

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT  
JULY 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION  
JANUARY 2002

# NETA Training Group



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## 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 **learn**direct 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.

## Grading

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

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

## SUMMARY

The original inspection of NETA Training Group was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for hospitality, equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with hospitality, equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website ([www.ali.gov.uk](http://www.ali.gov.uk)).

**NETA Training Group provides good training in construction and engineering. Training and assessment is well planned. Work placements are good, national vocational qualification (NVQ) achievement rates are high, and many learners secure long-term employment. Call-centre training is excellent. There is effective initial assessment of learners' occupational skills, training resources are good, and learners are well supported in their search for jobs. Hospitality training is satisfactory. There is comprehensive support for all learners. Portfolios are good. On-the-job training is not planned and achievement rates on some programmes are poor. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory, although some learners and clients have little understanding of equality issues. Complaints procedures are thorough and effective. Support for learners is satisfactory. The flexible training arrangements and good pastoral support meet learners' individual needs. The recognition of learners' achievement raises their self-esteem. Insufficient use is made of initial assessment results and learning plans are not always matched to individual needs. The management of training is satisfactory. Effective relationships with employers and strong involvement in government initiatives allow training programmes to be tailored to the needs of industry and learners. The monitoring of subcontractors is not systematic. Quality assurance is satisfactory. Quality is monitored through the use of self-assessment and quality audit procedures. Both result in effective action being taken to deal with shortcomings. The evaluation of training is underdeveloped and the new internal verification system is not yet operating in all areas of learning.**

## GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	2
Retailing & customer service	1
Hospitality	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Hospitality	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

## KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong links with local employers
- ◆ good job opportunities for many learners
- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications in construction and engineering
- ◆ some excellent resources for construction and call-centre learners
- ◆ good pastoral support

## KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress for modern apprentices
- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities by some learners
- ◆ poor tailoring of learning plans to individual needs
- ◆ lack of systematic monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ some poor internal verification practices

## INTRODUCTION

1. NETA Training Group (NETA) was established in 1975. It provides training for the engineering construction industry, primarily in Teesside but also nationally and internationally. NETA is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. There are approximately 75 staff. Operational management responsibility rests with the general manager, who is supported by a team of seven managers. One of the managers has overall responsibility for all government-funded training programmes. The general manager reports to a board of trustees, drawn from representatives of the local engineering construction and other related industries. In November 2001, NETA bought the Engineering and Marine Training Authority's training centre in Billingham after lengthy negotiations. A new business plan has been developed to take account of the expanded business.

2. NETA has been involved in government-funded training since 1982. Before then its business focused exclusively on commercial training. At the time of the original inspection, NETA had a contract with Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide work-based training. There were 211 learners and clients following NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in construction, engineering, retailing and customer service and hospitality. Seventy-four learners were modern apprentices, 69 were on national traineeships, 21 were following other forms of work-based learning for young people, and there were 13 learners on work-based learning for adults programmes. NETA now has a contract with the Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC). NETA no longer offers government-funded training in retailing and customer services. There are now 129 learners and clients following NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in construction, engineering, and hospitality. Sixty-one learners are advanced and 49 are foundation modern apprentices. NETA is a member of a partnership which contracts with the Employment Service's Teesside unit of delivery for New Deal 18-24. At the time of the original inspection, NETA had 34 clients following the full-time training and education option of New Deal. NETA also holds a direct contract with the Employment Service for the New Deal Gateway programme. There are now 19 young people following the New Deal full-time training and education option.

3. NETA offers a wide range of customised commercial courses, on a local, national and international basis. It is the United Kingdom's largest provider of training in the engineering construction industry. The company operates from a main site in Stockton-on-Tees, with satellite centres at Thornaby-on-Tees and Canning Town in London. The London centre is used solely for commercial training courses. In the financial year 1999-2000, commercial income represented 75.5 per cent of the company's turnover and, in 2000-01, it represented approximately 65 per cent of the company's turnover.

4. The Tees Valley LSC's area of operation covers the unitary authorities of Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Hartlepool and

Darlington, which have a combined population of 653,700. At the time of the original inspection, the unemployment rate varied across the five unitary authorities, but at an average of 8 per cent in May 2000, it compared unfavourably with the Northeast's average of 7.3 per cent and the national average of 4.3 per cent. In some areas of Tees Valley, unemployment exceeded 20 per cent. By September 2001, unemployment in the Tees Valley had fallen to 5.8 per cent, just above the Northeast's average of 5.2 per cent, but still considerably above the national average of 2.9 per cent.

5. In July 1999, 8 per cent of school leavers in Teesside were unemployed, 8 per cent entered employment, including modern apprenticeships, 56 per cent continued in education, 15 per cent entered government-funded work-based training, and the destinations of the remaining 13 per cent were unknown. In July 2000, 6 per cent of school leavers in Teesside were unemployed, 7 per cent entered employment, including modern apprenticeships, 67 per cent continued in education and 14 per cent entered government-funded work-based training. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above ranged from 31 per cent in Middlesbrough to 42.9 per cent in Darlington, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In 2001, the proportions ranged from 35 per cent in Middlesbrough to 43.4 per cent in Redcar and Cleveland, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Less than 2 per cent of the population in the Tees Valley are from a minority ethnic group, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. However, minority ethnic communities are unevenly distributed across the area. In Middlesbrough, minority ethnic communities form 4.4 per cent of the population, but the proportion is less than 1 per cent in Hartlepool and the borough of Redcar and Cleveland.

6. Until the 1970s, the area relied almost exclusively for employment on steel making, bulk chemical production and shipbuilding. These industries are in decline, and until recently, the area has failed to attract employers to fill the gap. Some new employers are now established, including a number of micro-electronics companies and call-centre operators.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

7. NETA completed a self-assessment report in May 2000. This was the first time the organisation had carried out a self-assessment in accordance with the Training Standards Council's (TSC) guidelines. Previous self-assessment exercises, conducted in 1998 and 1999, were completed against a locally approved framework produced by the five Northeast TECs. No reports were produced as a result of these earlier self-assessments, and there were no written records of strengths and weaknesses.

8. The self-assessment report, prepared for the original inspection, was compiled by the general manager and the manager responsible for government-funded training, in consultation with other staff. In preparation for self-assessment, the manager for government-funded training attended a training event held by Tees Valley TEC. The information gained from this event was shared with all staff at NETA. An action plan was developed by the company to help deal with the issues brought to light by self-assessment. NETA prepared a special report for the reinspection. This was dated August 2000 and was based on the strengths and weaknesses in the original inspection report. It commented on the continuing strengths and described the progress made on the weaknesses.

9. A team of six inspectors carried out the original inspection. They spent a total of 23 days with NETA in July 2000. All the occupational areas were inspected. Inspectors visited 28 employers and interviewed 24 workplace supervisors. They interviewed 48 learners and visited both NETA's training centres in Teesside. Twenty-one staff were interviewed. Two representatives from training subcontractors were also interviewed. Inspectors examined a range of documentary evidence, including 40 NVQ portfolios, together with assessment and review documents, and internal and external verifiers' reports. Policy and procedure documents, marketing information and a wide range of performance data were also examined. Inspectors observed several reviews and 11 instruction sessions. During January 2002, a team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at NETA. Inspectors visited nine employers and interviewed nine workplace supervisors. They interviewed 18 learners and visited NETA's two training centres in Teesside. Seventeen staff were interviewed. One representative from a subcontracted organisation was also interviewed. Inspectors examined a range of documentary evidence, including 10 NVQ portfolios, together with assessment and review documents, and internal and external verifiers' reports. Policy and procedure documents, marketing information and a wide range of performance data were also examined. Inspectors observed several reviews and an instruction session.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the original inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1	4				5
Engineering		2				2
Retailing & customer service			3			3
Hospitality		1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 2

10. There are 35 TEC-funded trainees and 22 New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. The construction training programmes are in scaffolding, gas fitting and thermal insulation. Off-the-job training is carried out at the training centre in Stockton. TEC-funded trainees and the New Deal clients undertake work placements with a variety of companies and local authorities, mainly in the Stockton and Middlesbrough areas.

11. Until June 2000, NETA subcontracted some modern apprenticeship training to another provider. The arrangement covered several construction occupations including scaffolding, carpentry and joinery. Since 1997, 85 modern apprentices have started training, mostly through the subcontracted agreement. All the present trainees are trained by NETA. Forty-seven per cent achieved an NVQ at level 2 and 19 per cent an NVQ at level 3. A further 12 per cent achieved all the goals in their individual training plans.

12. There are 13 New Deal clients working towards a basic scaffolding qualification, which will give them the necessary entry-level qualification for the scaffolding industry. There are also two modern apprentices, employed by local scaffolding companies. They are working towards an NVQ level 3 in scaffolding, which, if achieved, will give them recognition in the industry as advanced scaffolders.

13. Twenty-four trainees are on a national traineeship programme, working towards an NVQ level 2 in thermal insulation. Local depots of large national and multi-national companies employ them all, predominantly in the petro-chemical sector, where they receive training on the job. They started training in 1999-2000, and, during their two-year training programme, they receive off-the-job training and NVQ assessment in 10 two-week blocks. To date, none have left training. Between 1996 and 1999, 57 per cent of trainees completed their individual training plans and 70 per cent gained employment in the industry.

14. There are nine adults on the work-based learning programme, working



towards an NVQ at level 2 in domestic gas installation and maintenance. They are all employed, either with a national company which has a local base, or with one of three local borough councils. They receive training on the job, and attend NETA for planned, two-week periods when they undertake additional training off the job. They are also assessed on and off the job. This is the first group of trainees to undertake the programme, and they are all still in training. NETA has recently started to train New Deal clients in gas installation. Twenty-two clients have started to date, and nine are still in training. The course lasts 20 weeks and clients receive training and assessment for elements of the accredited certification scheme, which is a statutory requirement of the gas industry.

15. NETA's self-assessment report for construction covered scaffolding only. Thermal insulation and gas fitting were included under engineering. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but found that some were no more than normal practice. The self-assessment report also identified some weaknesses. Inspectors found further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option are provided with scaffolding tools and equipment worth in excess of £100 each. When they finish their training they will have the personal equipment which a prospective employer requires of them. This increases clients' chances of finding employment.*

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ good, well-planned, off-the-job training
- ◆ good use of work-based evidence and assessment
- ◆ excellent placement and employment opportunities for New Deal clients
- ◆ additional qualifications increase employment opportunities
- ◆ well-resourced training facilities

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessing key skills
- ◆ failure to set targets for progress towards the NVQ in scaffolding
- ◆ underdeveloped internal verification procedures

16. Off-the-job trainers have extensive industrial experience. They provide good role models for TEC-funded trainees and the New Deal clients. The training is good, well planned and varied. TEC-funded trainees and New Deal clients speak highly of their experiences with NETA. Training staff make excellent use of their long-established industrial contacts to widen the scope of available placements.

17. The two modern apprentices in scaffolding receive training on the job from their employers. They work with teams of experienced scaffolders on a wide range of activities. Both were employed before they began training with NETA. NETA took on the modern apprentices after an approach from their employers, so that they could benefit from the formal training and assessment required to register them as advanced scaffolders. Well-established systems are in place for the systematic collection of evidence from the trainees. Rigorous procedures, introduced by NETA, have maximised the assessment opportunities for scaffolding trainees.

18. Workplace reviews for the scaffolding modern apprentices, however, have not been fully effective. A failure to systematically monitor progress towards the NVQ has resulted in the delayed achievement of some NVQ elements and units. Employers are not aware of the NVQ assessment criteria, and are therefore unaware of the work that their trainees need to cover to complete their NVQs.

19. Trainees on the gas-fitting programme benefit from rigorous work-based assessment. Supervisors and mentors who undertake the assessments are well qualified and hold the relevant assessors' awards. Assessments take place in customers' homes and trainees are clear about the assessment criteria and the process. Assessors are skilled at identifying evidence relevant to other units and elements when observing trainees' performance. For example, evidence of communication skills and health and safety planning often emerge from a single task, observed by the assessor. Trainees are working to high occupational standards, and demonstrate appropriate levels of responsibility in their work.

20. The New Deal clients working towards the basic scaffolders' qualification are provided with excellent work placements which, for many of them, develop into long-term employment within the scaffolding industry. Achievement and employment rates are good. Since 1998, 61 New Deal clients have started training as scaffolders. Of these, 77 per cent have achieved the goals on their training plans and 36 per cent have obtained jobs in the industry. Training staff are highly supportive of the New Deal clients.

21. Most trainees benefit from additional training to complement their NVQ training and improve their employment prospects. For example, thermal insulation trainees follow a substantial course in scaffolding appreciation for which they receive a NETA certificate. This takes their training beyond the minimum required for the NVQ. New Deal clients undertake a two-day course on which they are trained and assessed for an industry-approved safety qualification. This award is a requirement of the construction industry and possessing it significantly improves the holders' job prospects.

22. New Deal clients on the newly introduced gas-fitting programme are placed with local and national companies. Trainers have considerable experience in their occupational sectors and use their contacts in the industry effectively to give clients excellent opportunities for work experience. Several New Deal clients have been offered employment and those who have completed their work placements are confident of securing employment on completion of the programme.

23. The scaffolding workshop is a purpose-built environment designed for training and assessment. It is well resourced, with up-to-date equipment. Scaffolding trainees are given a significant amount of tools and safety equipment, which they can keep upon completion of their training. Scaffolding and thermal insulation trainees undertake training and assessment activities on a high-level industrial-scale rig, which accurately simulates real working conditions. Staff involved in off-the-job training make good use of resources to simulate real activities which

occur in the industry.

24. Opportunities to recognise and assess key skills are being missed. Many on- and off-the-job training and assessment activities generate potential evidence of competence in one or more key skills, but these opportunities are not being identified or exploited. The two modern apprentices, for example, are not being helped to identify their use of key skills in the workplace. National trainees following the thermal insulation course spend a week of their off-the-job training time covering key skills. However, these are delivered in isolation, with little reference to their occupational training.

25. Until recently, internal verification in construction lacked rigour and was too infrequent. The sampling of assessments and portfolios was not systematic and opportunities to improve assessment procedures were missed. New systems have been established which introduce acceptable levels of quality assurance. However, they have yet to have an impact on training. In scaffolding and gas fitting there are not enough qualified internal verifiers.

## **Engineering**

## **Grade 2**

26. There are 110 trainees: 53 modern apprentices, 44 national trainees and 13 on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3 in a variety of engineering and engineering-related trades, including plant maintenance, instrumentation, fabrication and welding, pipe fitting, and materials processing and machining. Most trainees are employed in one of 49 local, national and international companies representing a wide range of occupations within the engineering industry. The larger companies are involved in activities such as welding and fabrication, chemical industrial work, shipbuilding and offshore construction. The smaller companies provide services to the local community and to larger multi-national companies.

27. Trainees initially attend the centre in Stockton for a period of three months, and work towards the engineering foundation NVQ at level 2. While this training is going on, work placements are found for each trainee. Trainees gaining employment at any stage are transferred to the modern apprenticeship programme. Most trainees attend a local college of further education on a block-release basis, spending two weeks in college and two weeks on the job. Others attend on a day-release basis. At college, they study the theory elements of their NVQ. The development of key skills forms part of the college programme for those attending college on block release. NETA provides key skills for those trainees who attend college on a day-release basis. NETA's staff carry out reviews of trainees' progress at least every 12 weeks. They also carry out the assessments. Fifteen members of NETA's staff are qualified assessors, five are qualified internal verifiers, and two are qualified to accredit prior learning. Reviews and assessments take place both on and off the job. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths and weaknesses. Two of the strengths were considered to be no more

than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the other strengths and weaknesses identified by the company and found a number of additional strengths and weaknesses. They awarded a higher grade than that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective and frequent reviews involving all parties
- ◆ comprehensive on- and off-the-job assessment
- ◆ good opportunities for trainees to achieve additional qualifications
- ◆ high rates of NVQ achievement

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of systematic planning for on-the-job training
- ◆ unsatisfactory procedures for recording and monitoring trainees' achievements
- ◆ slow progress by modern apprentices

28. Trainees are reviewed regularly both on and off the job. Reviews are effective and frequent. They are conducted at least every 12 weeks but, in many cases, they occur more frequently, sometimes as often as every two weeks. The reviews are conducted by a qualified assessor from NETA who has occupational competence in the area in which the trainee is working. Trainees' progress towards completion of the NVQ is reviewed and recorded and new goals are set. The review process involves the trainee, the employer and the assessor. Each receives a copy of the completed review document. Realistic and challenging targets are set for the trainee to meet by the next visit, and the employer's involvement in this process is critical in ensuring that trainees have the opportunity, at work, to achieve these targets. Reviews cover all aspects of training, from pastoral issues to the technical content of the NVQ being studied. Clear written feedback is given to the trainees on the progress they are making towards achieving the NVQ.

29. Most assessments are carried out on the job by NETA's staff, who are qualified assessors and occupationally competent in the areas concerned. Assessments are mainly based on direct observation of trainees at work. Supporting evidence includes written assignment work, set by the assessor at the previous review, and photographic evidence of tasks being carried out. When an assessment of a particular task cannot be carried out at work, arrangements are made for the trainee to be assessed off the job or, in certain circumstances, to transfer to another employer. Details of the assessment are recorded in the trainee's portfolio. Assessment of training on and off the job is of a high standard. Procedures for recording and monitoring achievement however, are unsatisfactory. Although each element of the NVQ is accredited as it is successfully completed, there is no central record of trainees' achievements. The company has achievement record cards, but they are not filled in. All assessment records are kept in trainees' portfolios, and if a portfolio were to be lost, there would be no record of achievement.

30. Trainees begin their training on one of a wide variety of engineering-related NVQs at level 2. Rates of progression from this point are good. Some progress from basic craft courses to more demanding technician-based qualifications. Trainees gaining employment are encouraged to become modern apprentices and stay in training to complete their qualifications. Trainees attend a local college of further education to learn the theory elements of their NVQ. In addition trainees work towards specialist qualifications which improve employment prospects. These include awards for electrical engineering, offshore safety, coded welding, crane driving and first aid. Trainees and employers value the additional skills which are developed in achieving these awards.

31. Where trainees have lost their jobs because employers have laid off workers or ceased trading, NETA has brought the trainees to their Stockton training centre for off-the-job training and quickly found them alternative employment. As a result, they have been able to continue their training with the minimum of disruption.

32. On-the-job training is not systematically planned. Trainees cover all the elements of their NVQ, either at work or in the training centre, but this is mainly because trainees and assessors are aware of the content of each of the units. Trainees are assessed as and when they complete the relevant work. There is little or no attempt to plan workplace activities in order to maximise the opportunities for trainees to demonstrate NVQ competencies.

33. Achievement rates for adults and young people on work-based learning programmes are good. Although there are no adults in training at present, all adults to date have completed their individual training plans and almost 80 per cent have gained employment. Over the last four years, more than 70 per cent of young people have achieved an NVQ level 2, more than 60 per cent have gained employment, and a further 12 per cent have continued their training by entering the modern apprenticeship programme.

34. The number of modern apprentices has fallen steadily from 42 in 1996-97 to 11 in 1999-2000. However, modern apprentices are making slow progress towards completion of their individual training plans. Twenty-four per cent of those starting in 1996-97 and 10 per cent of those starting in 1997-98 have completed their plans. A little over 50 per cent of apprentices starting between 1996 and 1998 left training without completing their training plans, although nearly half of them achieved an NVQ at level 3. Eighteen modern apprentices who started between 1996 and 1998 are still in training. Only three of the 35 apprentices who have started training since 1998 have left training, although most of those remaining have yet to achieve an NVQ at level 2.

## **Retailing & customer service**

## **Grade 1**

35. There are 14 trainees. Five modern apprentices and one national trainee are

working towards retailing NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and customer service NVQs at level 2. There are eight adult trainees on the work-based learning programme for call-centre operatives. All the adults are unemployed and all are following a six-week training course. NETA takes up to 10 new recruits onto the call-centre course every three weeks. Call-centre training takes place in a modern purpose-built call centre at NETA's Thornaby premises. The modern apprentices and the national trainee are all employed in local shops. Their training and assessment is subcontracted to another provider. Assessments are carried out in the workplace, once a week at pre-arranged times. All assessors come from retailing backgrounds and have appropriate assessors' qualifications. Where it occurs, the employers carry out on-the-job training. Off-the-job training, on a variety of retailing-related subjects, takes place on a monthly basis. Trainees are invited to attend all sessions. The company reported separately on its own training and the subcontracted training and awarded separate grades. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. A number of the strengths were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than the grades given by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ very frequent visits from trainers/assessors in retailing
- ◆ well-resourced call-centre training
- ◆ good initial assessment of occupational skills in the call-centre
- ◆ high retention rates for call-centre trainees
- ◆ strong support for call-centre trainees in finding jobs

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates in retailing

36. Retailing trainees are all employed by well-known shops and have the opportunity to gain experience in a wide range of departments and retailing activities. Although not a requirement of the modern apprenticeship framework, many modern apprentices complete the retailing NVQ at level 2 before progressing to the retail operations NVQ at level 3. Some trainees also achieve a customer service NVQ at level 2 as an additional qualification. Assessors from the subcontractor visit the trainees on a weekly basis. They examine work set the previous week, and set more work for the following week. They also conduct observations of the trainees at work. The frequency of these review and assessment visits means that trainees are set realistic and achievable short-term targets. In addition, with so little time between visits, any problems which may arise are resolved quickly. Despite the level of support trainees receive, however, retention rates are poor and progress towards NVQs is slow. No modern apprentices have completed their individual training plans, and five of the 10 apprentices joining since 1998-99 have left early. Three of these five left with an NVQ at level 2.

37. The call-centre training programme was set up just over a year ago. Trainees work on modern, industry-standard equipment. The software used is industry specific. Trainees are prepared well for jobs as call-centre operatives. The call-centre has a good reputation with local employers and the Employment Service, and the company has been very successful in attracting trainees to the course.

38. There is an effective initial assessment of occupational skills. Trainees for the call-centre course are normally referred to the company by the Employment Service, whose staff contact NETA directly by telephone, usually with the prospective trainee present. The subsequent telephone conversation, between the prospective trainee and one of NETA's call-centre trainers, forms part of the initial assessment and interview. Because telephone skills are an integral part of the job, NETA staff have introduced this process to help identify individual development needs right at the point of entry. On the first day of training, a trainee's computer skills are assessed while they use industry-specific call-centre software. The results of the assessment help in planning their training. Industry-standard performance indicators are used throughout the training. For example, an accuracy rating of 98.2 per cent is used as the indicator for assessing competence when entering data.

39. Formal training, covering both theory and practical skills, usually takes four weeks. Training is well planned and well structured. The mix of theory and practical training is well thought out, and effective in maintaining trainees' interest and motivation. After the intensive training, trainees are encouraged to apply for as many jobs as they can. On average, over 50 per cent of trainees get jobs, although the success rate for some groups is significantly higher. The curriculum vitae of each trainee who is leaving without a job is kept on file. Employers routinely approach NETA when they need to recruit new operatives, and the company sends details of those still unemployed, further helping to improve their trainees' job prospects. Since the course started a little over a year ago, retention rates have been 100 per cent and all the adults starting training have achieved the goals on their individual training plans.

## **Hospitality**

## **Grade 3**

40. There are 12 modern apprentices on the work-based learning programme and three young people on the full-time education and training option of the New Deal. They are working towards hospitality NVQs at levels 2 or 3, including those in food preparation and cooking, bar service, and licensed premises supervision. All learners achieve a food hygiene qualification and a basic health and safety certificate. Training and assessment for these qualifications takes place at the Thornaby training centre. Induction is carried out by NETA's staff. All learners also receive an induction from their employers or work-placement providers.

41. Most learners and clients work in public houses operated by national or

regional chains. All training and assessment for NVQs is carried out in the workplace by NETA's staff, all of whom are qualified assessors and verifiers. One member of staff is occupationally qualified to assess work in bar, food and drink service and food preparation. The other is occupationally qualified to assess work in bar and drink service. Both hold training qualifications and the key skills practitioners' awards.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate learning resources
- ◆ delayed introduction of key skills
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

42. Most of the weaknesses have been dealt with satisfactorily. There are adequate learning resources. These include textbooks, improved handouts, and computer-based presentations. There is a key skills induction. Assessment for key skills is now integrated with learners' vocational programmes. Learners work on projects to demonstrate their competence in the key skill units. NETA's staff carry out all assessments. Assessors ensure that learners know what aspects are to be assessed, understand the preparation required and know what assessment methods will be used. The self-assessment report was detailed and evaluative. Inspectors agreed with two of the four strengths identified in the report, but combined them into one. The other two were considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with two of the weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that awarded by NETA.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive support for learners
- ◆ good, well-structured portfolios

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates on some programmes

43. Learners receive frequent visits from NETA's staff, as many as one or two a week, if required. Normally there is a review of the work the learner has completed since the last visit and an agreement on targets to be achieved by the next visit. On some visits, staff observe learners at work and conduct assessments, on others they test occupational knowledge or review portfolios. All visits occur at times agreed by the learners and employers, and the team at NETA will alter the arrangements at short notice if asked to do so. NETA's staff are also in regular contact with learners and workplace supervisors by telephone, and at off-the-job training sessions. NETA's strong links with employers in the area enable the company to offer learners many employment opportunities. New Deal clients are quickly found



appropriate work placements. If, for any reason, work placements have to be changed, this is done quickly and with the full involvement of the learners and their employers. Learners are highly motivated. The good support given by NETA is acknowledged and valued by learners and workplace supervisors. This support is helping learners to complete their training and to secure employment

44. Learners' NVQ portfolios are well structured. They contain a good variety of evidence which is carefully indexed and matched against the elements and units of the NVQ, and cross-referenced where appropriate. Learners understand the NVQ process and take pride in their portfolios. NETA's staff provide learners with effective support in building their portfolios, but are careful to ensure that learners do not become too reliant on their advice.

45. Off-the-job training is carefully planned. On-the-job training is usually provided by an experienced member of the employer's staff working with the learner. All learners have individual learning plans and these contain target dates for the completion of units of their learning programme. All learners acquire good practical skills, but there is little systematic planning of the on-the-job training. Learners simply engage in the work that their employer requires. The quality of the training in the workplace is not monitored or evaluated in a planned way.

46. Retention and achievement rates on advanced modern apprenticeship programmes have been poor. For example, only one advanced modern apprentice has completed all the requirements of the apprenticeship framework, and in 1999-2000 and 2000-01, only 11 per cent gained an NVQ. To improve retention and subsequent achievement, NETA now places learners on foundation modern apprenticeships. Current figures show that one learner has completed the framework and 70 per cent are still in training. Learners on NVQ programmes have been more successful, with 71 per cent achieving all the targets on their individual learning plans in 1998-99 and 100 per cent doing so in 1999-2000. Retention and achievement rates for New Deal clients are poor, but the proportion moving into employment has improved from the previous 26 per cent to 38 per cent in 2000-01.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 3**

47. NETA has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which is updated annually. A copy of the policy is included in the learners' information pack which is given to LSC-funded learners and New Deal clients at induction. The pack also contains a written explanation of the policy and copies of the disciplinary, grievance and complaints procedures and the NVQ appeals procedures. Overall responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the general manager. A member of the management team serves as the company's equal opportunities officer. The officer chairs an equal opportunities committee which meets regularly to discuss

issues, raise awareness and formulate new policy. All job descriptions refer to the responsibility of staff to maintain and promote equality of opportunity. Equal opportunities is always an agenda item at management meetings. The company states its commitment to maintaining equality of opportunity and equal access to vocational training and qualifications for all its customers. The small amount of promotional material produced by the company has to be approved by the equal opportunities officer. Ninety-one per cent of learners are men, and 1.4 per cent of all learners are from minority ethnic groups. There are no learners classed as having a disability. Of the 68 staff, 46 are men, two are classed as having a disability and three are from a minority ethnic group.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices
- ◆ no analysis and use of data relating to equal opportunities
- ◆ no recruitment targets for under-represented groups
- ◆ poor access to the Thornaby training centre for people with restricted mobility

48. Most of the weaknesses have been dealt with satisfactorily. The allocation of day-to-day responsibility for equal opportunities to a member of the management team has raised the profile of equality of opportunity within the organisation. Staff have been given awareness training and can use a computer-based equal opportunity learning resource. Pre-placement checks now include an examination of the equal opportunities policies and procedures of potential employers and work-placement providers. There is annual monitoring of work placements to identify any changes that have been made since the pre-placement visit. The company has procedures for collecting and analysing data on learners in terms of gender, ethnicity, and disability. The proportion of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds is slightly lower than the proportion within the local population. The company is liaising with local community groups to find out how best to promote the training available at NETA. Promotional material has been translated into Urdu for parents of minority ethnic learners. New promotional material has been developed to help remedy the traditional imbalances between male and female learners in some occupational areas. Targets to improve recruitment for these groups have been set for the June 2002 intake. Access to the Thornaby training centre does not now affect current learners on work-based learning programmes. There is an accessible parking space for disabled drivers near to the entrance and NETA has had the building surveyed to improve access. The self-assessment report contained one strength and one weakness. Inspectors agreed with the strength. The identified weakness does not affect current work-based learners. Inspectors identified that one of the original weaknesses had not been fully rectified. The grade awarded is the same as that given by NETA.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ thorough and effective complaints procedures

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor understanding of equal opportunities by some learners

49. There are few formal complaints. The general manager, in line with the company's written procedures, deals swiftly and sensitively with those that arise. All complaints are investigated thoroughly and fairly. Detailed records are kept and the complainant is kept fully informed of progress during any investigation. Some complaints are dealt with informally at the request of the complainant.

50. Equal opportunities is included in the checklist of topics to be covered at induction and the form used at learners' progress reviews contains a specific section relating to barriers to progress. Equal opportunities training at induction finishes with a quiz to test learners' understanding. Some learners receive further training during off-the-job training, using videos as a discussion point. However this further training is not available to all learners. Some learners show little understanding of equality of opportunity and some have little recollection of the topic being mentioned during induction.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 3**

51. Learners and clients are introduced to NETA in a variety of ways. Most of those on modern apprenticeships are recommended by their employers, many of whom have used NETA for several years. The Employment Service refers New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option. A few learners contact NETA after meeting careers service representatives or respond to recommendation from friends or relatives. Learners who are unemployed receive off-the-job training while seeking employment or attending job interviews arranged through NETA's network of industry contacts. Learners receive an initial assessment of their basic and occupational skills before starting their training. All learners have an induction to NETA's procedures followed, in many cases, by a further induction from their employer when they begin work. Most learners undertake off-the-job training at NETA's or a subcontractor's premises, on a day-release or block-release basis. Reviews of progress are conducted by a member of NETA's staff, either in the workplace or in one of the company's two training centres.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment of basic skills
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ inadequate training plans
- ◆ poor recording of the additional support provided for trainees
- ◆ inadequate job-search provision

52. Most of the weaknesses have been dealt with satisfactorily. An initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is now made before they begin

a training programme. The information gathered from the basic skills assessment is also used to assess key skills. There are no specific tests for the key skill of using information technology (IT). A range of other methods is used to assess this aspect of the learners' competence. Questionnaires are used to provide further information on the learners' abilities in key skills. Additional support needs are recorded in a number of places including the learners' review documents, case conference records and individual learning plans. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the special self-assessment report. They also found some additional weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ flexible training arrangements to meet individuals' needs
- ◆ high levels of personal support for all learners
- ◆ effective recognition of learners' achievements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ insufficient use of initial assessment information
- ◆ training plans not closely matched to individual needs
- ◆ weak jobsearch practice in some areas

53. NETA provides off-the-job training to suit the individual needs of learners and employers. When opportunities to acquire and demonstrate the competences required for the NVQ are not available in the workplace, learners attend NETA's training centres for additional training and assessment. This is arranged for times convenient to the employer and the learner. In some cases, the company uses its good relationship with employers effectively by moving learners between employers to ensure that they develop the full range of competences for their chosen occupation. If economic factors lead to learners becoming redundant during training, NETA arranges for off-the-job training to continue, while making efforts to secure them other employment. The company has considerable success in arranging employment for its learners and New Deal clients.

54. Learners receive very good personal support from staff at NETA. Individual circumstances which may affect training are taken into account, and staff help with personal problems, including travel difficulties. Time off is arranged for learners who have family problems, and members of staff readily assist in researching benefit issues and arranging childcare. Learners are visited in the workplace more often if they need additional help or have personal difficulties. New Deal clients, in particular, benefit from NETA's links with industry. Training programmes and work placements take close account of clients' wishes. Many clients secure permanent employment and their success owes much to the research the company has carried out to identify occupational areas in which there is a regional or national skill shortage. In one case, New Deal clients attend a work placement with an employer several hundred miles away. Clients are accommodated in a hotel and

have the use of a hire car to travel to and from work during the four-week placement.

55. NETA celebrates the successes of its learners. There is an annual awards ceremony, which is well attended by learners, parents and representatives of industry. The event is intended not only to recognise the achievement of those who are leaving, but also to help motivate those who are still in training. In one instance, a learner who was to receive the apprentice of the year award lost his job shortly before the presentation ceremony. The event was used to publicise the learner's circumstances and another employer offered him a job. Many learners are successful in regional and national skills competitions. Recent issues of NETA's in-house newsletter highlight the successes of welding learners who have received union and institute awards. Cups and shields awarded to learners are displayed in the reception area of the company's headquarters. Many learners who have not succeeded in formal education achieve their first qualification with NETA.

56. The initial assessment of basic skills is adequate in most occupational areas. All learners starting training and employment are formally assessed to determine their basic levels of literacy and numeracy. These and other tests are used to judge learners' level of ability in the five key skills areas. However, this information is not yet used fully in all programmes. Prior achievement and qualifications are not always taken into account or credited towards the NVQs and vocational qualifications.

57. Individual learning plans include the results of the basic skills assessment, and the prior experience, training and qualifications of learners. The plans are updated as the learners' circumstance and details change. Some plans list the units of the award and give the same achievement date for each unit. This practice does not take into account the progress an individual learner may make. Other plans allow learners too much time for the completion of awards. Some learners on the same award have almost identical plans and their individual ability to progress at different rates is not taken into account.

58. The quality of jobsearch sessions offered to New Deal clients varies. Some are given a good range of jobsearch activities. There was no plan for one observed session and no summary or feedback was given at the end. Alternative means of searching for a job were not explored and the clients were not set any task or other activities to undertake between sessions.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 3**

59. The company has produced an annual business plan. It was first accredited as an Investor in People in 1997 and was reaccruited in January 2000. Investors in People is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. A team of seven department managers supports the general manager, who reports to the board of trustees on a quarterly basis. The management team

meets formally once a month to discuss progress towards objectives in the business plan. It also meets weekly on a less formal basis. Information on the issues raised and decisions made at management meetings are communicated to all staff. Government-funded training now accounts for 35 per cent of NETA's turnover. In April 2000, a manager was appointed to take direct responsibility for all local LSC and Employment Service business. Some engineering training is subcontracted to a local college of further education. NETA employs 44 trainer/assessors. All are occupationally competent and have the relevant trainers' and assessors' qualifications.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no formal agreements with subcontractors
- ◆ inadequate co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ some employers' lack of understanding of, and involvement in, NVQ programmes
- ◆ underdeveloped management information systems
- ◆ failure to follow staff appraisal procedures

60. Since the original inspection, NETA has taken over the Engineering and Marine Training Authority's training centre in Billingham. A new business plan has been developed to take account of the expanded business. The company has also ceased its publicly funded training in retailing. Most of the weaknesses have been dealt with satisfactorily. The co-ordination of on- and off-the job training in engineering has been improved. The contract for the off-the-job training has been placed with a local further education college. Regular meetings are taking place to plan the training. NETA has implemented procedures to help employers understand the NVQ process. Employers receive a comprehensive brochure which explains the structure of NVQs and apprenticeship training and the requirements relating to health and safety and equal opportunities. Construction staff have given presentations to employers to explain the NVQ process. Employers involved in hospitality training have a good understanding of the NVQ process and some have completed NVQ training programmes themselves. The management information system has been improved. Reports are available to help monitor learners' progress and to analyse performance relating to learners' achievements and the company's business objectives. Further work is planned to improve the detailed monitoring of individual learners. All staff have been appraised using a standard format. The appraisals are comprehensive, relate to business objectives where relevant, and identify future training requirements. Training requirements are logged for each member of staff. Progress towards meeting these training requirements is monitored by the departmental manager. The self-assessment report produced for the reinspection was realistic and identified similar strengths and weakness to those identified by the inspection team. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective and well-established relationships with employers which strengthen training opportunities

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ lack of systematic monitoring of subcontractors

61. NETA has been operating as a training organisation for 25 years and has a sound reputation in the local business community for the quality of its training. The company maintains close contact with commerce and industry through the activities of its business development department and this enables it to offer learners and clients good opportunities for training and employment. NETA is also represented on regional and national groups, at a strategic level, and on several national training and industry-specific groups. NETA understands the needs and demands of the industries in which it operates, and uses this expertise to ensure that the training is up to date with developments within these industries. The company is able to respond quickly to new legislation and the changing demands of industry and can tailor training programmes accordingly. Involvement in various national and regional initiatives has resulted in the acquisition of resources which benefit all learners.

62. The number of subcontractors for government-funded work has been reduced. Contracts have been signed with the subcontractors specifying what NETA requires from each of them. This includes compliance with quality assurance and equal opportunities policies. NETA has conducted a preliminary audit of a subcontractor but the system for monitoring of the subcontractors has still to be implemented.

## **Quality assurance**

## **Grade 3**

63. NETA holds ISO 9002, an international quality assurance standard, and has a detailed policies and procedures manual for quality assurance. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with the general manager, helped by another member of staff who co-ordinates quality assurance. NETA has a number of trained quality assurance auditors. An annual schedule of audits is carried out, covering all the procedures described in the company's manual.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training
- ◆ failure of quality assurance arrangements to cover all aspects of training
- ◆ failure to make self-assessment an integral part of quality assurance arrangements

64. Most of the weaknesses have been dealt with satisfactorily. There is now a systematic evaluation of the training using the company's comprehensive quality

assurance procedures. A team of internal quality assurance auditors checks various aspects of the company's operation throughout the year, according to an agreed schedule. All aspects of the training are evaluated against criteria in the quality assurance manual. NETA carries out self-assessment on a regular basis and takes action on the findings. Self-assessments and action plans are now an integral part of the company's quality assurance procedures. Inspectors agreed with the strength identified in the special self-assessment report. They also found an additional strength and two weaknesses. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective use of self-assessment
- ◆ effective action taken to deal with non-compliance with quality assurance procedures

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ underdeveloped evaluation of training
- ◆ some poor internal verification practices

65. In the self-assessment report, NETA's managers accurately identified many of the strengths and weaknesses of the company's training. An action plan was drawn up promptly, and actions have been taken to remedy the weaknesses. Since the original inspection, these actions have had a significant effect on the organisation and have made a positive impact on the quality of training. The self-assessment report continues to be used to further improve the training provision.

66. Prompt, corrective action is taken to deal with instances of non-compliance with quality assurance procedures and systems. The quality assurance manual covers all aspects of government-funded training. A team of trained quality assurance auditors carries out checks on all aspects of the training provision at least twice a year. All staff are aware of the requirements of the system.

67. NETA has a planned system for the regular review of training. This system draws information from a range of sources such as employers, learners, internal quality assurance audits and self-assessment. All types of training are evaluated, but not all aspects are covered thoroughly. There is no method of ensuring that all interested parties contribute to reviews of training. Further developments to this system are planned. Little use is made of performance trends to measure whether the standards of training are being improved continuously. Targets for retention and achievement are not always demanding.

68. NETA has introduced a new system of internal verification which meets the requirements of the awarding bodies, but it is not fully operational across all areas. In some areas, the internal verification system is well planned and thorough, but in other areas it is insufficiently planned and targets set for assessors are insufficiently demanding. Some action plans do not set deadlines, while others are



insufficiently detailed. Some assessors are verified frequently, while others are not. From some verification records it is not clear what has been verified or which award is being assessed.

69. A special self-assessment report was produced by NETA for the reinspection. It was based on the requirements of *Raising the Standard*. By the time inspectors visited NETA for the reinspection, the company had produced the latest version of its self-assessment report based on the *Common Inspection Framework*. This is thorough in its appraisal of the company and builds on the findings of the special report and the original inspection. A comprehensive new action plan has been produced.