

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION APRIL
2002

Agenda Training
(formerly Agenda Training
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
- ◆ learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- ◆ education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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 Agenda Training was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for 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 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).

Agenda Training provides good training in agricultural occupations. There is a wide range of courses available to learners who would otherwise find it difficult to access suitable training. Retention and achievement rates are good and assessment is thorough. Learners produce good portfolios of evidence, but there is a shortage of training materials. Following the original inspection, a range of initiatives has been introduced and staff and learners are now more aware of equal opportunities. There is still limited awareness of equal opportunities issues by employers. Learners are given good support to meet individual needs and good use is now made of their prior achievements when developing learning plans. Initial assessment and induction is now carried out systematically and learners' progress reviews are regular and set clear targets. Management of training and quality assurance are now good. Performance against training targets is closely monitored, lines of communication and accountability are clear and employers are closely involved in planning on-the-job training. Internal verification is well organised and thorough. Staff training is good, audit procedures are used effectively and paperwork is kept up to date. There are new quality assurance systems in place but these are not yet fully established.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Agriculture	2

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

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high retention and achievement rates
- ◆ rigorous assessment and internal verification
- ◆ wide access to opportunities for work-based learning
- ◆ good, individualised support to learners
- ◆ close monitoring of training targets
- ◆ good internal and external communications
- ◆ good training management procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient employer awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ lack of established quality assurance procedures

INTRODUCTION

1. At the time of the original inspection, Agenda Training Limited (Agenda) was a subsidiary company of the Lantra Trust, which also manages the national training organisation for land-based industries. It was established in 1994 following the privatisation of the statutory Agricultural Training Board. Its purpose was to provide management-consultancy services, including short off-the-job courses and work-based learning for agricultural businesses. It offered a small number of national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in England and Wales until 1998. Since October 2001, Agenda has been part of Lantra NTO, now the Sector Skills Council for the environment and land-based sectors, and has not traded as a separate company. Learners are located in Durham, North Yorkshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Coventry, Warwickshire, Hereford, Worcester, Bristol and Sussex. Training is organised by four full-time and two part-time local training co-ordinators. It includes on-the-job training and assessment, off-the-job training organised by local employer-led training groups and attendance at colleges. Off-the-job training in veterinary nursing is subcontracted to a private college of animal health.

2. At the time of the original inspection, Agenda contracted with eight training and enterprise councils (TECs). These were County Durham, North Yorkshire, North Derbyshire, North Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Humberside, Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) and Sussex Enterprise. In addition, Agenda was a subcontractor providing training funded by WESTEC and Hereford and Worcestershire CCTE in the Bristol and Hereford and Worcestershire areas, respectively. At the time of the reinspection, Agenda contracts with local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in North Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Co Durham, West of England, and Coventry and Warwickshire, which acts as the lead LSC. At the time of the original inspection, six full-time and six part-time staff were employed. Twenty-two subcontracted assessors and verifiers were also used. There were 149 learners on programmes in land-based occupations. Of these, 55 were advanced modern apprentices, 81 were foundation modern apprentices and 13 were on other work-based learning programmes for young people. At the time of the reinspection, six full-time and three part-time staff are employed and 10 of the assessors who were previously subcontracted are in the process of becoming employees. There are now seven subcontracted internal verifiers. There are 99 learners on programmes in agriculture and customer service. Of these, 41 are advanced modern apprentices, 54 are foundation modern apprentices and four are NVQ learners.

3. Local economies, educational achievement and unemployment rates vary widely within the communities served by Agenda. For example, in North Yorkshire, the economy is relatively diverse. Tourism, food production and agriculture account for a high proportion of economic activity. Many of the areas served have a high proportion of land and agricultural businesses. For example,

north Derbyshire contains the Peak District National Park and 63 per cent of County Durham is designated as agricultural land. In Humberside, 12.8 per cent of businesses are involved in agriculture, hunting and forestry. In Bristol, the service sector employs 82 per cent of the working population and most of Agenda's learners in this area are following programmes in floristry, amenity horticulture and garden centre operations.

4. The achievement of general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs), participation in further education and training, and unemployment rates vary widely in the areas served by Agenda. At the time of the original inspection, 55 per cent of school leavers in North Yorkshire achieved five or more GCSEs at grade C or above, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Elsewhere, the rate varied from 38 per cent in Durham and Humberside, to 51 per cent in Sussex and 49 per cent in Hereford and Worcester. The proportion of young people staying on in full-time education and entering work-based learning varied across the areas served. For example, in 1999, 19 per cent of school leavers in County Durham entered government-funded work-based learning, with 58 per cent staying in full-time education. In Sussex, 76 per cent stayed in full-time education and only 5 per cent entered government-funded work-based learning. Unemployment rates varied from 6 per cent in County Durham and northeast Derbyshire, to 2.2 per cent in Warwickshire and North Yorkshire and 1.3 per cent in West Sussex. Data at the time of the reinspection are shown in Table 1 below. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups in the rural communities which Agenda serves is low. It ranges from less than 1 per cent in County Durham to 3 per cent in north Derbyshire. In the area served by West of England LSC, the proportion is 2.7 per cent, although it is much higher in some parts of Bristol.

Table 1: GCSE pass rates, participation in further education and unemployment rates at the time of reinspection.

LSC area	Percentage of 2001 school leavers achieving 5 or more GCSE passes at grade C or above	Percentage of 2000 school leavers entering full time education or training	Percentage unemployment rate as at October 2001
County Durham	41	61	4.9
Coventry & Warwickshire	48	70	2.4
North Yorkshire	58	74	1.9
Nottinghamshire	42	67	3.8
West of England	46	74	1.8
England	47.9	71	2.9

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. Agenda undertook its first self-assessment 12 months after starting to provide work-based learning. The second self-assessment report was produced before the original inspection. Evidence for self-assessment was gathered through feedback from learners and employers and regular meetings of the management team. Progress towards the targets in the action plan was reviewed at monthly management meetings. The report was compiled by the operations manager and graded in consultation with the chief executive and the management committee. Following the original inspection, an action plan was produced. This was a detailed plan which, identified responsibilities for action, timetables and indicators of success. The action plan was successfully completed before the reinspection. By the time of the reinspection, Agenda produced its first self-assessment report based on the guidelines of the *Common Inspection Framework*.

6. The original inspection was carried out by a team of five inspectors who spent a total of 25 days with Agenda during September 2000. Inspectors visited 34 work placements, the head office and offices of local training co-ordinators. They interviewed 43 learners, 27 workplace supervisors and other employers' staff, and 35 staff from Agenda, including the operations manager, programme manager, assessment centre manager, training co-ordinators and assessors. Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documents, including learners' files, NVQ portfolios, records of meetings, procedural manuals, policies, correspondence and external verifiers' reports. They observed one training session and four assessments, awarding a grade 2 to each.

7. The reinspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors, who spent a total of 15 days with Agenda in April 2002. Inspectors visited 22 work placements and the administrative centre in Wales. They interviewed 28 learners, 23 employers and workplace supervisors and conducted 25 interviews with staff from Agenda, including the finance director, lead training co-ordinator, assessment centre manager, training co-ordinators and assessors. Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including learners' files, NVQ portfolios, records of meetings, procedural manuals, policies, correspondence and marketing materials.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Agriculture

Grade 2

8. There are 149 trainees on programmes in a wide range of occupations, which are shown in the table below. All trainees except four are employed. Seven training co-ordinators are responsible for groups of up to 60 trainees in each location. Employers and trainees are recruited through telephone marketing, careers services, local employers' groups and word of mouth. Most training takes place in the workplace. Short training courses away from the workplace are available to most trainees. All assessment takes place in the workplace. There are 22 appropriately qualified visiting assessors and verifiers, who have relevant occupational qualifications and experience. Each trainee is allocated a personal assessor who visits the workplace at least once a month. Veterinary nurse training is subcontracted to two colleges. Induction takes place in the workplace. Health and safety is checked before trainees start on a programme and is monitored by training co-ordinators during progress reviews. The retention rate over the past three years has been 83 per cent on foundation modern apprenticeships, 78 per cent on advanced modern apprenticeships and 86 per cent on other work-based learning programmes for young people. Achievement rates for most completed programmes are high. Trainees still in training are making good progress towards achievement of their target qualification. Inspectors agreed that high retention and achievement rates and rigorous assessment are strengths and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

Trainee numbers

	Advanced modern apprenticeship	Foundation modern apprenticeship	Other training	Total
Agriculture & commercial horticulture	31	30		61
Amenity horticulture	5	19		24
Floristry	9	16		25
Retailing (garden-centre operations)	9	9		18
Animal care	1	1		2
Gamekeeping			3	3
Fencing		6		6
Veterinary nursing			10	10
Total	55	81	13	149

STRENGTHS

- ◆ rigorous assessment
- ◆ good NVQ portfolios
- ◆ wide range of additional training courses available
- ◆ high retention and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient materials to support training
- ◆ poor awareness, training and assessment of key skills

9. Assessment is well planned and regular and helps trainees make good progress towards achievement of the NVQ. Assessors visit trainees in the workplace, usually once each month, to carry out assessments, plan future assessments and review action plans. There is a thorough assessment process, which includes recording of assessments, sampling of portfolios, completion of feedback sheets and monitoring of progress. There are regular meetings between the assessors and the internal verifier. Records are detailed and internal verification is rigorous. A copy of the action plan is given to the trainee following each monthly visit by the assessor. Assessors often make additional visits and provide support by telephone. They regularly meet trainees' requests for assessment visits at short notice to take advantage of opportunities assessment identified by trainees.

10. Trainees' portfolios are of a very good quality. They are clearly referenced, contain a wide range of diverse evidence and show that trainees have a good understanding of the requirements of the NVQ. Assessments are recorded in detail. A wide range of assessment techniques is used, including direct observation, written and oral questions, photographic records, case studies and projects. The needs of trainees with learning difficulties are taken into account in assessment. Some witness testimony is used but it is not planned routinely in order to encourage trainees to make best use of evidence from the workplace.

11. There is a wide range of additional training courses available for most trainees. These are run close to where trainees are based by training providers who are approved and monitored by Agenda's parent company. Most of the courses lead to qualifications which assist trainees with career progression. These qualifications are additional to those required as part of qualification frameworks. They include first aid, health and safety, manual handling and a wide range of relevant occupational short courses.

12. Retention and achievement rates for most programmes are high. Retention on advanced modern apprenticeships averages 78 per cent. Retention rates are higher in agriculture, commercial horticulture and amenity horticulture than in floristry and garden centre operations. Although the company has offered advanced modern apprenticeships only since 1998-99, achievement and progression rates are good. Fifty per cent of trainees who started at work towards level 3 NVQs in 1998-99 have completed the advanced modern apprenticeship. Since foundation modern

apprenticeships were first offered in 1998-99, 84 per cent of trainees have remained on their programmes. Seventy-eight per cent of trainees who started in 1998-99 have completed the framework. Retention and achievement rates of trainees on other work-based learning programmes for young people, including veterinary nurse trainees, are also high. All trainees recruited in 1997-98 achieved the qualifications on their individual training plan. For the past two years, the average retention rate has been 75 per cent. Trainees on all programmes are making good progress towards achievement of their NVQ and additional qualification requirements.

13. Most training is work based and for most trainees lacks structure. Most training is unplanned and is undertaken as part of the normal working day. Most trainees work on portfolios in their own time. In most programmes, there are no learning materials to help trainees understand related theory. Trainees rely on information supplied by the assessor, their employer or through the trade press and magazines. There is no systematic provision of support materials to ensure trainees are well prepared for assessment. Agenda's parent company produces good training materials, but these are available only to trainees attending short courses away from the workplace. Some trainees do not have direct access to a computer to support their training. In some cases, training co-ordinators and assessors take portable computers to the workplace, but these are not left with the trainee.

14. There is no initial assessment of trainees' key skills and little key skills training. Most trainees are unaware of the requirements for key skills. Trainees do not take advantage of the opportunities for training and assessment for key skills which occur in their work and occupational programme. Assessment of key skills is often left to the end of the programme. Individual learning plans do not always identify key skills as a target qualification although it is a requirement of the qualification framework. In a few cases, assessors with key skills experience are providing guidance to trainees.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

15. The finance director of the parent company is responsible for overseeing the equal opportunities policy and how it is put into practice. The lead training co-ordinator and the assessment centre manager share responsibility for monitoring the equal opportunities policy in relation to staff and learners. The policy has been reviewed within the past 12 months. New staff are given a copy of the equal opportunities policy, and existing staff are given an updated copy if any changes are made. An external organisation with expertise in equal opportunities is working with Agenda's staff to improve understanding of equal opportunities. Job descriptions do not specify responsibility for equal opportunities. There is a complaints procedure, which includes feedback to the quarterly quality assurance meetings. Learners are given the equal opportunities policy and complaints

procedures at induction. Employers sign a training agreement, which includes a requirement to comply with equal opportunities legislation. At the time of the reinspection, two learners are from a minority ethnic group and six have learning difficulties or disabilities. Of the 99 learners, 32 are women.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities policies
- ◆ lack of awareness of equal opportunities among staff, learners and employers
- ◆ insufficient promotion of equal opportunities during learners' recruitment

16. Since the original inspection, Agenda has ensured that equal opportunities is more fully monitored in the workplace. Agenda's equal opportunities policies are now adequately monitored. Staff discussions at meetings now result in decisions being made and acted upon. The relevant staff are involved in the annual revision and updating of the policy statement. However, Agenda does not monitor employers' policies. A good range of initiatives has ensured that staff and learners' awareness of equal opportunities is now satisfactory. Agenda places recruitment advertisements in a range of publications with predominantly minority ethnic readerships. All promotional material has information showing that Agenda has an equal opportunities policy. However, there is no overall strategy to widen participation by under-represented groups, or to rectify the gender imbalance on most programmes. The grade given by inspectors is the same as that given by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ wide range of opportunities for learners to access training
- ◆ good range of initiatives to raise awareness of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient awareness of equal opportunities by employers

17. Many learners are recruited to the programme from remote rural areas where access to training is difficult. The programme enables them to undertake training and assessment in the workplace without the need to travel long distances to the nearest alternative training provision. Learners are able to gain qualifications through work-based learning and assessment, which are not easily available through other routes. For example, there is training in specialist areas, such as poultry production and fence erection, where training is not available locally. Some learners have worked for their employer for some time before entering training and have not previously had the opportunity to have formal training and assessment. Some learners in urban locations have domestic and work commitments which prevent attendance at off-the-job training. They benefit from Agenda's flexible work-based learning programmes.

18. Agenda has put into practice a good range of initiatives to raise awareness of equal opportunities among its learners and staff. One of the training co-ordinators has specific responsibility to lead the development of the organisation's equal opportunities policy and practice. There is now an extensive selection of resource materials on equal opportunities for staff and learners. All staff have had good equal opportunities awareness training. Equal opportunities are introduced effectively at learners' inductions. Learners remember this induction and retain a satisfactory understanding of equal opportunities. They are clear about who they should approach if they face harassment or have a grievance. Agenda has recently added to the learners' induction pack a well-written, simple, guide to understanding harassment and bullying. Questions on equal opportunities routinely form a part of the learners' quarterly progress reviews. These act as a useful reminder to learners of what equal opportunities means in the workplace, and an opportunity for staff to note any issues. Agenda includes appropriate questions on the equal opportunities aspect of induction when it collects telephone feedback from the learners. This helps the organisation to monitor how well learners retain such information.

19. Employers are not sufficiently aware of equal opportunities issues. Agenda ensures that employers sign an agreement to comply with Agenda's equal opportunities policy. The policy, and additional information on equal opportunities, are included in the pack given to employers when the training programme is arranged. However, the policy and the information focus narrowly on compliance with legislation and there is insufficient effort to promote the benefits of equal opportunities to employers. Although some employers value the information they receive, others clearly perceive equal opportunities as a threat. For example, some employers fear that they may be forced to employ people who are unable to work effectively. Agenda is aware of these views, but does not respond to them.

Trainee support

Grade 3

20. Agenda recruits learners who are employed in a wide range of land-based industries. Many are recruited through direct contacts with employers built up by Agenda's network of assessors and training co-ordinators. Agenda's staff have access to the parent company's marketing materials and have also developed NVQ information sheets for use in the recruitment and induction of new learners. Recently, Agenda has used telephone marketing to recruit more learners in areas where it has established contracts with local LSCs. The aim is to find local companies which are prepared to accept a learner, or which have a staff member who needs training. When a new employer is identified, Agenda advertises locally to find prospective learners, who are then interviewed by the employer. Learners receive an induction from training co-ordinators, who also visit the learners to carry out progress reviews and assessments. The training co-ordinators also provide pastoral support to learners. Assessors for the occupational areas

sometimes provide support to meet learners' identified additional learning needs. Some co-ordinators are appropriately qualified to give support for basic and key skills training.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment
- ◆ no systematic induction
- ◆ little accreditation of prior achievements
- ◆ no use of individual learning plans as working documents
- ◆ poor reviews of trainees' progress

21. Agenda has introduced revised systems and procedures that have satisfactorily rectified the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. At the same time, it has worked to further improve the previously identified strengths. Initial assessment has been introduced and includes information on learners' prior knowledge and experience, and the assessment of their literacy and numeracy abilities. This is used to ensure that they are on the appropriate level of training. The initial assessment of key skills is under development. More consideration is being given to learners' prior learning and those who already have qualifications now join training at a higher level or are being set a shorter timescale in which to complete their programmes of training. Induction takes place at the start of training and includes information on health and safety, equal opportunities and assessment. Exercises that test learners' knowledge of topics covered at induction are used as assessment evidence where appropriate. A revised individual learning plan has been introduced and the same document is used by all the regional units. This forms a long-term plan and is updated when progress reviews and assessments take place, or when learners' personal circumstances change. Short-term learning and assessment plans are produced monthly and are linked to the assessment process. Progress reviews take place every 10 to 12 weeks and in some cases, more regularly. These now include comments from the learner, training co-ordinator and the employer. They refer to previous, current and planned learning activities and form a comprehensive record of progress. Staff have received training and guidance notes on all these revised arrangements and how to make best use of them.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ regular support in the workplace
- ◆ clear target-setting by assessors
- ◆ good use of learners' prior achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate additional learning support
- ◆ poor access to off-the-job training for some learners

22. Assessors and employers provide good training and support to learners in the workplace. Learners with individual learning needs, including dyslexia, are given additional time on assessment visits. Assessors encourage and guide those learners who lack confidence and communication skills. A range of assessment methods is used, including oral questioning to test understanding. Assessors carry out additional assessments and offer support to learners when required. Training coordinators also provide support and encouragement to learners and often maintain contact with them outside the normal training arrangements. Some learners contact assessors by e-mail. Many employers are very supportive of learners and set aside time to help them develop new skills. Some employers help learners to gather evidence for key skills units.

23. Assessors visit learners regularly to carry out assessments and set learning and developmental tasks. On each visit, assessors set background knowledge work and practical tasks for the learners to complete before the next visit. The assessor, learner and employer agree clear targets, which are recorded in detail on assessment plans. Copies of these are sent to the assessment centre manager, who also monitors learners' progress. Learners make good progress against these targets, which take account of employment and seasonal variations in the occupational sector.

24. Good use is made of learners' prior achievements. If learners have previous qualifications, the results are used in deciding the appropriate level of training. A learner who had completed the first year of a national diploma in animal care began work-based learning at level 3 NVQ. A florist who had completed an NVQ in retailing was given credit for similar units in the floristry qualification. A learner following a level 3 NVQ in Amenity horticulture had previously completed the NVQ at level 2. The assessor used the assessment evidence from the level 2 to identify what was needed to progress to level 3. Where learners have completed GCSEs at an appropriate level, they are exempted from the written examination for key skills. Copies of original certificates are placed in the learners' assessment portfolios.

25. Individual learning support is inadequate. Initial assessments are used to identify learners who have poor literacy and numeracy skills. However, there is no formal training, or use of support materials to help learners overcome identified learning difficulties. Training materials designed to help learners develop their potential in relation to key skills have been purchased, but are not yet used with all learners. Few staff are qualified or experienced to deal with specialised additional learning needs. Two staff are working towards a qualification that will help them to carry out the training and assessment of key skills.

26. Some learners find it difficult to access off-the-job training. For those learners following specialist programmes or located with employers with more unusual occupations, there is insufficient training support available locally. In some cases, learners need to travel considerable distances to access appropriate training. In one case, a learner working on a dairy farm in a predominantly arable farming area was

not able to access suitable training locally. Many learners still have insufficient access to learning materials to support their training. This was identified as a weakness in the original inspection.

Management of training

Grade 2

27. A lead training co-ordinator manages training, assessment and reviews of learners progress. An assessment centre manager manages quality assurance, the assessment and internal verification process and liaison with external verifiers, awarding bodies and local LSCs. They both report to the finance director of the parent company. Five other full-time and three part-time training co-ordinators and administrative staff are employed and 10 assessors who were previously subcontracted are soon to become employees. Seven internal verifiers are engaged on a subcontract basis. Two training co-ordinators are responsible for health and safety and equal opportunities, respectively. Off-the-job training in veterinary nursing is subcontracted to a specialist private college. Other short, off-the-job training courses are provided by local training providers approved by the parent company. Arrangements have been made to provide further work-based learning following research into the training needs of the land-based sector. All except four learners are employed. In 1991, and again in 2001, the parent company was accredited as an Investor in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor monitoring of subcontracted training providers
- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training
- ◆ no systematic induction of new staff
- ◆ inadequate staff resources

28. Since the original inspection, Agenda has reduced the number of subcontractors it uses to provide off-the-job training. There is a written agreement with the only regularly used provider, a private college providing veterinary nursing training. This is reviewed annually. Feedback sheets from learners and evaluation reports are now received more regularly from most of the short courses provided by Agenda's parent company. Most employers are now fully involved in the training process. They work closely with co-ordinators to plan training and assessment and produce monthly reports on the progress of their learners. New staff, including subcontracted assessors and internal verifiers are now systematically inducted into the organisation. New staff are fully informed about company procedures and specific roles and responsibilities. Assessors and internal verifiers are briefed on procedures for assessment and internal verification by the quality assurance co-ordinator. Changes to the management structure have led to improvements in the way training is organised and more realistic caseloads for training co-ordinators. Inspectors gave a higher grade for management of training

than that given in the most recent self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ close monitoring of training targets
- ◆ good analysis of and provision for staff training needs
- ◆ good internal and external communications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently detailed employer agreements

29. Training targets are monitored closely at all levels within the company. There is a clear business strategy and associated targets, which are well understood by staff. The assessment centre manager and lead training co-ordinator monitor assessment visits and internal verification. Co-ordinators complete detailed weekly feedback forms. These give comprehensive information on learners' starting and leaving programmes, enquiries received, assessment and progress review visits, potential recruitment and future priorities. This information is displayed on a database, which is easily accessible to all training co-ordinators. Each week, the lead co-ordinator and the finance director review recruitment and achievement rates, information on learners who leave their programmes and compare progress against financial targets.

30. There is a long-established and effective staff appraisal scheme. Appraisal of all staff is carried out every three months. It includes a systematic, detailed review of roles and responsibilities, training and development needs and progress towards training targets. Clear objectives are set, with start and end dates. There is a corporate training and development plan which outlines general and specific objectives. The board of trustees reviews progress towards this on a quarterly basis. A central record of all staff training is kept. Regular training is provided for all staff. For example, training and standard-setting days are held every three months in the north and the south of England for assessors and verifiers and are well-attended. The training day's programme includes updates on training frameworks, portfolio building, assessment planning and key skills. A recent event looked at the potential for paperless portfolios. Feedback from those attending is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. Other informal training and updating days are arranged by training co-ordinators to cover specific aspects of assessment and verification.

31. There are clear lines of communication and accountability. A new management structure introduced last year is particularly effective. All staff have clear roles and responsibilities and work well as a team, despite being long distances apart. In addition to communicating using email and mobile phones, training co-ordinators and assessment centre staff meet monthly. These meetings are well-attended and included an in-depth review of learners' progress as well as other operational issues. Communication with learners and employers is good. Training co-ordinators or assessors carry out assessment visits every four to six

weeks and monitoring visits every three months. Employers produce a report on their learners each month which indicates how well they are progressing towards the targets set at the previous visit. These reports are sent to the co-ordinator, lead co-ordinator and the assessment centre manager. Any concerns about learners' progress are quickly followed up.

32. There is insufficient information about Agenda's responsibilities in formal agreements with employers. Detailed, written agreements are signed by Agenda and each employer. This clearly sets out the roles and responsibilities of the employer in support of the learner, and in meeting contractual requirements such as completion of timesheets and health and safety obligations. Although this agreement forms part of an employers' pack which details Agenda's services, it does not define Agenda's responsibilities for supporting the learner and the employer. For example, there are no details about the frequency of assessment and monitoring visits and other services which Agenda provides.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

33. The Director of Finance has overall responsibility for quality assurance arrangements. The assessment centre manager is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the procedures and for monitoring the quality of assessment. A part-time internal quality co-ordinator carries out checks on learners' files. There is a written policy and supporting procedures for quality assurance. Standard policies and procedures are accessible to all staff through the intranet with written confirmation of the changes. Quality assurance issues, including any complaints received, are discussed quarterly at senior management team meetings. Amendments to procedures are agreed at this meeting and also discussed at meetings of training co-ordinators and assessors. There are procedures for self-assessment and action-planning and the company produced its third self-assessment report for the reinspection. Internal verification meets the awarding body's requirements. External verification reports are co-ordinated by the assessment centre manager, who circulates action plans to appropriate staff. Surveys of learners and employers' opinions of training are undertaken four times a year and the responses are analysed annually.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate awareness and implementation of procedures for quality assurance
- ◆ ineffective use of internal auditing
- ◆ weak monitoring of the effectiveness of quality assurance

34. Since the original inspection, new procedures have been produced for the training and assessment processes. These are included in the quality assurance system and are subject to amendment and review in line with company policy. Examples of good practice have been produced and assessors use these as an aid to completing the forms. The internal audit process has been extended to include

training and assessment. Assessment and review documents are also monitored for quality. A marking system has been developed and every assessment and feedback sheet is graded by the assessment centre manager. Assessors are given feedback on ways of improving the quality of assessment records. Inspectors gave the same grade for quality assurance as that given in the latest self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough internal verification
- ◆ good training management procedures
- ◆ consistently good standard of documenting information

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of established procedures

35. Internal verification is well-planned and co-ordinated. The assessment centre manager co-ordinates all internal verification and external verifiers' visits and reports. Action plans are circulated to the relevant training co-ordinators, assessors and internal verifiers. Senior managers monitor progress towards completion of these actions. The process of internal verification is well recorded and monitored. Internal verifiers produce good-quality documents containing detailed and constructive feedback for assessors. Assessors' meetings are held regularly and minutes are taken. Action plans are produced and followed up. Internal verifiers visit the workplaces regularly to monitor assessments and they also sample all NVQ portfolios.

36. In September 2001, Agenda introduced new procedures for managing the training processes. All staff have been trained in how to use them. Progress in making effective use of the procedures, and suggestions for amendments, are discussed at monthly team meetings. All training co-ordinators and assessors are now using the same documents. The most current version of documents is available on the company's intranet. A good practice guide, giving many useful examples of how to fill in paperwork, accompanies the procedures.

37. At the time of the original inspection, there was inconsistency and uncertainty in the way in which training co-ordinators and assessors were using recording documents. All staff are now producing a consistently high standard of paperwork. An internal quality co-ordinator carries out regular checks on learners' files and gives the training co-ordinators regular feedback on the quality of their paperwork. Assessment paperwork is now graded after every assessment and assessors are given feedback to help them improve their performance. Assessors are given a list of prompts to help them check that all the necessary paperwork has been completed. The check on learners' files and the grading of assessment paperwork helps to ensure that staff working in different parts of the country are working to the same standards.

38. Although all staff are using the new procedures, the company is not yet

confident that the system is sufficiently well established. The company is currently checking all learners' files and assessment paperwork, although it plans to reduce this to the sampling of paperwork. It is too early to judge the effects of the new procedures, but many of the weaknesses identified at the original inspection have already been rectified.

39. Following the original inspection, a detailed action plan was introduced. This identified responsibilities for action, timetables and indicators of success. The action plan was successfully completed before the reinspection. By reinspection, the provider produced its first self-assessment report under the *Common Inspection Framework*. The report is self-critical and accurately identifies the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors matched with all but one of the grades given in the self-assessment report. They gave a higher grade for management of training.