

INSPECTION REPORT

The Employee Development Forum Limited

12 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

The Employee Development Forum Limited is a limited company based in Horsham, Sussex. It has been operating for nearly three years and currently gives engineering training to 21 modern apprentices.

Overall judgement

The quality of work-based training is satisfactory, but the leadership and management of The Employee Development Forum Limited are unsatisfactory. The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it.

Work-based learning for young people

Work-based training for young people is satisfactory in engineering. The Employee Development Forum Limited is currently training 21 modern apprentices, all of whom are employed by engineering companies. The retention rate for apprentices is very good, at 88 per cent. As the company has only been operating for three years, only one apprentice has completed a full modern apprenticeship. Apprentices on both foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships benefit from good work placements and excellent work-based training. Employers actively encourage and help apprentices to develop skills beyond the requirements of their target national vocational qualification (NVQ). Apprentices speak highly of the good support they receive from The Employee Development Forum Limited's staff. Co-ordination between on- and off-the job training is poor. Most employers do not understand that they have to integrate training at work with off-the-job training. Apprentices' basic skills are not systematically assessed, nor do they undertake any aptitude tests for the training programme they are on. No apprentices receive any additional learning support. Some apprentices have had unacceptable delays in completing their assessments.

Leadership and management

The Employee Development Forum Limited's leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The company produces a clearly written business plan, but there are no targets relating to the apprentices. Communications between the company's staff and their apprentices are effective. Communications with employers are inadequate and some employers fail to understand their role as partners in the training process. There is not enough use of management information. Staff

appraisals are not thorough enough. Contracts and service level agreements are well written but the monitoring of subcontractors is weak. The Employee Development Forum has a good equal opportunities policy but it is not reinforced to apprentices. Equal opportunities data is collected, but not analysed. The company does not have a comprehensive quality assurance framework, but some quality assurance processes exist and work well.

GRADES

Engineering	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- high retention rates
- good business- and action-planning
- effective communication between staff and apprentices

KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate initial assessment
- weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- insufficient use of management information
- poor promotion of training to under-represented groups
- no overall quality assurance framework
- weak monitoring of subcontractors

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more time allowed for induction
- better monitoring of apprentices' progress
- more comprehensive service level agreements
- wider involvement in self-assessment process

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. The Employee Development Forum Limited (EDF) was founded in 1998 to provide a range of training and development programmes in Sussex. The company has its headquarters in Horsham. All off-the job training is subcontracted to local colleges. EDF has three staff who are associates of the company rather than employees. It currently trains 21 apprentices. Most apprentices are employed by small engineering companies, based mainly in West Sussex.

2. Modern apprenticeship training is funded through a contract with the Sussex Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). West Sussex is economically strong. In April 2001, the unemployment rate was 1 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.3 per cent. Minority ethnic communities comprise 3 per cent of the population of West Sussex. Sussex has a significantly high number of small businesses, with over 80 per cent of employers having fewer than 20 employees. Overall during the past decade, there has been a small decline in engineering business and the engineering sector has not given its employees as much training as in the past. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in West Sussex achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 54.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of three inspectors spent a total of 12 days at EDF during June 2001. They interviewed 14 apprentices and three of EDF's training staff and also visited seven employers and three subcontractors and interviewed eight workplace supervisors. Inspectors observed training and assessment sessions at a college but did not grade them as none of EDF's apprentices was present. They examined a range of documents including apprentices' portfolios of evidence, apprentices' records, EDF's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and awarding bodies' reports. Inspectors studied EDF's self-assessment report, which was published in September 2000.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	21	3

4. Advanced modern apprentices are scheduled to complete their engineering training in three to four years and foundation modern apprentices are expected to finish within two years. Modern apprentices are recruited through referral from the careers service, colleges of further education, EDF's marketing activities or by a direct request from an employer. Eight of the apprentices currently with EDF were transferred from another training provider within the last year. Currently, there are 21 apprentices, all of whom are employed. Twelve of the advanced modern apprentices are following qualifications in engineering production, two in technical services and two in engineering maintenance. Two of the foundation modern apprentices are following level 2 NVQs in engineering production. Another foundation modern apprentice is following a level 2 engineering maintenance qualification, with two others aiming to gain NVQs in performing manufacturing operations at level 2. All off-the job training and teaching of background knowledge is subcontracted by EDF to local further education colleges. Advanced apprentices spend their first year in college following a foundation programme and in the following years attend college for one day each week. At college, apprentices study for appropriate additional qualifications such as National or Higher National Certificates. During this period, apprentices are work-based and work towards a level 3 NVQ. Throughout their training, foundation apprentices attend college one day a week and follow an appropriate skills-based course. All apprentices work towards key skills qualifications throughout their training. EDF's staff carry out most assessments and progress reviews.

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

Work-based learning for young people								
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started			1		4		2	
Still in training			0	0	3	75	2	100
FMA framework completed			0	0	0	0	0	0

Work-based learning for young people								
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started			1		6		10	
Still in training			1	100	5	83	10	100
AMA framework completed			0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			1	100	3	50	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			1	100	3	50	0	0

STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- good training opportunities in workplaces
- effective support for apprentices
- high retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- weak co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- inadequate initial assessment
- delay in completing some assessments

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better monitoring of apprentices' progress
- more time allowed for induction

5. EDF's staff have developed effective links with local employers, as well as with educational, careers and training organisations. They take great care to find good work placements for potential apprentices. Employers' premises are generally well equipped with modern machinery. Advanced manufacturing and production techniques are widely used. Apprentices are enthusiastic about their work and take pride in what they achieve. They speak knowledgeably about the business processes used by their employers.

6. Apprentices are encouraged to make use of a wide range of training opportunities available in their workplaces. Most apprentices are encouraged to do additional training beyond the requirements of their target NVQ, a strength noted in the company's self-assessment report. Many apprentices achieve qualifications in manufacturing and production manufacturing techniques.

7. EDF's staff provide good support to apprentices, often beyond that which is required in the company's contract with the LLSC. For example, during a progress review, an apprentice complained about being paid significantly less than other apprentices. One of EDF's staff spoke to the employer concerned and the matter was resolved satisfactorily. Apprentices have regular progress reviews, at which all aspects of their general progress, careers and personal development are considered. Action-planning is effective and apprentices' progress against agreed targets is regularly reviewed. EDF's staff liaise regularly with employers about matters concerning apprentices and all parties sign and keep copies of completed progress review paperwork. The retention rate for apprentices is very high, at 88 per cent. As the company has only been operating for three years, only one apprentice has completed their training.

8. Co-ordination between on- and off-the-job training is weak. Most employers do not understand that what apprentices learn at work should be linked to what they are learning at college. They are often unaware of the content or relevance of college courses undertaken by their apprentices. Inspectors were unable to observe any of EDF's apprentices receiving training at college, but they saw sessions for other apprentices. The sessions were well-organised and apprentices were fully involved throughout the sessions. Each apprentice had their own workstation and was carrying out work at an appropriate level for their particular course.

9. EDF's initial assessment process is inadequate. Apprentices' basic skills are not routinely tested and they are not given any specific aptitude tests for the type of work they will be doing. No apprentices are receiving additional learning support, although one of them is known to have dyslexia. Testing of apprentices' key skills has recently been introduced. Individual training plans are well devised but do not take sufficient account of apprentices' abilities or previous achievements. Apprentices are issued with a very comprehensive personal development plan designed by EDF. It explains in detail the modern apprenticeship framework and encourage apprentices to think about lifelong learning. Many apprentices find it complicated and there is insufficient time allocated at induction to make the most of its potential. Induction is well planned and includes a detailed discussion on equality of opportunity in the workplace.

10. Although EDF has a satisfactory system for monitoring apprentices' progress, there are some unacceptable delays in assessments. The apprentices who transferred to EDF from another training provider have still not been assessed in their workplaces, although they have collected sufficient evidence to be assessed for NVQ units. EDF will not assess these apprentices until the end of their training programmes. While this does not affect their final completion dates, it denies these apprentices the opportunity to be assessed for skills they have now. Apprentices' portfolios of evidence are generally satisfactory. At one company where there are eight apprentices, the evidence collected is of a good standard, and beyond the requirements of the NVQ. Apprentices are not given plans detailing when they will be assessed and what evidence will be required, making it difficult for them to match any evidence they have gathered against the requirements of their NVQ. Qualified assessors from EDF visit apprentices who work in companies where there are no qualified assessors to assess them in the workplace. The internal

verification process is well planned and the record keeping is good.

Good Practice

A highly effective apprentices' forum is operating in one company. Meetings take place once a month and are attended by all apprentices, managers and a representative from EDF. Meetings are chaired effectively by a nominated trainee and the whole process is managed by the apprentices. Apprentices use the skills they acquire running the forum as evidence for their key skills portfolio. At each meeting a wide range of topics is discussed with an emphasis on improving the training and development activities within the company. This has already led to improvements. For example, additional training resources have been secured, including computers and intranet access for apprentices' use. All training materials are now available on a shared computer network. The forum has had a positive effect on the apprentices, not only in terms of their performance at work but also on their behaviour.

Poor Practice

When an apprentice started his training he told EDF staff that he was dyslexic. No initial assessment was carried out to find out the extent of the problem. He has received no specialist support, although his supervisor and other staff give him extra help when they can. Qualified specialist tutors work at the same location as the apprentice but have not been asked to help.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

11. EDF is a limited company owned by its managing director. It has no direct employees but three consultants who together form the staff of EDF. One member of staff acts as a training centre co-ordinator. All staff carry out assessment and internal verification as well as managing the training of apprentices in the workplace. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to local colleges. EDF has an equal opportunities policy and accompanying statement of intent. There is a quality assurance policy, but no procedures to put it into practice. EDF began an annual self-assessment process in September 1998 and produced its third report in September 2000.

STRENGTHS

- good business and action-planning
- effective communication with staff and apprentices
- good support for employers in developing equal opportunities strategies

WEAKNESSES

- poor communication with employers
- insufficient use of management information
- poor promotion of training to under-represented groups
- no overall quality assurance framework
- inadequate evaluation of feedback
- weak monitoring of subcontractors

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more thorough appraisal of staff
- further development of complaints procedures
- comprehensive service level agreements
- wider involvement in self-assessment process

12. EDF is a small company, with apprentices working over a wide geographical area. Training is managed satisfactorily and general administration is good. The company produces a clearly written business plan accompanied by a good action plan every year. The managing director updates the business plan in consultation with the other staff. The plan contains key objectives relevant to training, such as the maintenance of LLSC contracts, improving the quality of training and improving apprentices' ability to achieve the goals on their individual training plans. However, there are no targets for the recruitment of apprentices or retention and achievement rates.

13. Communications between the managing director and other staff are good and based on openness and trust. There is a lot of informal communication in addition to

formal team meetings, which are held every two months. Notes of meetings are distributed and action points followed up. There is also good communication between the company and its apprentices. This is helped by the frequency of visits and EDF's supportive attitude towards apprentices. Communications with employers are inadequate. Some employers do not understand their role as partners in the training process. They often rely too heavily on EDF to manage all aspects of apprentices' training. For example, some employers do not always ensure that supervisors are available often enough to give apprentices the help they need. When apprentices' concerns are brought to EDF's attention, for example about their employment rights or pay, problems are swiftly resolved. Employers are issued with a well-written guide to work-based training. However, workplace supervisors do not understand this document. Inspectors agree with EDF's self-assessment report that the effectiveness and implementation of the guide need to be reviewed. There is not enough use of management information. A database designed to record apprentices' progress is only used to record their achievements and not for planning purposes. Management data that are available are not in a useful format. EDF does not collate or use data as a basis for decision-making or setting targets. Equal opportunities information is not collected. This general lack of performance review by EDF was recognised in its self-assessment. All other administration and documents, including apprentices' files, are well organised.

14. EDF staff fill in a form to determine what training and development they need. This process is effective and results in a clear development plan for all staff. Most training courses that staff attend are well suited to their needs. Staff members' progress towards the goals on their development plan is reviewed every six months. Appraisal of staff takes place informally. The process is not rigorous enough. Individuals' strengths are not made full use of and their weaknesses are not being dealt with. Job roles identified when EDF was formed have not been formally reviewed or updated. Contracts and service level agreements are sent to all employers and subcontracting colleges. Not all have acknowledged their receipt. The agreements are satisfactorily written. However, service level agreements for employers do not mention equal opportunities and the version for colleges does not explicitly mention monitoring requirements.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 4

15. EDF has a clear and concise policy on equal opportunities. The actions of EDF's staff are consistent with its stated commitments, particularly with regard to work placements and supporting apprentices in the workplace. However, there is no detailed action plan showing how EDF will put its equal opportunities commitments into practice. During induction, apprentices are given a copy of EDF's equal opportunities policy. Their rights and responsibilities are explained to them at this stage, but this is not specifically reinforced during apprentices' training. Staff who visit apprentices every six weeks closely monitor how they are treated. EDF has a complaints procedure and apprentices know how to use it. Any problems apprentices experience are usually identified and resolved through apprentices' progress reviews. Over the past three years, records have not been kept of complaints, but when problems arise they are dealt with promptly. Access to workshops and classrooms at colleges is good.

16. The company collects, but does not analyse, data on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of apprentices. It has not taken any specific action to promote engineering training opportunities to under-represented groups on its training programmes. There is one female apprentice, who was referred to EDF by the careers service. Staff have experience of dealing with equal opportunities matters but have not received any recent training. Inspectors agree with the self-assessment report that EDF provides good support to employers by helping them develop equal opportunities policies. However, there is little monitoring of how employers actually promote equality in the workplace. Most have their own policies on equal opportunities but some do not. In one engineering workshop where apprentices receive on-the-job training, pictures of women are displayed which are of a sexist nature. EDF is aware of this but have not asked the employer concerned to remove the pictures.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 4**

17. EDF does not have an overall quality assurance framework, a weakness noted in the self-assessment report. Some procedures that would contribute to a quality assurance system are used and work well. For example, the internal and external verifiers' reporting process is well managed. Checklists are regularly used to monitor a number of procedures. Some of these processes are satisfactorily audited. The EDF team regularly discusses the training and shares good practice. Concerns raised by external or internal verifiers are given detailed consideration. All of these activities help to improve the quality of the apprentices' experience. However, these activities cover only some aspects of the training process. EDF is aware of its shortcomings and is seeking external advice on how to improve its quality assurance systems. Business action-planning is good. The business plan, self-assessment and audit reports contain well-written action plans, focused on improving training. For example, the business plan identified the need for service level agreements with subcontractors and the need to improve key skills support. These actions are not complete but good progress is being made.

18. Feedback from apprentices on the quality of their learning experience has recently been collected but not evaluated. EDF plans to evaluate the data. No feedback is collected from employers or subcontractors, other than informally. The views of employers and subcontractors are not taken into account in EDF's decision-making. The managing director, on advice from the LLSC, wrote the self-assessment report based on earlier inspection criteria. The final report was shared with the staff, but no apprentices, employers or subcontractors were consulted. The report is mainly descriptive. It is not self-critical enough about strengths and weaknesses and some significant weaknesses were not identified at all. As a result, many of the grades awarded were higher than those given by inspectors. Contracts and service level agreements have been issued to employers and subcontractors, but no formal monitoring of subcontractors takes place. EDF staff do not observe off-the job training, review the external verifier's reports or collate reports of inspections of its subcontractors. The standard of assessment and verification is satisfactory. However, some assessment at NVQ level 3 has been unacceptably delayed. Internal verification is well planned and well recorded. EDF's staff are appropriately qualified. There is one staff member for every seven apprentices, a good ratio, and apprentices are frequently visited. The records of these visits are well maintained.