

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT  
JULY 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION  
FEBRUARY 2002

# Vocational Legal Training Ltd



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 Vocational Legal Training Ltd was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in a less than satisfactory grade being awarded for business administration. This area has 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 section of the original report dealing with business administration has 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)).

**At the original inspection in July 2000, Vocational Legal Training Ltd offered training in business administration which was less than satisfactory. Theory was not taught systematically, and the training programme relied on assignments rather than on evidence from the learners' work roles. At the time of the reinspection in February 2002, the business administration programme has improved significantly and is now satisfactory. Learners' portfolios contain a full range of workplace evidence. Assessments are carried out each month at employers' premises and internal verification occurs throughout the course. Theory training is now carefully planned between the learner and employer at the start of the training programme. Some employers are still not sufficiently aware of their role, the qualifications and their learners' progress, as they are not reinforced during quarterly reviews. The company's staff are committed to equal opportunities, and monitor training thoroughly to ensure that learners are fairly treated. Vocational Legal Training Ltd has a valuable network of external contacts. Some employers do not participate sufficiently in training programmes. Learners and employers' feedback is collected and acted upon. There are gaps in the quality assurance system.**

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Trainee support	2
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Business administration	3

### **KEY STRENGTHS**

- ◆ strong company culture of equal opportunities
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ effective external networking
- ◆ positive response to feedback from learners and employers
- ◆ good learning environments
- ◆ additional qualifications for modern apprentices

### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ lack of employers' involvement in training programmes
- ◆ weak quality assurance system
- ◆ inadequate system to monitor retention and achievement rates

## INTRODUCTION

1. Vocational Legal Training Ltd (VLT) is a privately owned company which was established in 1996 to offer vocational training for people working in administrative posts in law firms. At the original inspection, VLT had contracts with Leeds Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), its co-ordinating TEC, and Calderdale and Kirklees TEC to offer training towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in business administration. The company also had training in business administration subcontracted to it from training providers in Manchester, Newcastle, Bradford, Humberside, Sheffield and Nottingham. At the time of the original inspection, VLT had 76 learners and there are now 46 learners, all of whom are modern apprentices employed in legal environments in Leeds and the surrounding area. The company no longer offers business administration training under subcontract arrangements to other training providers. Tutor/assessors visit learners in the workplace each month for a tutorial, during which assessment and action-planning takes place.

2. At the original inspection, VLT was based at one site comprising administrative offices, two training rooms, and an information technology (IT) training centre. At reinspection, the company has expanded and has another training site in the heart of Leeds commercial centre. The number of staff has decreased from 24 to 16.

3. The city of Leeds has a buoyant economy, with employment growing at approximately twice the national rate. Most jobs are in the service sector, notably in public administration, education and health, distribution, and banking and finance. Leeds is one of the principal centres for telephone-based customer services. Over the past decade, there has been an increase in employment in management and professional occupations, and a decline in manual occupations. In June 2000, the unemployment rate in Leeds was 3.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent. By September 2001, the rate had fallen to 3 per cent, compared with 2.9 per cent nationally.

4. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Leeds achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 40 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In 2001, the proportion has remained the same at 40 per cent, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups in Leeds is 5.8 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. VLT prepared its first self-assessment report in November 1999 for the original inspection. Key members of staff attended several external training events in preparation for self-assessment, and support was received from Leeds TEC. The judgements and grades in the first self-assessment report were arrived at by the senior management team in consultation with other members of staff. The views of learners and employers were sought informally, and used to develop the report. A second self-assessment report was prepared and completed in October 2001 using the *Common Inspection Framework*. The findings and grades were decided by the senior management team in consultation with all members of staff. The views of some learners and employers were used.

6. At the original inspection, a team of three inspectors, and a specialist from the legal profession, spent a total of 11 days at the company's premises in July 2000. They visited 13 workplaces, and interviewed 30 learners, 11 workplace supervisors, and 15 members of VLT's staff. Inspectors observed nine tutorials, and examined documents including learners' administrative files and training plans, learners' portfolios of work, policies, procedures and contractual information. No training was observed or graded.

7. The reinspection was carried out by two inspectors who spent a total of six days at VLT's premises. Inspectors visited seven employers where they interviewed seven workplace supervisors. Ten learners were interviewed and 11 portfolios of evidence were examined. Eight individual learning plans were seen, along with assessment and internal verification records. Two interviews were held with VLT's staff. Four assessments and two progress reviews were observed and judged to be satisfactory. Inspectors observed one training session and one coaching session, both were considered to be very good and were given a grade 2.

8. At the original inspection, comprehensive initial assessment was considered to be a key strength. VLT has amended their initial assessment practices as a pilot project and inspectors no longer consider this to be effective. Two additional key strengths have been added and two key weaknesses have been removed. An additional key weakness was identified during reinspection due to difficulties in establishing the accuracy of data relating to retention and achievement rates.

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 3

9. VLT offers modern apprenticeships for 46 learners, of whom 15 are foundation modern apprentices and 31 are advanced modern apprentices. Retention rates for advanced modern apprentices have improved from 52 per cent in 1999-2000, to 69 per cent in 2001-02. For foundation modern apprentices, retention rates are 64 per cent for 2001-02. Achievement of modern apprenticeships was 59 per cent for 2000-01. Since the original inspection, VLT has introduced a range of measures to improve retention and achievement rates, but it is too early to assess the impact. All except one of the administration learners are employed in legal environments. All learners already have a job when they become modern apprentices. All learners are visited each month in their workplace, during which they discuss evidence and work on their portfolios. Two of VLT's staff are tutor/assessors on the administration programme and they are led by the company's academic manager who is also the internal verifier. One tutor/assessor has training and assessment qualifications and she is working towards an internal verifier qualification. The other tutor/assessor is training towards these qualifications and is therefore supported and monitored by the internal verifier. All have relevant occupational experience.

At the original inspection the main weaknesses identified were :

- ◆ over-reliance on pre-set tasks
- ◆ poor assessment of trainees' performance
- ◆ unsystematic approach to theoretical training
- ◆ lack of understanding of NVQ process by trainees

10. By the time of the reinspection, the actions to deal with the original weaknesses have largely been effective. Assessment of learners' performance is now satisfactory. Learners now fully understand their qualification and the assessment process. Evidence in the portfolio now consists of work products and personal statements and observation of performance in the workplace is undertaken regularly by assessors. The observation reports are detailed and are referenced to the relevant elements of the NVQ as well as the key skills units. Assessors give clear feedback to the learners on their performance. Weaknesses related to pre-set tasks and theory training have been dealt with and VLT's approach is now considered to be satisfactory in these areas. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good action-planning
- ◆ good achievement of additional qualifications

- ◆ good learning environments

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some inadequate arrangements for key skills training
- ◆ insufficient awareness of learners' progress by employers

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*A senior manager observes assessors at all stages of the learning process including induction, initial assessment and review and assessment. The records are detailed and identify strengths and weaknesses. Areas for improvement and training needs are noted and an individual learning plan is produced for each assessor.*

11. Each of VLT's tutor/assessors is responsible for a group of learners and they visit them in the workplace each month. The visits are arranged to suit learners' working schedules, and, once organised, are adhered to by tutors. Learners value this continuity. Visits are made up of individual portfolio-building and the assessment of evidence gathered since the previous meeting. They conclude with the negotiation of a short-term action plan which specifies exactly which units the learner should work on, and what evidence they should collect. The plan is carefully monitored, and a discussion of the learner's progress gives a starting point for the next visit. The action plan also details the training to be carried out either at the workplace or at VLT's premises.

12. All learners can undertake additional qualifications, such as a certificate in paralegal practice. These additional qualifications increase learners' confidence, and enhance their future employability. At the time of the reinspection, 13 foundation and 23 advanced modern apprentices are working towards the VLT certificate in law which is an in-house certificate covering the basic principles of law. The qualification prepares learners to progress to a legal executive's certificate. There are currently 10 advanced modern apprentices working towards this certificate, three of whom are specialising in legal secretarial practice. In addition, there are a number of learners undertaking nationally recognised qualifications in the use of information technology such as spreadsheets, databases and word processing.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Learners are encouraged to produce a professional behaviour statement, which confirms that they will act responsibly and with integrity in all aspects of their job role. This is particularly significant as most learners are employed in legal environments and much of their work is highly confidential and sensitive. The statement is signed and dated by the learner and authenticated by the supervisor.*

13. The learning environments are good. Employers are mainly prominent legal firms in prestigious offices in Leeds. Learners benefit from employers' internal training programmes in legal administration in specialist areas such as bankruptcy, trademarks and mortgage redemption. The training provider's premises are also well equipped with computers and a range of legal and administration resources. Learners have open access to VLT's premises and records show that they take up independent learning programmes during lunchtimes and on Saturdays as well as planned coaching sessions with their tutor.

14. The arrangements for key skills are inadequate. Learners are all aware of the requirement to work towards key skills units, but some are not clear about how, or when, this will be achieved. The introduction of key skills is late for some learners. Several learners have been in training for some time and have only just started their key skills training. All learners are being invited to carry out mock key skills tests, but this is not an established process. Key skills training needs are not clearly identified at the start of the training programme and are therefore not included in the individual learning plans. However, VLT has started to offer training in presentation skills and this has been well received by one group of learners and



#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Learning materials are tailored to meet the needs of the qualification, the learners and employers. They incorporate typical examples from the learners' workplace and use the company's name throughout the activity. This increases the learners' attention and interest as they can see the relevance of the activity.*

their employer. There are plans to offer further key skills training, but they are not in place as yet. There are independent learning materials for the application of number key skill, but few for the other key skills areas. None of VLT's staff have recognised qualifications. Staff have attended support events and have disseminated information on their return to the company.

15. Some employers have little understanding of their learners' training programme and are not aware of the NVQ process or key skills. They are therefore unable to assist learners in a structured way to help them achieve their targets. Although employers are given information at the start of apprenticeships, this information is not always given to the most appropriate workplace supervisor. Clear roles and responsibilities for the workplace supervisor are not defined. Some employers are unsure of the status of the learner and the type of NVQ and range of key skills they are working towards.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 2**

16. VLT has an equal opportunities policy. The managing director has ultimate responsibility for implementing the policy but this responsibility is shared with all members of staff. The company also has a grievance and appeals procedure. Trainees have the right to refer grievances to their local TEC, to the careers service or to the company itself. Trainees are given a copy of the equal opportunities policy and the appeals and grievance procedure during induction. They are informed that VLT will not tolerate any form of discrimination. Employers are also supplied with a copy of the company's equal opportunities policy. One member of staff acts as the equal opportunities representative. The self-assessment report identifies a number of strengths and one weakness. Some of the strengths represent no more than compliance with TEC contracts. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths claimed by the company. They did not consider the weakness claimed to be significant. They identified additional strengths and one weakness and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ strong company culture of equal opportunities
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of equal opportunities
- ◆ effective action to protect trainees from discrimination
- ◆ positive action to recruit under-represented groups

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ trainees' lack of awareness of company's grievance procedure

17. VLT's staff share a determination to provide equality of opportunity for all staff and trainees. Anti-discriminatory practice is promoted by word and example.

All staff acknowledge the importance of treating one another and trainees equally. Trainees and employees are informed about the company's commitment to equal opportunities during their induction programme. They are told that any complaints about inequality or unfairness will be thoroughly investigated and systematically pursued. This gives them confidence that they will be fairly treated. Employers are given a copy of the company's equal opportunities policy and are required to indicate their commitment to it. In January this year a member of staff took on the role of equal opportunities representative. She maintains an equal opportunities manual. This contains up-to-date articles on topics such as violence at work, disability, bullying, harassment and discrimination, and employment practices. The equal opportunities representative regularly updates staff on new national developments, and on any issues or complaints which relate to equality of opportunity.

18. The high priority given to equal opportunities is shown by the company's regular monitoring of equality issues. Equal opportunities is an agenda item at monthly law tutors' meetings and at monthly meetings for all staff. The minutes of these meetings record the equal opportunities issues which have been discussed and the action which has been taken. Equal opportunities issues are recorded sensitively and in detail. VLT tutors discuss equality of opportunity at the learners' three-monthly progress reviews and trainees are invited to discuss any issues concerning equality and fairness. Trainees can also raise any concerns regarding equal opportunities during their tutors' monthly workplace visits.

19. Trainees are effectively protected from discrimination and harassment in the training centre and in their workplaces. When work placements are selected for trainees, attention is paid to proximity of the placement to the trainees' homes and to the suitability of the placement in terms of the trainees' gender and ethnic origin.

20. The company is aware of the need to widen participation in its training programmes. It is keen to make contact with and attract under-represented groups in the community that it serves. Initiatives have been taken to disseminate information more widely and to encourage applications from potential trainees who are interested in working in the legal profession. For example, local radio stations have been approached with requests that they interview VLT's staff about their modern apprenticeship training programmes and to include features on appropriate programmes to raise awareness of VLT's training programmes among ethnic, and other, minority groups. Articles about VLT's modern apprenticeship programmes have been included in Asian newspapers. The company responds positively to invitations to attend careers events, open evenings, and exhibitions and seminars organised by a local Asian business-development network. There is a comprehensive and well-managed computerised system for recording trainees' details. This includes information on the sources through which trainees learn about VLT's programmes. It enables the company to monitor its recruitment sources and to identify the success of each.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Many potential trainees require parental approval before they can begin a training programme. Family decision-making is particularly important for young Asian trainees. One of the introductory leaflets gives a summary of VLT's modern apprenticeships, the qualifications available, and the salaries offered. The leaflet is printed in English. Information has been translated into Bengali, Urdu and Punjabi so that it can be readily understood by minority ethnic groups and especially by some parents who prefer to read an Asian language rather than English.*

21. Trainees have a sound understanding of equality of opportunity but their knowledge of VLT's policies and procedures, particularly the grievance procedure, is vague. Those who are aware of its existence are unsure about how it relates to them and how they could use it to challenge an assessor's or internal verifier's decision. The grievance policy, like the equal opportunity policy, is given inadequate attention after induction.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

22. Trainees learn about VLT's modern apprenticeship programmes through schools and the careers service, through recommendation from others, and through promotions at careers events and training exhibitions. When potential applicants enquire about training programmes, their details are entered on the company's database. If they do not submit an application form, they are contacted and reminded of the opportunities available to them. When application forms are received, trainees are invited to the company for an interview and initial tests. Trainees who are accepted by VLT attend an induction programme followed by a session which acquaints them with NVQ procedures. Unemployed trainees have their induction in the training centre. Tutors visit employed trainees in the workplace and present the induction programme there. Employed trainees are enrolled onto a modern apprenticeship and they begin their NVQ training immediately. Unemployed trainees are not enrolled onto a modern apprenticeship until they begin their employment. After a one-week in-house training programme, unemployed trainees attend the training centre for two days a week. They are helped to find employment so that they can begin their modern apprenticeship as soon as possible. VLT summarises the support it offers to trainees in a handbook. Trainees are provided with regular feedback on their progress and they are given frequent opportunities to discuss any aspects of the NVQ and their workplace experiences with their tutor. The self-assessment report identifies nine strengths and two weaknesses in trainee support. Some of the strengths represent no more than compliance with TEC contracts. Inspectors identified three strengths and two weaknesses and awarded the same grade as VLT.

#### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ effective additional learning support
- ◆ active support for those seeking jobs

#### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ unmemorable induction for some trainees
- ◆ unclear review process

23. All trainees are initially assessed to determine their suitability for working in

the legal profession and to decide which level of the administration NVQ is appropriate for them. Their personal qualities and attributes, such as oral communication, enthusiasm and knowledge, are assessed by means of a short oral interview. They are given two written tests. One is a reading-comprehension test and the other a problem-solving test. The results of these tests are effectively used to decide whether a level 2 or level 3 administration NVQ is suitable for the trainee. If neither is suitable, the trainee is referred back to the careers service or to another training provider who can offer an NVQ level 1 or a foundation training programme. The results of the interview and written tests are effectively used to indicate whether the trainee has additional learning needs, such as reading, spelling or numeracy. Trainees also complete a questionnaire which is used to assess their understanding of basic legal terms. The results determine at which level trainees start their training.

24. During the initial assessment process, trainees are given advice and guidance on progression routes and how to get the most from their training. They are shown how they can ultimately progress to becoming a qualified solicitor. To enable them to make the most of their opportunities, tutors continue to give guidance throughout the training programmes. Tutors also help trainees to compile action plans and to find ways of making good progress with their NVQs. In addition to receiving visits from tutors every four weeks, trainees can contact them by telephone, fax and e-mail when required. Trainees have the opportunity to visit VLT's premises at any time to use computers or facilities which are not available in their work placements. VLT opens the centre on Monday evenings and, from time to time, on Saturday mornings.

25. After being accepted for a prevocational training programme, trainees who do not already have a job in a legal office have a one-week induction in the training centre. They take part in activities designed to help them find a work placement such as preparing curricula vitae and practising interview techniques. They attend the training centre for two days a week until a placement is obtained. The company has an extensive database of legal work placements. Efforts are made to obtain jobs for trainees as quickly as possible.

26. The overall impact of the induction process is weak. The extent to which trainees remember the content of the programme is very variable. The key messages from induction are not reinforced subsequently, nor is trainees' continuing understanding of them checked. Employers lack awareness of VLT's induction process and some employers have difficulty in recalling how trainees are inducted by their own organisations.

27. Trainees' progress is formally reviewed every three months. The review takes place during a scheduled monthly tutorial/assessment visit. Consequently, it occupies some of the time which is usually devoted to reviewing the trainees' action plans and to devising new plans, to assessing their work product and to assisting and supporting them. This results in a lack of clarity between progress reviewing, action planning, tutoring and assessing. Although employers sign and

are given a copy of the review document, they are not always present when trainees' progress is reviewed by the tutor. The reviews are narrowly focused and based on trainees' progress towards their NVQs. They do not take a broader view of the trainees' progress in their job roles. Some of the review comments are not detailed enough and of little value. Although trainees are told that reviews will occur every three months, they are often extended over more than one tutorial/assessment visit. This fragments the review and reduces its benefit. When reviews extend over more than one visit, the review document cannot be completed and distributed as required. Staff have no qualifications in counselling but have or are working towards the postgraduate certificate in education.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 3**

28. VLT has 24 staff, led by the managing director. There are 17 tutor/assessors, co-ordinated by the academic manager, and two administrative staff who work under the direction of the business manager. A further two members of staff have senior managerial responsibility for issues such as finance, marketing and equal opportunities. Tutor/assessors work with up to 50 trainees each, and cover a range of geographical locations. VLT's TEC contracts have grown steadily since the company began to take on government-funded work. A new database has been introduced for the collection and analysis of data on trainees' achievements. A staff appraisal system has recently been implemented, and all staff have been appraised. The company achieved the Investors in People standard in June 2000. The self-assessment report identified five strengths. Inspectors agreed with two of them. They judged two others to be no more than complying with TEC contracts, and another to be inaccurate. The weaknesses for management of training and quality assurance were the same, and all but one, which has been addressed since the writing of the self-assessment report, related to quality assurance. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses, and awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ open, consultative management
- ◆ thorough, well-planned staff development
- ◆ effective external networking
- ◆ detailed business plan

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ employers' insufficient involvement in training programmes
- ◆ ineffective management of on-the-job training

29. VLT has a well-structured system of meetings involving employees at all levels within the company. Tutor/assessors meet monthly to discuss issues related to their occupational area. Senior staff participate in a strategy group, which also

meets once each week to discuss corporate matters, and to outline company policy. The full staff team meets for one day every month, to exchange information on a range of procedural and strategic issues. All these meetings are minuted, with clear action points. In addition, staff liaise with each other informally, and tutor/assessors have regular one-to-one discussions with the academic manager to discuss their workloads, and the progress of trainees. Staff feel consulted, informed, and well supported by the company's management. They are keen to put forward suggestions for improvement, and confident that these will be constructively received. They value the openness of managers, and their collaborative style.

30. All company employees have a personal development plan, which records their individual training needs. This is written as part of their annual appraisal, and updated during regular meetings with their line manager. Staff training is readily available, and managers are conscientious and creative in identifying relevant opportunities. For example, two members of staff wanted to take a qualification in marketing. The managing director found a training provider who offered an appropriate NVQ, and allowed the staff time to produce evidence in the form of a draft marketing plan. This benefited both the staff and the company. Staff development is set within an overall plan which all employees can read. Each training event attended, or course undertaken, is evaluated by the member of staff concerned. The business manager collates the evaluations and provides an analysis of the overall effectiveness of VLT's staff development strategy.

31. VLT has been asked by Leeds TEC to participate in a series of initiatives and pilot projects. These have included prevocational programmes for young unemployed people, programmes for disaffected young people, many of whom have serious personal problems and learning difficulties, a key skills project, and an initiative to encourage young people who have dropped out of modern apprenticeship programmes to re-enter training. These projects have allowed individual members of staff to develop their skills and to increase the range of their work, and have allowed VLT to develop useful partnerships with other organisations.

32. VLT has a business plan which is produced annually, and updated regularly throughout the year. The business plan is based on a series of action plans maintained by the managing director. She discusses the action plans, and the company's short-term and long-term targets, with a consultant, who assists in the writing of the business plan. The business plan is clear and detailed. It shows achievable targets and realistic indicators of success. All employees are given a copy, and the content is discussed during staff meetings. Staff understand the company's short-term and long-term goals.

33. VLT has made efforts to increase the involvement of employers in their trainees' programmes. They have introduced an 'employers' commitment' document which outlines employers' responsibilities with regard to training. Employers have to sign this document at the beginning of a trainer's programme.

A monthly newsletter, giving information about trainees' achievements, and company developments, is sent out to all trainees and employers. Workplace supervisors receive a copy of their trainees' action plan, and are given oral reports on their trainees' progress during tutors' visits. However, these strategies have not been fully effective in encouraging employers' involvement in training. Few employers know how many units of the NVQ their trainees have achieved, and some are unsure of the qualification being followed. Other than signing witness testimonies which the trainee writes out for them, they take no part in assessment, or in assisting trainees to identify evidence-gathering opportunities. Most do not see this as their role. Although they are given a copy of the trainees' quarterly progress reviews to sign, they do not take part in the review discussions. Their lack of involvement means that they are unable to effectively support their trainees in developing their knowledge and helping them to achieve their qualifications. Some employers do not allow trainees any time during the working week to build their portfolios, although this is a clear requirement of the 'employers' commitment'. VLT has recognised the problems posed by employers' lack of involvement, and is working closely with two of the companies who employ large numbers of their trainees to devise strategies for improvement.

34. Trainees receive insufficient structured on-the-job training. VLT does not liaise with employers to ensure that there is co-ordination between trainees' NVQ work and the tasks they perform in the workplace. Although employers are sometimes asked to provide the trainee with a particular learning opportunity, this is not done in a structured way. VLT does not have a way of ensuring that on-the-job training is carried out systematically, and that it suits the particular learning style of each trainee.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Grade 3**

35. VLT meets the quality standards of the TECs with which it contracts, and of its awarding body. The company has a quality assurance strategy, and is developing policies and procedures to support it. Four staff share the responsibility for internal verification. The academic manager checks paperwork, and observes the performance of tutor/assessors. Feedback is collected regularly from trainees, employers and VLT's staff. The self-assessment report was written by the managing director in consultation with the rest of the staff. Trainees and employers' views were gathered through informal discussion and incorporated into the report. The self-assessment judgements for the aspect of quality assurance do not provide an accurate reflection of provision in this area. The strengths claimed represent no more than contractual compliance. Two of the weaknesses are statements of intent, rather than judgements. Inspectors agreed with one of the other weaknesses and considered that the other refers to management of training. Inspectors found other strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by the company.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ high level of compliance with external requirements
- ◆ positive response to feedback from trainees and employers

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ gaps in the quality assurance system
- ◆ insufficiently analytical self-assessment report

36. learners VLT has a good record of compliance with TEC contractual requirements, and often exceeds these. It takes seriously the judgements of external agencies such as awarding bodies, and works energetically to put suggested changes into place. The company gathers feedback from trainees and employers using a series of questionnaires, some produced externally and some by the company. These are given out at various stages of the programme, at and after induction, and when a trainee leaves the programme.

37. The information gathered from these questionnaires analysed, and the results are discussed during staff meetings. Further feedback is gathered informally from trainees and employers, and is often acted upon. For example, a request from an employer that tutors take laptop computers on their tutorial visits for the use of trainees has now been met. When the company cannot meet a request, this is explained to those who made the request, and a reason is given.

38. VLT has a quality assurance strategy which outlines the key elements of its quality assurance system. The company is developing policies and procedures for each aspect of its work. Some of these, such as the procedures recruiting and interviewing trainees, are comprehensive and well designed, using a flowchart which is easy to follow. However, other sets of procedures, such as those covering assessment, are not as clearly set out. Policies have not been written for some aspects of training, such as trainees' induction and trainees' progress review. Others, such as the information technology policy, were written in 1998 and have not been updated. The company's financial director is examining all procedures to assess their usefulness, but this has not yet been completed.

39. Internal verification is undertaken by four members of staff. All portfolios are internally verified twice, once during work towards the qualification, and once when they are complete. A further 25 per cent of portfolios are selected at random and internally verified on three occasions. Internal verification decisions are recorded, and assessors receive written and oral feedback. The academic manager carries out regular observations of tutorials and other aspects of performance, and of paperwork. She gives tutors written and oral feedback on their performance. Where interaction with a group of trainees has been observed, this feedback is good and contains constructive suggestions for improvement. However, in other cases, such as the observation of a tutorial, the written feedback is provided in the minutes of law tutors' meetings. When shortcomings in performance or the completion of paperwork are identified, there is no written indication as to whether



the issue identified has subsequently been addressed.

40. The company's self-assessment report is descriptive in style. Although it provides some useful contextual material, some of the judgements lack clarity. Some of the strengths cited represent no more than normal practice. A number of the weaknesses represent a statement of intent, or express regret about a current situation, rather than offering a clear and objective analysis of the company's performance. The judgements made do not always reflect the company's estimation of a grade.