

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
JANUARY 2001

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
FEBRUARY 2002

Omega Training Services Limited



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 **learndirect** 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 Omega Training Services Limited was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for health, care and public services, 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 health, care and public services, 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).

Omega Training Services Limited offers training programmes in care to 69 learners. The retention and achievement rates for learners are poor. Training opportunities are promoted well to under-represented groups in the local community. Monitoring of equal opportunities takes place in the workplace. Learners now receive an induction to their training. Reviews of learners' progress take place frequently and there is initial assessment to shape their individual learning plans. Staff development opportunities are good. Management of training is now satisfactory. There are quality assurance systems, but they are not effectively monitored. Internal verification is thorough, but there are some weak assessment practices. There is insufficient feedback gathered from learners.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Health, care & public services	4

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Health, care & public services	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

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

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ low retention and achievement rates
- ◆ weak assessment practices by some assessors
- ◆ poor strategic planning
- ◆ inadequate monitoring of quality assurance procedures
- ◆ insufficient feedback gathered from learners

INTRODUCTION

1. Omega Training Services Limited (Omega) is a privately owned company based in Birmingham. The company was formed in April 1996, with two equal shareholders and directors, who continue to own and manage it. Omega provides training in care for older people, care for people with learning difficulties and care for people with physical disabilities. At the time of the original inspection, the company had contracts with Birmingham and Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE). Birmingham and Solihull TEC was the co-ordinating TEC for the purposes of the original inspection. Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC) has replaced Birmingham and Solihull TEC. In addition, at the time of the original inspection, the company subcontracted with Birmingham and Solihull TEC to provide training for clients on the voluntary sector option of New Deal. This is no longer the case. Omega also provides training for 198 privately funded adult learners.

2. There are 69 LSC-funded learners. Fifty-seven are modern apprentices from the Birmingham area, and 12 are modern apprentices from Shropshire. All are employed. Training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is given individually or in small groups in the residential or nursing homes in which learners are employed. The learners who work in domiciliary care services, providing care to people in their own homes, receive training on a one-to-one basis.

3. Most of Omega's learners come from Birmingham, Telford and Shrewsbury. At the time of the original inspection, the unemployment rate was 6.3 per cent in Birmingham and 2.3 per cent in Shropshire, compared with the average unemployment rate for England of 3.3 per cent. In September 2001, the unemployment rate was 5.6 per cent in Birmingham and 2.1 per cent in Shropshire, compared with the national average of 2.9 per cent. At the time of the original inspection, people from minority ethnic groups made up 21.5 per cent of the population in Birmingham and 1.6 per cent in Shropshire, compared with 6.2 per cent for England as a whole. These figures have not changed for the Birmingham area, but in Shropshire the proportion has dropped to less than 1 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 41 per cent in Birmingham and 56 per cent in Shropshire, compared with 49.2 per cent for England as a whole. In 2001, the proportions were 41 per cent in Birmingham, 54 per cent in Shropshire and 47.9 per cent nationally. The proportion of students who remain in education or training after the age of 16 is 69 per cent in Birmingham and 75 per cent in Shropshire. The national average is 71 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. For the original inspection, one of the two company directors had responsibility for compiling the self-assessment report and attended training on self-assessment which was organised by Birmingham and Solihull TEC. An external consultant was employed by the company to carry out a practise inspection before the company completed the report. The self-assessment process included interviews with employers, learners and assessors. All training staff were involved in self-assessment. All the grades awarded by inspectors were lower than those given by the company in its self-assessment report. The self-assessment process for the reinspection involved all staff. Four grades awarded by inspectors matched those in the self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report for quality assurance.

5. The original inspection was carried out by a team of three inspectors. They spent a total of 12 days with Omega in January 2001. Inspectors interviewed 18 learners and eight workplace supervisors and work-based assessors. Nine employers and 16 training staff were interviewed. Inspectors viewed documents which included TEC contracts, external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, quality assurance reports, minutes of meetings and promotional materials. Inspectors observed seven training sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Six training sessions were graded.

6. Five inspectors spent a total of 20 days reinspecting Omega in February 2002. They interviewed 25 learners, looked at 24 learners' portfolios, interviewed 19 employers and carried out 16 interviews with Omega's staff. They examined learners' personal files, reports from the awarding body, local LSC documents and Omega's policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the reinspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Health, care & public services			7	1		8
Total	0		7	1	0	8

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

7. There are 69 learners of whom 35 are advanced and 34 are foundation modern apprentices. There are 16 young men and 53 young women. All learners are employed. They work in a variety of settings including hospitals, residential homes and nursing homes. All learners receive a half-day induction to familiarise them with the requirements of the NVQ and their role and responsibilities as learners. Assessment is undertaken either by work-based assessors or by visiting assessors from Omega. Learners are given off-the-job training in key skills and for all the units of the NVQ except those relating to equality of opportunity.

At the original inspection, the main weakness identified were:

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

8. The company has rectified the weaknesses in learners' and employers' understanding of the programmes. It has improved the planning of training and the quality of training in key skills. Learners are given a handbook to supplement the information they are given at induction. Training co-ordinators have made employers aware of the qualification requirements. A list of training sessions is circulated to learners and employers, and a session plan is devised for each session. A full-time member of staff has been appointed to give off-the-job training and assessment in key skills. However, three weaknesses remain from the original inspection. There is still slow progress for some learners, there are some weak assessment practices and there is insufficient access to resources for some learners.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support from training co-ordinators
- ◆ very good work placements for most learners

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress for some learners
- ◆ weak assessment practices by some assessors
- ◆ insufficient access to up-to-date resources for some learners

9. There is very good support for learners. Training co-ordinators visit learners in their workplaces weekly or fortnightly depending on their needs. Co-ordinators

understand the units learners are working towards. Co-ordinators help learners to relate their work to the requirements of the NVQ and assist them in identifying sources of evidence. Learners appreciate having the NVQ explained in language they can understand. The co-ordinators and assessors work with learners to plan their assessments.

10. Learners are employed in a variety of workplaces. Most of the employers are very supportive. The best provide models of good practice for learners. These employers arrange a variety of on- and off-the-job training sessions to help the learners to develop as carers and to provide evidence towards their qualifications. Training includes basic food hygiene, first aid, working with dementia, promoting continence and dispensing drugs. There are clear aims and objectives for each session. Some learners are also given time during their working day to produce evidence for their NVQ.

11. For the past three years retention and achievement rates have been low. In 2000-01, the retention and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices were 6 per cent. In the same year, the retention rate for foundation modern apprentices was 36 per cent and the achievement rate was 15 per cent. During the current year there are indications that retention rates are improving. From April 2001 to January 2002, the retention rate for all modern apprentices was 71 per cent. More learners are achieving their modern apprenticeship framework within the agreed timescales. Of the 18 foundation modern apprentices who achieved all the requirements of the framework between April 2001 and January 2002, 72 per cent did so within the agreed timescale. However, achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices are low. Of the seven who achieved the full apprenticeship framework, only 43 per cent did so within the agreed timescale. There are still too many learners whose rate of progress is slow. There are too few work-based assessors. Not all assessors carry out their role effectively. Some assessors lack experience and some find it difficult to fit assessment around their workloads. Some learners are hampered by the number of hours and the shift patterns they have to work.

12. There are some weak assessment practices. The assessment plans that learners are using are not individualised. Target-setting is weak. Most of the plans do not specify target dates for the achievement of units or say when direct observation will occur. There is very little use of witness testimony. Some learners use witness testimonies provided by members of their own families. Signatures are often illegible and designations are omitted. There is too much reliance on written evidence. Learners have to describe how they meet the performance criteria for each element, and then provide statements on the background knowledge. Learners have to answer up to 35 questions for each element. Many find this hard work and time-consuming. Some of the written work does not cover all the knowledge and understanding required, especially at level 3. Arrangements for direct observation are made when learners have completed their written work. Assessors do not record how long the observation lasts and sometimes only observe activities once. This does not allow learners to show that they are using their developing skills with

a range of clients over a period of time. During a direct observation, a learner weighing clients was using inappropriate lifting methods. The assessor did not intervene. It was only during the post-assessment feedback session that the assessor made it clear to the learner that such methods were inappropriate and suggested alternatives. In the better portfolios there is evidence of assessors encouraging learners to produce a range of evidence including direct observation, witness testimony, work products and, for one learner, the use of taped evidence. There is very little evidence of oral questioning.

POOR PRACTICE

During a key skills session one of the learners was using a laptop computer. The learner either sat leaning on his left arm or with his head in his hand while typing with his right hand. The trainer did not identify the inappropriateness of this posture.

13. The training centre has too few relevant textbooks. There are five that relate specifically to NVQs at level 2 and 3. These are not available for loan. Many learners are unaware of their existence. There is a file containing a few handouts which training co-ordinators can photocopy for learners. Some of the handouts are themselves poor photocopies. Others are not dated and some are out of date. Most are not referenced. Many learners do not have access to NVQ textbooks or occupational journals at work. They are unable to research topics that are relevant to their area of work, or broaden their knowledge and understanding of their clients and their area of work. One care home has a single NVQ-related book that cannot be removed and is shared between three learners. Two learners are using textbooks which are 16 and 18 years old respectively. Attendance rates at the off-the-job training sessions are low. Some learners have heavy work commitments and their employers do not always release them for training sessions. Some have to travel a considerable distance to the training centre. The company has made several attempts to deal with the problem of attendance but has been unsuccessful.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. Omega has a detailed equal opportunities policy. This was last updated in 2001. It refers to current legislation and applies to staff, learners and employers. A written agreement between the employers and the company stipulates that employers must comply with the relevant legislation. One of the directors has overall responsibility for equal opportunities. Day-to-day responsibility is delegated to one of the co-ordinators. All staff have been given equal opportunities awareness training. The training room is accessible to learners with restricted mobility. The company has an open-door recruitment policy and records all applications. Learners are usually recruited through employers' recommendations. Omega collects data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disabilities to satisfy the LSC's requirements. Twenty-nine per cent of learners are young men and 23 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. There are no learners with disabilities. Information on equal opportunities is given to learners at induction and is included in their handbook.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace

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

15. Following the original inspection, Omega produced an action plan to rectify the weaknesses. Actions, timescales and evaluative measures were agreed. At reinspection, inspectors found that progress had been made towards rectifying both weaknesses. Equality of opportunity is regularly monitored in the workplace. Data are now used to target under-represented groups of learners and this weakness has now become a strength.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of data to recruit from under-represented groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

16. Omega uses a range of data to target under-represented groups. Managers identified from their own data that few learners were young men. Omega works actively with employers who are recruiting new staff to encourage them to recruit men. This is particularly successful in care homes for people with challenging behaviour. The percentage of learners who are men has risen from 16 per cent to 20 per cent in 12 months. Local labour market information has been used to build a profile of minority ethnic groups in the 16 electoral wards of Birmingham City Council. Twenty-eight per cent of Omega's learners from Birmingham are from minority ethnic groups, which is well above the general proportion of 21.5 per cent in the city. Learners of black African and Caribbean origin are well represented but the company has recognised that Asian learners are under-represented. Omega is using marketing activities such as local advertising, discussions and direct marketing with employers to encourage the recruitment of more learners from under-represented ethnic minority groups.

Trainee support

Grade 3

17. Learners are recruited to training programmes after being nominated by their employers. All learners attend a half-day induction. After induction, a workplace visit is made by senior staff from Omega to sign paperwork, give feedback on learners' initial assessment and answer queries. A handbook is given to all learners during induction. All learners are given an initial assessment of their basic skills. Advice on careers is given on request. A range of NVQ assessment methods is used. Some staff have received training in specialist support subjects such as dyslexia, sign language and counselling.

At the original inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor induction of trainees
- ◆ insufficient use of initial assessment

- ◆ inadequate training plans
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress

18. Following the original inspection, Omega produced an action plan to rectify the weaknesses. At reinspection, inspectors found that Omega had made progress on all weaknesses but not all had been fully rectified. All learners now attend a half-day induction and complete an initial assessment. Reviews are carried out regularly. Insufficient progress has been made on improving learning plans and this remains a weakness.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate individual learning plans

19. Learners are well supported by their training co-ordinator who visits them at their workplace at least every two weeks and often weekly. Learners can request additional visits and contact their co-ordinator during weekdays, evenings and weekends for additional support. During the visit, the co-ordinator plans the next unit for assessment with the learner on a one-to-one basis. Visits take place to fit in with learners' shift patterns. Co-ordinators take into account individual's learning styles and needs. Tasks are set to be completed before the next visit which stretch the learner but also take into account individual circumstances. Most workplace supervisors provide good learning and personal support. There are good relationships between supervisors and co-ordinators, who work as a team to support learners. Co-ordinators take laptop computers into the workplace to assist with key skills training. The eight-weekly workplace reviews meet the contract requirements of the LSC.

20. Individual learning plans are poor. They contain the minimum of information necessary to comply with contractual or statutory requirements. There is little specific information about learners' off-the-job training needs. The on-the-job training to be given by the employer is not agreed or recorded. There is no information on how training will be given or what learning resources will be provided if learners are unable to attend off-the-job training. Assessments and reviews are not used to check what training has been given in the workplace or to make changes to individual learning plans. Plans do not record learners' need for additional support. Supervisors and co-ordinators help learners with spelling, punctuation and writing, but this is informal.

Management of training

Grade 3

21. The company was formed in 1996 with two directors and shareholders. It specialises in training for the care sector. The management structure is clear, and

both directors have distinct roles. One is responsible for the day-to-day management of contracts and staff, and the other for the quality of training. The company gained Investors in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people, in May 1998, and was recredited in November 1999. Staff have written job descriptions, and there is an annual appraisal system which links with their development needs. Most staff have appropriate experience of the care sector and either hold or are working towards assessors' qualifications. There are weekly, minuted meetings for the training staff, at which contractual and training-related issues are discussed. Employers provide most training on the job. Omega's staff provide training in areas such as first aid and manual handling.

At the original inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

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

22. Following the original inspection, Omega produced an action plan to deal with the weaknesses in this area. At the reinspection, inspectors found that although Omega had made satisfactory progress towards rectifying these weaknesses there were now two new ones. Inspectors agreed with the grade for management of training given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and effective marketing strategy
- ◆ good staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor strategic planning
- ◆ no monitoring of action points from meetings

23. Omega has introduced clear and effective marketing materials. Mailshots are used to promote training to care homes which do not already use Omega's services. There has been an advertising campaign in a chain of restaurants using posters and advertisements on placemats. Omega offers free training for work-based assessors in the care sector in order to increase the number available. Although the time available to achieve the awards is limited to six months, Omega continues to provide support if assessors need more time.

24. Omega's managers strongly support staff development, and clearly value their staff. Staff development is linked to an annual appraisal system. It offers staff the opportunity to gain training qualifications and helps them to achieve their personal career-development targets. Members of staff are being helped to achieve assessors' and key skills qualifications, and health and safety qualifications.

Several staff are working towards further education teaching qualifications and mentoring awards. Since the original inspection, three training co-ordinators have achieved the internal verifiers' qualification. The company also paid for driving lessons for a member of staff, to assist them in their job role.

25. There is poor strategic planning by senior managers. Planning is informal, infrequent and does not take place regularly. There are no records of the process and staff are not informed of the decisions made.

26. Staff receive information mainly through weekly meetings chaired by the senior training co-ordinator. These are sometimes attended by one of the company's directors. Minutes of the meetings are very brief, but show that the items discussed are wide ranging. They cover inspection information. Training staff welcome the opportunity provided by these meetings to share information with other staff and to seek solutions to problems arising in their job roles. The meetings contribute to a strong team spirit among training staff. However, there is no evidence of any monitoring of action points arising from the minutes of meetings.

27. There are written procedures for the recruitment of staff. Recruitment, selection and rejection are recorded and monitored to ensure that Omega complies with employment and equal opportunities legislation.

28. The work of the company covers a wide geographical area, including Birmingham, Solihull and Shropshire. The company currently provides training in care for employees of 92 care homes. At the original inspection, inspectors identified the heavy workloads of co-ordinators as weaknesses. This has now been rectified. Co-ordinators now have a caseload of 50 learners each. The responsibilities of training co-ordinators include liaison with employers, support for learners, the assessment of learners, health and safety checks and off-the-job training. Training co-ordinators are expected to visit each learner fortnightly.

29. At the time of the original inspection, feedback from employers showed that they had a poor understanding of Omega's policies and targets. There was no strategy to deal with this problem. It was unclear how, if at all, the policies and targets were communicated to employers. The situation has now been improved. Most of the 30 per cent of employers who responded to a questionnaire said that communication had improved. A few still indicated that Omega's policies did not apply to them, but most of these used their own policies instead.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

30. Since the original inspection, the quality assurance manual has been revised and updated. There is now a quality assurance policy and a range of procedures. Copies of the manual are available to staff. Responsibility for quality assurance is held by one of the directors of the company. Staff are aware of the self-assessment

process, and were fully involved in the production of the self-assessment report.

At the original inspection the main weaknesses identified were:

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

31. After the original inspection, Omega produced a quality assurance policy and a range of procedures to support the policy. These are based on an international quality assurance standard. The quality assurance structure was adopted in December 2001 so at the time of the reinspection it was too soon to make judgements about its effectiveness. The use of data continues to be a weakness. At the reinspection, inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but found significant weaknesses not identified by Omega. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the company in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough internal verification
- ◆ inclusive self-assessment process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of quality assurance procedures
- ◆ lack of target-setting
- ◆ insufficient feedback gathered from learners

32. At the original inspection, internal verification practices were satisfactory. They are now thorough. There is a policy and detailed procedures covering all aspects of internal verification. The implementation of the policy and procedures is closely monitored by one of the directors. Each internal verifier has a detailed sampling plan, which ensures breadth and depth of sampling across all learners and assessors. All internal verifiers keep detailed, up-to-date records of all the work that has been internally verified. Each internal verifier observes assessors once a year and is responsible for supporting and observing assessors who are still in training.

33. All staff have been fully involved in the self-assessment process, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. The grades awarded by inspectors matched those identified in the self-assessment report in four of the five areas reinspected.

34. There is inadequate monitoring of quality assurance procedures. Some aspects of training are monitored at the weekly staff meetings. The progress review process is discussed, but the quality of reviews is not. There is no follow-up after the meeting to ensure that the reviews identified as being due did actually take place. There is no schedule for internal audits and very few have taken place.

Learners' personal files were audited in 2001 but no report was produced and information from the audit was not passed to staff. Inspectors found documents to be incomplete and out of date. There is no system for checking that procedures for key training practices are being followed.

35. At the time of the original inspection, there was insufficient analysis and use of data to bring about improvements in the training programmes. Data were not used to set targets, for example, for the completion of individual learning plans, or the achievement of key skills units. This is still an area of weakness. Staff are not given targets for their learners' retention, completion and achievement rates. Accurate data are available, but are not being used effectively by staff to monitor learners' progress. There is no discussion of learners' progress at team meetings and no monitoring to ensure learners are making satisfactory progress.

36. Omega gathers insufficient feedback from learners. Learners complete questionnaires at six-monthly intervals. However, the questionnaires are identical and the questions do not cover all aspects of training. The questions are poorly constructed and many of them are not answered by the learners. In August 2001, there was a very poor response rate and those learners who did respond answered very few of the questions. The company does not use any other means of gathering the views of learners. The response rate of employers to a questionnaire in August 2001 was better, but very important issues which were raised were not discussed at the staff meetings and the information was not passed on to staff.