

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Herefordshire Group Training Association Limited

18 June 2001



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

## **Adult Learning Inspectorate**

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

## **Inadequate provision**

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

## SUMMARY

### The provider

Herefordshire Group Training Association Limited is a private company and a registered charity. The company operates from premises in Hereford and Worcester. It provides training for foundation and advanced modern apprentices in the occupational areas of engineering, business administration and retailing and customer service.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, work-based training in engineering and business administration is good and in retailing and customer service it is satisfactory. Herefordshire Group Training Association Limited's leadership and management are good.

### Work-based learning for young people

Apprentices benefit from good resources and training at the company's training centres. Herefordshire Group Training Association Limited's staff provide good pastoral support for apprentices and good guidance on issues relating to their training. Many of the current apprentices have not received assessment in key skills until near the end of their programmes. In the occupational area of engineering, the company tailors individual training plans to the needs of individual apprentices and employers. Apprentices in engineering gain experience of a wide variety of activities in the workplace. However, the company's assessors carry out too few work-based observations of engineering apprentices. In business administration, apprentices benefit from an imaginative and effective induction and from good work placements. However, the links between on- and off-the-job training in business administration are weak. Apprentices in retailing and customer service produce good portfolios of evidence but some reviews of these apprentices' progress are ineffective.

### Leadership and management

The strategic management of Herefordshire Group Training Association Limited is good. Apprentices benefit from the association's effective relationships with employers and its member companies. Processes to assure quality have resulted in continual improvements in many areas. Staff have effective appraisals and good opportunities for development. However, good practice is not always shared. The company refers to equal opportunities in apprentices' inductions and in its agreements with employers but does not reinforce this subsequently.

## GRADES

<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	2

## KEY STRENGTHS

- effective training at the training centres
- good support for apprentices
- good work placements for apprentices in business administration
- good strategic management
- continuous improvement in many areas

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- weak management of key skills
- little reinforcement of initial promotion of equal opportunities to apprentices and employers

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- involvement of employers in detailed planning of assessments
- better monitoring of subcontractors for engineering training

## THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Herefordshire Group Training Association Limited (HGTA) was founded in 1967. In October 1999, it acquired Midshire Training Services. HGTA's 65 members companies range from small businesses to large employers in the manufacturing and processing sector in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. The association recruits staff and provides training for its member companies. It also trains staff from a local council and from retail, accountancy and legal services companies. HGTA employs 23 staff and currently has 285 foundation and advanced modern apprentices. Its premises in Hereford consist of offices and a training centre. After acquiring Midshire Training Services, HGTA established an additional training centre and offices in Worcester.

2. The funding for HGTA's training comes from employers and through the Local Learning and Skills Council for Herefordshire and Worcestershire. In Herefordshire, the largest source of employment is manufacturing and the second largest is wholesaling and retailing. The rate of unemployment in Herefordshire is 2.4 per cent, compared with a national average of 3.3 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Herefordshire who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 52 per cent, compared with a national average of 49.2 per cent. Minority ethnic groups make up 0.6 per cent of Herefordshire's population. In Worcestershire, manufacturing is the third largest source of employment. The rate of unemployment in Worcestershire is 2.5 per cent. The proportion of school leavers in Worcestershire who achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or above in 2000 was 49 per cent. Minority ethnic groups make up 1.5 per cent of Worcestershire's population.

## THE INSPECTION

3. Seven inspectors spent a total of 28 days with HGTA in June 2001. They carried out 67 interviews with managers, assessors, trainers and employers' staff. Inspectors interviewed 85 apprentices at HGTA's premises and 48 at work placements in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. They visited one subcontracted college of further education. Inspectors observed and graded seven lessons. Inspectors examined apprentices' portfolios and files, management information and promotional material. They studied HGTA's most recent self-assessment report which it had produced in February 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	5
Retailing, customer service & transportation	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>



## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	155	2

4. HGTA has 14 foundation modern apprentices on two-year training programmes in engineering and 141 advanced modern apprentices on four-year programmes. All the advanced modern apprentices are employed. Employers range from small engineering companies to large manufacturing companies producing a wide variety of products. HGTA recruits apprentices and matches them to suitable employers, which then interview them. After an initial assessment and induction, all advanced modern apprentices attend foundation training in engineering for the first year of their programmes. This training takes place at HGTA's training centre in Hereford and at a local college of further education in Worcester. Most apprentices attend the training full time for 36 to 48 weeks, although some attend on a day- or block-release basis. After the first year of their programmes, apprentices attend further education colleges for day-release training which complements their NVQs. Foundation modern apprentices work towards an NVQ at level 2 and advanced modern apprentices work towards an NVQ at level 3 or 4. The apprentices also attend two local colleges for training and assessment in key skills. Advanced modern apprentices spend most of the final three years of their programmes at their employers' premises. Workplace supervisors carry out training and provide witness testimony of apprentices' competence. HGTA's qualified and occupationally experienced staff visit apprentices in the workplace to review their progress and carry out assessments.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					8		12		11	100
Still in training					0	0	6	50	8	73
FMA framework completed					1	12	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					5	62	6	50	2	18

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started			49		55		45		42	100
Still in training			32	65	37	67	34	76	38	90
AMA framework completed			4	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			44	90	45	82	31	69	5	12
NVQ level 3 completed			14	29	1	2	0	0	1	2

### STRENGTHS

- good resources at training centre
- wide variety of activities experienced in the workplace
- good matching of individual training plans to individual needs of apprentices and employers
- good support for apprentices

### WEAKNESSES

- too few work-based observations by HGTA's assessors
- no assesment of key skills until towards the end of apprentices' programmes

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more detailed planning of assessments during fourth year of training

5. Both HGTA's workshop and the workshop at the further education college in Worcester are dedicated to training in engineering and have a wide variety of resources. There is more specialised equipment to develop apprentices' skills in milling, drilling, welding and bench fitting. Both workshops use computer numerical control systems. The computers in the workshops have up-to-date software. It is part of HGTA's business plan to continually upgrade the resources in its workshops. The company has recently acquired an automated guillotine, a punch machine, upgraded lathes and welding equipment. The self-assessment report identified the facilities at the workshops as a strength. HGTA makes efficient use of its resources. The company structures apprentices' learning so that they can use the machines whenever they need to. The ratio of one trainer to every six apprentices ensures that apprentices can obtain guidance whenever they require it. HGTA's training staff have extensive occupational experience and are qualified in training and assessment.

6. Advanced modern apprentices normally experience a wide variety of work

placements within their company for the first two years after achieving their level 2 NVQ. These work placements help apprentices to build on the skills they have acquired during the first year of training. Examples include tool rooms and site installation and repair workshops. Apprentice technicians spend time in drawing offices and research and development departments. Apprentices have the opportunity to specialise in particular areas of engineering. They do not select their optional units for the NVQ at level 3 until the third year of their programmes. This allows them to choose units which will prepare them for their chosen engineering specialism. Workplace supervisors are qualified and experienced.

7. HGTA tailors apprentices' individual training plans to the needs of the individual apprentices and their employers. This ensures that apprentices' activities in the workplace reinforce their learning at college. Apprentices have opportunities to achieve higher-level qualifications. When apprentices need to learn specialist skills, HGTA arranges for them to attend specialist colleges after consulting their employers. For example, apprentices at one company are receiving specialist training in refrigeration engineering. HGTA provides help with transport for apprentices who need to attend colleges at a distance from their homes. Apprentices also receive other relevant training, such as courses in aspects of engineering which are specific to their employers and training in health and safety.

8. Apprentices receive good guidance on issues relating to their training and good pastoral support. This strength was identified in the company's self-assessment report. Apprentices benefit from HGTA's good relationships with employers. Employers participate in the frequent visits by HGTA's staff to carry out monitoring and the five-weekly reviews of apprentices' progress. HGTA deals promptly with any concerns which apprentices raise during these visits. HGTA encourages first-year apprentices to attend weekly sessions in physical fitness. A qualified physiotherapist assesses the apprentices before they start to attend these sessions and assists in their instruction. For apprentices who are unable to take part, there are suitable alternatives, such as swimming. After attending the fitness course, apprentices attend a week's course in adventure and citizenship. This develops their leadership skills and sense of achievement. HGTA works closely with employers.

9. Apprentices' portfolios of evidence are good. They contain a large amount of evidence from apprentices' work placements. However, HGTA's assessors carry out too few observations in the workplace. There is an over-reliance on workplace supervisors' witness testimony. Although the workplace supervisors are occupationally competent and experienced, many do not have the assessors' award and cannot accurately assess apprentices' work against the standards of the NVQ. A few companies do have qualified work-based assessors who carry out observations. However, these companies do not plan assessments in detail during the fourth year of the advanced modern apprenticeship. In these companies, the recording of evidence and successful assessments for apprentices' portfolios does not start until towards the end of the fourth year. This means that gaps in apprentices' evidence are not identified until three to four months before they are due to complete their training.

10. Advanced modern apprentices do not start training and assessment in key skills until the third year of their training. These apprentices carry out tasks which demonstrate their key skills during the first two years of their programmes, for example during the course in adventure and citizenship and while working on engineering projects. However, they do not record evidence of these for their portfolios. By the time they reach their third year of training, apprentices regard some assessments of their key skills, for example tests of application of number, as a step backwards. This is especially so for apprentices who are working towards higher-level qualifications. HGTA is currently planning to introduce training in key skills earlier in apprentices' programmes. The company's staff have recently had training in key skills and are beginning to use more evidence from the workplace.

**Business administration, management & professional**

**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	110	2

11. HGTA has 53 foundation modern apprentices and 57 advanced modern apprentices in the occupational area of business administration. Fourteen of the advanced modern apprentices are working towards the qualification of the Association of Accounting Technicians. Apprentices can also gain additional qualifications, such as an NVQ in customer service. Some applicants for training are referred to HGTA by the careers service or their employers. Others apply directly as a result of HGTA's marketing. Apprentices can start their training at any time of the year but most do so in July. Employers notify HGTA of vacancies for jobs. The company matches apprentices who are not already in employment to the vacancies during their two-week induction. Many apprentices are on short-term contracts which cover the period of their training. Apprentices' work placements reflect the local economy. They include placements with the local council, with property developers and with manufacturers. Apprentices attend training at HGTA's training centres for one day each week throughout their programmes. They also attend training in key skills. HGTA's staff carry out assessments, internal verification and monthly reviews of apprentices' progress in the workplace.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started					26		40		59
Still in training					0	0	16	40	37	63
FMA framework completed					15	58	15	38	1	2
NVQ level 2 completed					16	62	26	65	6	10

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started					26		44		43
Still in training					0	0	21	48	36	84
AMA framework completed					9	35	8	18	4	9
NVQ level 2 completed					7	27	6	14	1	2
NVQ level 3 completed					17	65	23	52	11	26

## **STRENGTHS**

- imaginative and effective induction
- effective training at the training centres
- good work placements
- good personal development of apprentices

## **WEAKNESSES**

- slow progress towards key skills award by some apprentices
- weak links between on- and off-the-job training

## **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- involvement of employers in detailed planning of assessments

12. After an initial assessment, apprentices attend a two-week induction. The induction is informative and motivating. During the course, HGTA informs apprentices about the structure and aims of their training. The induction also covers HGTA's history and background, the funding of the training and the resources available to apprentices. Apprentices learn about their own responsibilities and those of their workplace supervisors. During the first few days of the induction, HGTA strongly encourages apprentices to get to know each other and the company's staff. HGTA uses innovative games and activities to develop apprentices' teamwork, communication and presentation skills. There is a full discussion on equal opportunities and a video which explains aspects of equal opportunities in the workplace. Apprentices learn filing, telephone and keyboard skills. The induction presents essential information clearly and imaginatively on first aid, health and safety, firefighting and manual handling. Apprentices record the activities which take place during the induction in personal logbooks.

13. At the start of each year, HGTA gives apprentices and employers a programme of the training available at its training centres. The training rooms for this training are well equipped and maintained. Each room has teaching aids such as flipcharts, overhead projectors and videos. At Hereford, there is a computer suite, with a comprehensive range of hardware and software. When necessary, HGTA takes laptop computers to its training centre in Worcester for apprentices to use. There is a comprehensive range of books and videos. The self-assessment report identified these resources as a strength. Lessons are lively and informative. They have clear aims and objectives and lesson plans. Trainers encourage discussion and debate. They ensure that all apprentices contribute and give appropriate one-to-one coaching when necessary. The trainers encourage apprentices to work in teams and to learn through practical activities as well as through receiving information. Apprentices often work on projects in small groups

and are responsible for planning and producing the required results. Apprentices work on projects which relate to their qualifications and to their work or leisure. The trainers continually encourage apprentices and give them feedback on their work. The company records apprentices' attendance at lessons. The handouts and other information for apprentices are good. They contain little jargon and explain any necessary technical terms in plain language. The handouts have colour graphics to enliven the text.

14. Apprentices' work placements are good. They provide a large variety of opportunities for personal development and for gathering evidence of competence. Many apprentices are in roles which require a high level of personal and occupational skills. Apprentices carry out tasks such as liaising with clients from overseas, supervising junior colleagues and working closely with senior colleagues on tackling homelessness in their local area. Workplace managers and supervisors value the training which apprentices receive and apprentices' contributions to their companies. Many apprentices have become an integral part of teams within their companies and play an important role in meeting their teams' objectives. This has enhanced the apprentices' confidence. HGTA has good relationships with employers. Employers welcome the regular visits by HGTA's staff to carry out monitoring and reviews of apprentices' progress. However, employers do not routinely take part in the detailed planning of assessments.

15. HGTA places a high priority on apprentices' personal development. It develops apprentices' personal skills, such as skills in communication and teamwork, throughout their training. At induction and during lessons, apprentices perform tasks which involve interacting with each other and with their trainers. The weekly lessons at HGTA's training centres and the monthly reviews of apprentices' progress help to establish close and effective relationships between apprentices and HGTA's staff. Staff deal effectively both with apprentices' personal difficulties and with problems which arise in their work placements. All the apprentices have the opportunity to attend a week's course in adventure and citizenship. Activities include caving, rock climbing and abseiling. Apprentices gain confidence through participating in the course. After the course, apprentices work in teams to plan, prepare and deliver presentations on various aspects of the course to employers, HGTA's senior staff and external organisations. Apprentices use these presentations as evidence towards their key skills awards.

16. HGTA has not integrated training in key skills fully with the occupational training for some of its current apprentices. Some did not start their training in key skills until after they had achieved their NVQs. These apprentices have not been able to gather evidence of their key skills at the same time as gathering evidence for their NVQs in administration. One apprentice believed that there would be a six-month period after he had achieved his NVQ during which he would gather evidence and undergo assessments of his key skills. This weak training in key skills has reduced apprentices' rate of achievement of their apprenticeship frameworks. HGTA identified this weakness in its self-assessment report. The company has since made plans to improve employers' understanding of the importance of key skills. Two of HGTA's staff have gained the key skills practitioners' award. Apprentices who have started their training more recently are

benefiting from earlier training in key skills and better integration of key skills with their occupational training.

17. The links between on- and off-the-job training are weak. Workplace managers and supervisors know little about the training which takes place at HGTA's training centre. They understand little about competency-based training and the requirements of specific NVQs. Most workplace supervisors know that HGTA sets apprentices work-based assignments. However, their poor understanding of the NVQ hinders them from assisting apprentices with the assignments. HGTA has good relations with employers. However, the company does not adequately assist workplace supervisors to facilitate assessment of the skills which apprentices learn at the training centre. HGTA identified this weakness in its self-assessment report. The company has since offered training for employers' staff, including training towards the assessors' award.



Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	20	3

18. HGTA started to provide training in retailing and customer service in August 1999, when it took over the training from another training provider. Currently, there are 15 foundation modern apprentices and five advanced modern apprentices. Between them, they are working towards NVQs in retail operations at levels 2 and 3, distribution and warehousing at level 2, procurement at level 2, customer service at levels 2 and 3, and international trade and services at level 3. HGTA provides training towards the NVQs at its training centre in Hereford. The company's staff also carry out one-to-one coaching, assessment and reviews of apprentices' progress in the workplace. All apprentices work towards the key skills award. HGTA's commercial operations manager is the internal verifier for this occupational area. Eighty-five per cent of the apprentices are employed. Their employers and work-placement providers include retail chains, family-run shops and small companies in and around Hereford.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							9		17
Still in training							1	11	14	82
FMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed							6	67	6	35

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started					2		7		9
Still in training					0	0	1	14	4	44
AMA framework completed					0	0	0	0	1	11
NVQ level 2 completed					0	0	2	29	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed					1	50	1	14	3	33

## STRENGTHS

- good portfolios of evidence
- good support for apprentices
- very effective training at the training centre

## WEAKNESSES

- slow rates of progress towards achieving apprenticeship frameworks
- ineffective reviews of apprentices' progress

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more commitment by employers to training at the training centre
- more thorough initial assessment

19. HGTA encourages apprentices to produce a wide variety of evidence for their portfolios. Its assessors help apprentices to gather interesting evidence of their individual achievements in the workplace. Apprentices take a pride in their portfolios, which contain good work. Apprentices often produce their work on computers at home to make their evidence appear more professional. Apprentices' portfolios are an interesting and up-to-date record of their roles at work, a strength which HGTA did not identify in its self-assessment report. Assessors observe and photograph apprentices carrying out routine tasks at work. The apprentices write clear notes to explain how the photographs demonstrate their competence. Apprentices in distribution and warehousing use photographic evidence particularly extensively. This allows them to prove their competence without producing lengthy written evidence

20. HGTA's staff support apprentices well. They visit the apprentices in the workplace approximately once each fortnight. Apprentices who require additional learning support receive weekly visits. Apprentices are making good progress towards their NVQs as a result of the frequent visits and good support. They have also become more confident. Some apprentices have been promoted during the their programmes and attribute this to their training and support from HGTA.

21. HGTA offers a variety of lessons at its training centre in Hereford. The lessons cover topics such as customer service, loss of stocks, security, time management, communication, first aid, and health and safety. The lessons are lively, well presented and informative. Apprentices find them extremely relevant to their roles at work. The lessons develop the skills which apprentices need for work and enhance the knowledge and skills required for their NVQs. The trainers are very experienced in retailing and customer service. The apprentices respect the trainers and are very positive about the benefits of training. Apprentices who attend the lessons achieve their NVQs sooner

than those who do not. Some employers are reluctant to release their apprentices to attend the lessons. Their apprentices are finding it difficult to achieve the key skills award without attending training in key skills. HGTA has identified greater commitment by employers to releasing apprentices for lessons as an area for improvement in its self-assessment report.

22. Apprentices have made slow progress towards achieving their apprenticeship frameworks. Only one apprentice has achieved the advanced modern apprenticeship. No apprentice has achieved the foundation modern apprenticeship. However, the rate of achievement is improving and apprentices are beginning to achieve their NVQs within acceptable timescales. Five apprentices are expected to achieve their foundation modern apprenticeships within the next two months. Previously, some apprentices were unaware that they had to achieve the key skills award as part of their apprenticeship frameworks. However, newer apprentices are collecting evidence of their key skills alongside evidence towards their NVQs. HGTA does not give apprentices written plans for their assessments. Sometimes apprentices do not know what evidence to collect or how to achieve their short-term targets. Apprentices are unclear when assessments are taking place because they find it difficult to distinguish between assessments and one-to-one coaching. Assessors do not use standardised monitoring documents to cross-reference apprentices' evidence to the standards of their NVQs. Consequently, apprentices do not know how close they are to achieving units of their NVQs. Apprentices received detailed feedback on their overall performance in achieving the units and receive oral feedback throughout their training.

23. HGTA does not carry out an initial assessment of apprentices' key skills or identify apprentices who need additional help with key skills. The company's assessors carry out an initial assessment of apprentices' occupational skills to ensure that they choose an appropriate training programme but they do not record the results in detail. HGTA identified the need for more thorough initial assessments in its self-assessment report. Individual training plans set out the requirements of apprentices' apprenticeship frameworks but they do not specify how apprentices will achieve their qualifications.

24. Assessors complete a form after each progress review and give a copy to the apprentice. HGTA keeps a further copy at its training centre in the apprentice's file and records information from the form on a computer database. The assessors show the forms to employers but the employers do not have to sign them and do not receive copies to keep. Employers have little involvement in reviews of apprentices' progress. Although there is a space on the form for employers' comments, assessors usually ask employers for comments and fill in this section for them. Assessors do not update apprentices' individual training plans at their progress reviews. There is no record of apprentices' training in the workplace, and so assessors fail to identify some opportunities for assessment.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

25. An executive committee determines the overall policies of HGTA. The day-to-day running of the company is the responsibility of the chief executive. HGTA comprises an engineering operations section and a commercial operations section. Each section has a senior manager, who reports directly to the chief executive. The chief executive has overall responsibility for assuring quality. The commercial operations manager has responsibility for equal opportunities, and the engineering operations manager has responsibility for health and safety. A quality assurance manual contains various policies, including an equal opportunities policy. HGTA produced its most recent self-assessment report in February 2001.

### STRENGTHS

- good strategic management
- effective relationships with employers and member companies
- well-developed and effective staff appraisals and development
- continuous improvement in many areas

### WEAKNESSES

- little reinforcement of initial promotion of equal opportunities to trainees and employers
- insufficient sharing of good practice

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better monitoring of subcontractors for engineering training
- increased sampling of assessments

26. HGTA's strategic management is good. The company identified this strength in its self-assessment report. There is a strong senior management team and the two sections of the company are well managed. HGTA's management of key skills is weak but the company has started to rectify this. All staff are fully involved in making decisions and setting targets. A cycle of business-planning has developed over several years, with participation by the association's leading member companies. The company consults all staff on its annual business plan. HGTA sets clear and realistic targets for retention and achievement. In addition, individual members of staff have personal targets. HGTA regularly monitors its performance against the targets and draws up plans to rectify poor performance. When HGTA has taken over new businesses and contracts, it has planned and managed the transitions well to ensure good-quality training. HGTA has worked hard to integrate staff from the companies which it has taken over.

27. Apprentices benefit from HGTA's effective relationships with employers and its member companies. The self-assessment report identified this strength. In many

companies, apprentices are taking part in important projects, which provide work-based evidence towards their NVQs. For example, one fourth-year apprentice has played an important role in the commissioning of a new machine by an Italian company. This resulted in the apprentices' employer doubling its workforce to fulfil the resulting contract. In other instances, employers have provided work placements for redundant apprentices until they have obtained new employment. Some apprentices have spent time with companies other than their employer in order to gain skills which are necessary for their NVQs. A senior manager of one member company is a prominent member of HGTA's quality assurance review group and advises HGTA on systems to assure quality.

28. HGTA has a well-developed and effective system for reviewing the performance of its staff. The company did not identify this strength in its self-assessment report. The system is an integral part of the company's system to assure quality. It provides good opportunities for staff development. All staff have a copy of the staff handbook, which contains details of the system. Staff have twice-yearly appraisals, which focus on identifying their personal and professional objectives and appropriate support to help them achieve their objectives. The developmental needs of staff are also identified throughout the six months between appraisals. HGTA produces individual development plans for its staff and reviews them regularly. Staff have had training in health and safety. Some staff have achieved the key skills practitioners' award. Others are studying towards a postgraduate diploma in safety management. HGTA was accredited as an Investor in People in 1995 and was successfully reaccredited in 1998 and 2001.

**Equality of opportunity**

**Contributory grade 3**

29. HGTA's senior management team reviews its equal opportunities policy each year. The company uses a computerised system to collect and analyse data on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of its apprentices and staff. Two of the current apprentices have disabilities and two are members of minority ethnic groups. Three of the apprentices in engineering are women. Apprentices receive training in equal opportunities during their induction. However, HGTA does not reinforce this initial training in equal opportunities during apprentices' programmes. During their induction, apprentices also receive copies of the company's grievance procedure and its recently introduced complaints procedure. HGTA deals with complaints promptly. The company introduced a policy on harassment in March 2000. HGTA has arranged for some apprentices who live in rural areas to use the bus to a local college. The company reimburses the travelling expenses of other apprentices, including some who are in employment.

30. HGTA gives presentations and attends careers events at local schools in order to increase the proportions of apprentices from under-represented groups. It has recently produced a compact disk with information about its training. The disk shows positive role models and has been placed in all the local schools and careers offices. HGTA is taking part in an initiative to promote training in manufacturing to pupils at eight local schools. This involves year-10 pupils spending time with employers. HGTA ensures that equal numbers of girls and boys take part in the scheme. HGTA's marketing literature promotes positive role models. Employers sign an agreement with HGTA which includes a statement relating to equal opportunities. The company also checks employers' equal opportunities policies. However, HGTA does not reinforce the importance of equal opportunities to employers after this initial stage. HGTA's service level agreements with two colleges refer to equal opportunities. The company's intranet contains its equal opportunities policy and other information on equal opportunities for staff. HGTA has provided training in awareness of equal opportunities for all staff. The company has a flexible approach towards the working hours of its staff. Some staff have renegotiated their contracts and now work part time. The action plan arising out of the most recent self-assessment report proposes various action relating to equal opportunities and HGTA has performed these. The training rooms at the company's training centre in Worcester are not accessible to people with mobility difficulties but alternative accommodation is available. The training centre in Hereford has a lift and there are plans to modify the toilets to make them accessible to people with physical disabilities.

**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 2**

31. HGTA has a quality assurance policy and procedures which cover all its main training activities. These are based on examples from industry and have been developed with help from the member companies. All staff can easily look up and understand the procedures. HGTA carries out audits in a structured manner. Qualified auditors perform regular audits, which include observing staff carrying out reviews of apprentices' progress and other training activities. Senior staff agree on appropriate actions to rectify any identified weaknesses. The quality assurance review team receives copies of the reports and action plans and monitors the company's progress in carrying out the actions and making improvements. HGTA has service level agreements with the subcontracted colleges of further education and its staff visit the colleges regularly. Staff in the commercial section carry out observations of training but staff in the engineering section do not, either in the training centre or at college. There are teams, consisting of employers, apprentices and staff from the careers service and the subcontracted colleges, which carry out effective reviews of the training programmes. HGTA systematically seeks feedback from apprentices, employers and parents and uses the data to make improvements. Examples include improvements to the toilets, training in counselling for staff and the introduction of video conferencing to improve communications between the company's two training centres.

32. Good practice is not systematically shared. For example, staff in different occupational areas use different documents and staff complete common documents, especially those relating to progress reviews, in different ways. Different assessors have different approaches to assessment and to the timing of witnesses' signatures. There are regular team meetings. Meetings of all staff take place in the evenings to ensure a high attendance. One purpose of these meetings is to share good practice but the agendas allow little time for this.

33. Internal verifiers sample sufficient assessments to meet the minimum requirements of the awarding bodies. There are few work-based assessors and some employers are not involved in planning assessments. HGTA produces a self-assessment report each year. The company links its development plan to the self-assessment report and monitors it regularly. HGTA involves all its staff in self-assessment and displays the action plan on its intranet. The most recent self-assessment report followed the format of The Common Inspection Framework. Although the report provided a good background to the organisation, inspectors considered many of the strengths in the report to be no more than normal practice. In two occupational areas, inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### Good Practice

*Apprentices success is celebrated with an annual prize-giving. Over 200 apprentices parents/guardians and employers normally attend. HGTA has won a Training Provider of the year award twice in the last four years.*