham area, and nine are advanced modern apprentices from Shropshire. All are employed. At the time of the inspection, there was one New Deal client. Training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is given on a one-to-one or small-group basis in the residential or nursing homes in which trainees are employed. The trainees who work in domiciliary care services, providing care to people in their own homes, receive training on a one-to-one basis.

3. Most of Omega's trainees come from Birmingham, Telford and Shrewsbury. The unemployment rate varies throughout the region. It is highest in Birmingham (6.3 per cent) and lowest in Shropshire (2.3 per cent), compared with an average unemployment rate for England of 3.3 per cent. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is even more variable. Minority ethnic groups constitute 21.5 per cent of the population in Birmingham and 1.6 per cent in Shropshire, compared with 6.2 per cent for England as a whole. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 41 per cent in Birmingham and 56 per cent in Shropshire, compared with 49.2 per cent for England as a whole. The proportion of students who remain in education or training after the age of 16 is close to the national average of 69 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. One of the two company directors has responsibility for compiling the self-assessment report and attended training on self-assessment which was organised by Birmingham and Solihull TEC. An external consultant was employed by the company to carry out a practice inspection before the company completed the report. The self-assessment process included interviews with employers, trainees and assessors. All training staff were involved in self-assessment. All the grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those given by the company in its self-assessment report.

5. Three inspectors spent a total of 12 days with Omega in January 2001. Inspectors interviewed 18 trainees and eight workplace supervisors and work-based assessors. Nine interviews were carried out with employers. Sixteen interviews were conducted with training staff. Inspectors reviewed documents which included TEC contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance reports, minutes of meetings and promotional materials. Inspectors observed seven training sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Six training sessions were graded.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Health, care & public services		1	1	4		6
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Health, care & public services

### Grade 4

6. The company has 95 TEC-funded trainees. Thirty-one are following foundation modern apprenticeships, working towards an NVQ at level 2 in care. Sixty-four are advanced modern apprentices, working towards an NVQ in care at levels 2, 3 or 4 or an NVQ at level 3 in promoting independence. There is one client on the voluntary sector option of the New Deal. All trainees are employed, working in large and small residential homes for older people and for people with learning disabilities some of whom display challenging behaviour or as carers in people's own homes. Off-the-job training is offered by Omega at its own or the employers' premises in first aid, patient handling, food hygiene and handling, health and safety and fire safety.

7. There are two directors. One is responsible for the day-to-day management of the training, and the other for the internal verification of the qualifications and for

assessors' training and development. The latter also owns and manages a local residential home for older people. In addition, there is one senior training co-ordinator, one co-ordinating support worker, and five training co-ordinators. One training co-ordinator is responsible for the training and assessment of key skills for all trainees. All staff are occupationally qualified and have appropriate experience. All the co-ordinators are either qualified assessors or working towards a qualification as an assessor. There are three internal verifiers, one of whom is qualified and two of whom are working towards a qualification. Four staff have teaching qualifications. There is a large number of work-based assessors, many of whom are working towards assessors' qualifications.

8. The self-assessment report identified three strengths, with which inspectors did not agree. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive planning of NVQ assessments

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor understanding of programmes by trainees and employers
- ◆ poorly planned training
- ◆ insufficient resources for training
- ◆ poor assessment practices
- ◆ poor training in key skills
- ◆ low achievement and retention rates

9. Assessment for the NVQ is planned in detail by the co-ordinators, some of whom are also assessors. Trainees are encouraged to identify evidence themselves and to write their own assessment plans. When trainees do not gain enough experience in their work to cover all aspects of the NVQ, Omega offers trainees opportunities to work in other areas to gain the experience they need. Assessment plans are detailed and clearly relate to the different components of the NVQ.

10. Trainees are unable to state which training programme they are on. They know that they are working towards an NVQ and at which level. Trainees do not understand that their programme determines the range of qualifications they will take. Many employers have no knowledge of the different programmes.

11. Trainees are guided through the NVQ by their assessors and training co-ordinators. Omega gives them no training in theory relating to their NVQ until they have been assessed. Training needs may then be identified through the assessment process. The identification of training needs relies on the trainees identifying gaps in their own knowledge by trying to answer questions. If a trainee

is unable to answer the questions set, the training need is then identified. Some employers offer training courses to their staff on relevant topics, such as abuse. Omega has also provided such courses in some work placements, but many trainees have not had access to such training. The trainees' induction and individual training plans do not inform them what training they will receive.

12. The company makes textbooks and handouts available to trainees. Many trainees are not aware of this and most trainees have not used them. Some of the handouts are out of date. The handouts do not cover all aspects of the NVQ and information is not organised logically. Some are hand written. Trainees include printed information as additional evidence in their portfolios, some of which is very out of date. The rooms used for training in key skills and in care are inadequate. People walking in and out to other rooms interrupt training sessions.

13. Half of the assessors are not qualified. Many have not been observed assessing trainees. Trainee assessors are not closely monitored while they are in training and the results of the monitoring which does take place are not recorded. Decisions by trainee assessors are not countersigned. Some trainees are assessed by members of their own families. One assessor is assessing a trainee at a level higher than the assessor's own qualification. No meetings of assessors take place to ensure consistency of practice.

14. Trainees make slow progress in key skills. Only four of the 276 trainees who have started training have completed key skills. Many trainees are unaware of the requirement for them to take key skills and are unsure of the role of key skills within the training or how they will be assessed. Opportunities to use evidence for key skills are sometimes missed within the NVQ training. The company provides training sessions in each of the key skills. No attempt is made to accredit trainees' previous achievements and much of the training session is taken up with assessment. Attendance rates at these sessions are low.

15. Retention and achievement rates are poor. Since training started in 1997, 276 trainees have started the programme. Of these four have completed their individual training plan, 20 per cent have completed an NVQ at level 2, and 19 per cent have completed an NVQ at level 3. Achievement rates of NVQs at level 2 have improved from 27 per cent in 1997-98 to 28 per cent in 1998-99 and 41 per cent in 1999-2000.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 4**

16. Omega has a detailed equal opportunities policy. This was last updated in 1997 and does not reflect recent changes in legislation. A written agreement between employers and the company stipulates that employers are required to comply with relevant legislation. One of the directors has responsibility for equal

opportunities. Day-to-day responsibility is delegated to one of the co-ordinators. The co-ordinator has undertaken training in equal opportunities and is planning training for the remainder of the staff. Parts of the company's premises are accessible to trainees in wheelchairs. The company has an open-door recruitment policy and records all applications. Trainees are usually recruited through employers' recommendations. The company collects data on trainees' gender, ethnicity and disabilities to satisfy the TEC's requirements. Fifteen per cent of trainees starting the programme in 1999-2000 were men, and 21 per cent were from minority ethnic groups. Three per cent of trainees have disabilities. People from minority ethnic groups account for 21.5 per cent of the population of Birmingham. The figure is lower in Shropshire, at 1.6 per cent. All the strengths given in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice or were not agreed with. Inspectors agreed with the weaknesses given in the report but considered them more appropriate to other aspects of the training. Inspectors found additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good promotion of training to under-represented groups

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ no use of data on equal opportunities in action-planning

17. Omega promotes training opportunities to under-represented groups in the local community through articles in the local press and contact with employers which are running homes which care for specific minority ethnic groups or religious groups. Talks about employment in the care sector are given to local secondary schools. Young people are given work experience in one of the care homes belonging to one of the directors. There has been a recent effort to encourage employers to employ men as carers and to recommend them for training.

18. There is no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace. The company has only recently recognised its responsibilities for equal opportunities in the workplace. Monitoring of equal opportunities does not form part of the reviews of trainees' progress or visits by the co-ordinator. Co-ordinators in direct contact with employers do not fully recognise monitoring opportunities in the workplace or use them to best effect. Equal opportunities is covered very briefly during the trainees' induction but no action is taken to check the trainees' understanding. The induction handbook includes one sentence on equal opportunities. Other sections of the booklet are not written in clear and simple English. Employers and trainees are unaware of the company's equal opportunities policy.

19. Omega collects data on gender, ethnicity and disability to satisfy the TEC's requirements. Further data were collected in preparation for the inspection. Analysis of data does not result in any planned developments. A complaints procedure is in operation but complaints are not systematically analysed. Responses to complaints do not result in any planned and recorded proposals for improvement.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 4**

20. Trainees are recruited to training programmes after being nominated by their employers. Trainees are visited in their workplace by their assigned co-ordinator to explain the programme's requirements. A second visit is made to sign paperwork and to carry out an induction into the training programmes. A welcome pack, including an induction handbook, is given to trainees. Some trainees complete an initial assessment of their skills. Advice on careers is given on request. Some staff have had training in awareness of dyslexia. A range of assessment methods is used, some of which reduce the emphasis on trainees' writing skills. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths given in the self-assessment report, which related to support provided by co-ordinators. Four other strengths given in the self-assessment report were considered by inspectors to be no more than normal practice or were considered to be weaknesses. Inspectors found additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ frequent and individualised support for trainees

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor induction of trainees
- ◆ insufficient use of initial assessment
- ◆ inadequate training plans
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress

21. Trainees are well supported by their training co-ordinator. Visits to the workplace normally take place every two weeks. During the visit, the co-ordinator plans the next unit for assessment with the trainee on a one-to-one basis. Trainees can request visits from their co-ordinator and contact them during weekdays, evenings and weekends for additional support. Visits can also take place to fit in with trainees' shift patterns.



22. All trainees receive an induction at the start of their training programme. This induction takes place in the workplace. It is brief, usually lasting no more than one hour. During the induction, trainees receive an introduction for Omega, to its policies and procedures, and to its training programmes. Trainees receive an explanation of how the NVQ process works and receive information on the planning of assessment for their first unit. Trainees have little memory of the content of the induction and find the information given confusing. Each trainee is given an induction handbook. The book is not written in clear and simple English. It refers mainly to trainees' responsibilities and uses legal terminology. There is little reference to equal opportunities. References to manual handling in the workplace encourage dangerous practices. No check is made of trainees' understanding of the issues covered.

23. It is Omega's policy to assess all trainees' basic and key skills as well as their preferred learning style at the beginning of the programme. This is done through a self-assessment form which trainees complete at home. However, some trainees had not been assessed, and none of the information produced by initial assessment is used as a basis for the trainees' individual training plans. Records of the initial assessment are not always included in the trainees' files and trainees are unaware of the results of the assessment. Only one out of almost 300 trainees over the past three years is recorded as having received additional support.

24. Individual training plans are poor. Few are filled in thoroughly. Many lack details of the trainees' previous learning, target dates, progress-review dates and changes to trainees' personal or work circumstances. There is no information about on-the-job training and few details of the off-the-job training. No records of trainees' additional support needs are included. Omega is expected to carry out trainees' progress reviews at six- or 12-week intervals, depending on their TEC contract. Progress reviews are infrequent and brief and do not meet contractual requirements. Some trainees had not had any progress reviews. Trainees are unclear of the purpose of progress reviews. No specific targets are set. Employers are not involved in the progress-review process.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 4**

25. The company was formed in 1996 with two directors and shareholders. It specialises in training for the care sector. The management structure is clear, and both directors have distinct roles. One is responsible for the day-to-day management of contracts and staff, and the other is responsible for the quality of training. The company achieved the Investors in People Standard in May 1998, and was re-accredited in November 1999. Staff have written job descriptions, and there is an annual appraisal system which links with the staff's development needs. Staff have appropriate experience of the care sector and either hold or are working towards assessors' qualifications. There are weekly, minuted meetings for the training staff, at which contractual and training-related issues are discussed. Most training is provided on the job by employers. Omega's staff provide training in

areas such as first aid and manual handling. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses to those given in Omega's self-assessment report, and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good staff development
- ◆ effective internal communications
- ◆ open and supportive management

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no management of on-the-job training
- ◆ no written procedures for staff recruitment
- ◆ high staff workloads
- ◆ poor understanding by employers of policies and targets

26. The company's managers strongly support staff development, and clearly recognise the value of staff. Staff development is linked to an annual appraisal system and offers staff the opportunity to gain qualifications which relate specifically to the training offered by the company, and also to the staff's personal career-development targets. Staff are being supported, for example, in achieving assessors' and key skills qualifications, and health and safety qualifications. Several staff are working towards further education teaching qualifications and mentoring awards offered at local colleges of further education.

27. Staff receive information primarily through weekly meetings, which are chaired by the senior training co-ordinator, and which are normally attended by one of the company's directors. Minutes of the meetings show that the items discussed are wide ranging, and cover information on targets, inspection information, and concerns about trainees' progress. Training staff welcome the opportunity provided by these meetings to share information and to seek solutions with other staff to problems arising in their job roles. The meetings contribute to a strong team spirit among training staff.

28. Both directors work closely with members of the training and administrative team. Access to management is good and directors are sensitive to staff's concerns. Recent examples include the introduction of flexible working arrangements to accommodate a member of staff. The company also paid for driving lessons for a member of staff, to assist in preparing them for their job role.

29. There are no written procedures for the recruitment of staff. The absence of written procedures exposes the company to the charge of poor practice with regard to employment and equal opportunities. The directors have identified this weakness, and the production of written procedures relating to the recruitment of staff is part of an agreed action plan.

30. The work of the company covers a wide geographical area, including Birmingham, Solihull and Shropshire. The company currently provides training in care for 92 care homes. Including trainees outside the scope of this inspection, each member of the training staff is responsible for an average of 72 trainees. The responsibilities of training staff include liaison with employers, support for trainees, the assessment of trainees, health and safety checks and off-the-job training. The expectation is that training staff will visit each trainee once every two weeks. The heavy workload of training staff is an important factor in the poor performance of trainees. Complaints recorded by the company include the failure by training staff to keep appointments, and the misplacement of trainees' work.

31. Feedback obtained by the company from employers shows a poor understanding of the company's policies and targets, but at the time of the inspection, no strategies were being implemented to address this issue. It is not clear how, if at all, Omega's policies and targets are communicated to employers. In response to questionnaires, some employers indicate that Omega's policies are not applicable to them.

32. Discussion at weekly meetings of Omega's training staff draw attention to employers allowing staff to work at their own pace towards a qualification, with no concern for targets which have been set. Nothing is being done by the company to address this lack of awareness and understanding on the part of the employers. In view of the central role given to employers in training, their knowledge of the company's policies and their involvement in setting targets, are essential to the success of the training.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 5

33. The quality assurance manual was introduced in 1997 to meet the contractual requirements of Birmingham and Solihull TEC. The manual is currently being revised and updated. Responsibility for quality assurance is held by one of the two directors of the company. Copies of the manual are available to staff. Staff are aware of the self-assessment process, and contributed to the production of the self-assessment report.

34. Many of the strengths identified by the company through self-assessment, were judged by inspectors to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found additional weaknesses to those identified by the company and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

## STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide consultation carried out to support self-assessment.

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systems to assure the quality of work-based training
- ◆ poor monitoring of assessments
- ◆ insufficient analysis of data

#### **POOR PRACTICE**

*Staff who do not have the internal verifiers' qualification are allowed to carry out verification without supervision or countersignatures.*

35. To help prepare the company for inspection, a sample of trainees and employers were surveyed on behalf of Omega by independent consultants during July and August 2000. The information gathered was used to shape Omega's action plans. The company also sought the support of the TEC and a half-day workshop was jointly organised for all of Omega's staff. Additional workshops were organised to inform staff about the self-assessment process.

36. In 1997, the company prepared a procedures and policy manual to meet the quality assurance requirements of Birmingham and Solihull TEC. The procedures focused on what the company had to do to comply with the TEC contract. The manual has not been reviewed or updated since 1997. Some policies are out of date, including the equal opportunities policy, which does not make any reference to disability legislation. The directors are aware of the need to prepare policies and procedures which assure the quality of work-based training and are currently engaged in such work. However, this work is at a very early stage and, at the time of inspection, had had no impact on the training programme.

37. The company has been successful in involving employers and their staff as work-based assessors. It offers free training towards assessors' qualifications to support this role. The monitoring of assessment practices is, however, poor. Assessment practices do not include, for example, direct observation or the use of witness testimony. There are examples of unqualified assessors, both work-based assessors and employees of the training company, taking assessment decisions, which are not countersigned by a qualified assessor.

38. Internal verification practices are satisfactory, and include a sampling strategy and arrangements for written feedback to assessors. Much of the feedback is, however, of little use for improving the quality of training.

39. Some performance data are gathered by the company. Feedback is obtained from trainees at the start, during, and on completion of their training programme. Feedback is collected from employers through an annual postal questionnaire. Records are kept of trainees who leave their programmes early, and the company has current data on achievement. There is, however, insufficient analysis of these data to bring about improvements in the training programmes. Data are not used to establish targets, for example, for the completion of individual training plans, or the achievement of key skills units. The range of data gathered is not comprehensive. For example, the quality of training provided by employers is not evaluated.