

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1998

ReMIT

SUMMARY

Retail Motor Industry Training (ReMIT) provides good training in motor-vehicle engineering. All trainees undergo careful initial assessment to determine their suitability for training, although in some instances the process leads to neither good individual training plans nor early diagnoses of additional learning needs. ReMIT takes care to safeguard equality of opportunity and has succeeded in improving prospects for women. Most trainees are employed. Their companies provide a wide range of learning opportunities in well-equipped workshops. Trainees are well cared for by workplace supervisors and ReMIT's training co-ordinators. Training at work is well managed and assessment is carefully planned. Many trainees take the opportunity to gain awards additional to a national vocational qualification (NVQ). Aspects of training subcontracted to further education colleges are, in some cases, poorly managed by ReMIT. As a result of its self-assessment and the emergence of a serious complaint, eighteen months ago, the company has worked hard to improve both its quality and quality assurance. Some changes have already contributed to a better learning experience for trainees. Others are at too early a stage of development to be sure of their effectiveness.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ employment in workplaces with good learning opportunities
- ◆ chance to gain additional qualifications
- ◆ effective initiatives to promote the interests of women as motor mechanics
- ◆ good support for trainees at work
- ◆ teamwork between training co-ordinators and assessors
- ◆ staff development geared to meeting company aims
- ◆ extensive review of quality assurance procedures following self-assessment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ history of quality assurance too weak for complex provision
- ◆ significant new quality assurance measures are immature
- ◆ some poor off-the-job training
- ◆ slow identification of trainees' additional support needs
- ◆ poor management of some subcontractors
- ◆ no analyses of trends in trainees' achievements or other performance data

INTRODUCTION

1. Retail Motor Industry Training (ReMIT) was established in 1983, by the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI), formerly the Motor Agents' Association. RMI is the main trade association for the motor-vehicle retail and repair industry, with over 12,000 members in the United Kingdom. The establishment of ReMIT was seen as a natural development of RMI's involvement in training young people for the industry, which began with the introduction of the National Craft Certificate in 1942. ReMIT's mission statement declares that the company's objective is to provide high-quality training facilities which meet the needs of all members of the industry. ReMIT takes careful account of the standards set by the industry lead body, the Motor Industry Training Council (MITC), and contributes to national debate on standards through RMI representatives on the council.

2. ReMIT is organised into seven regions, covering England, Scotland and Wales. The company's head office is in London. ReMIT employs 98 full-time permanent staff and 180 subcontracted assessors and training co-ordinators; they oversee its own training and that delivered under contract by further education colleges and independent training centres. The company has over 7,500 trainees, working in more than 4,000 motor-vehicle companies. These companies include those which sell and repair motor vehicles and those which sell vehicle parts, fuel and lubricants, throughout the United Kingdom. In addition to government-funded training, contracted through training and enterprise councils (TECs), ReMIT also provides commercially funded training to companies involved in the motor-vehicle industry. Sussex TEC took the lead as co-ordinator for the inspection. The company contracts with all but two English TECS: ELTEC and St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise.

3. Early in 1998, ReMIT received many trainees, transferred from another provider. Several of them had target dates for NVQ achievement which were set by their previous training provider. A review of their portfolios by ReMIT's staff showed that, in many cases, the original target dates were unachievable. Training has been extended by as much as a year, and ReMIT has had to employ additional staff.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. ReMIT produced its first self-assessment report in September 1998, the outcome of an extensive self-assessment process which involved staff at all levels of the organisation and in all regions. The company received guidance, in producing the report, from Manchester TEC. The report highlighted some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. However, an action plan developed by the company, as a result of its self-assessment, addressed many more weaknesses than are mentioned in the report. The company is enthusiastic about the benefits of self-assessment and has quickly sought to address the weaknesses found. Some of these weaknesses had been undetected for some time by the company's quality assurance procedures, which were in place before self-assessment. In its self-assessment report, the company proposed grades for its training in motor-vehicle engineering, trainee support and management of training which were endorsed by inspectors. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed for equal opportunities, but gave a lower grade for quality assurance than that which the company believed appropriate.

5. Inspection concentrated on the government-funded training offered by ReMIT in six regions covering England and Wales. A team of nine inspectors spent a total of 46 days inspecting motor-vehicle training across England. Inspectors met managers and staff from further education sector colleges and interviewed 20 college tutors. They met representatives from Sussex and Sheffield TECs and from the government office (GO) for the southeast region. Inspectors visited 70 employers' premises and interviewed workplace supervisors and managers. Interviews took place with 132 trainees, at work and while studying off the job. Inspectors interviewed 63 ReMIT staff, including national, regional and area managers, training co-ordinators and assessors. They examined assessment records, training plans, trainees' files and assessment portfolios and numerous other documents about training and its management. Inspectors observed 13 trainees' progress reviews and seven training sessions.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

6. There are 7,580 trainees on government-funded programmes, of whom 53 per cent are modern apprentices and 47 per cent are on other programmes for young people. Ninety per cent of trainees are employed, including those in Scotland. ReMIT works with 4,268 companies, including large main dealerships, small garages and franchised outlets. They represent the full diversity of motor-vehicle retailing. Many employers provide trainees with extra knowledge about specific products. Trainees work towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in a wide variety of subjects, including light- and heavy-vehicle mechanics, motorcycle mechanics, body repair, automobile electrical work, fitting tyres and exhausts and spare parts administration. ReMIT employs 278 people, including 23 regional managers, 13 at

its head office and 180 field workers on contracts, of whom 108 are training co-ordinators and 72 are assessors. The company subcontracts most off-the-job training to further education colleges, which trainees attend on a day- or block-release basis, and to private training providers. ReMIT works with 139 colleges nationally. Regional training managers negotiate contracts and visit these colleges annually to discuss the changing requirements of the programme. Training co-ordinators visit colleges and workplaces more frequently. Training co-ordinators, although not usually assessing trainees' competence, have responsibilities which include recruitment and induction of trainees, their pastoral care and assessing employers' suitability. Assessors formally evaluate trainees' competence towards an NVQ. ReMIT's self-assessment report did not find all the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good opportunities for work-based learning
- ◆ good opportunities for additional off-the-job training and qualification
- ◆ excellent resources at most training and assessment centres
- ◆ experienced and well-qualified field staff
- ◆ high proportion of employed trainees
- ◆ outstanding achievement is rewarded

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of directly observed, work-based assessment in some placements
- ◆ poor assessment of key skills by some colleges
- ◆ some poor off-the-job training
- ◆ slow development of work-based assessors

GOOD PRACTICE

Many trainees are employed in main dealerships. They have the opportunity to work on new vehicles, with sophisticated electronic management and handling systems. They also use the latest fault-finding equipment in the workshops.

7. Trainees work for a long-established network of employers. These companies offer a wide range of learning opportunities which matches the needs of the industry and the NVQ programme. Trainees use the latest technology. ReMIT's field staff are well qualified and have a broad range of experience in the motor-vehicle industry. They visit trainees regularly at work. ReMIT's teams of assessors and training co-ordinators have established good working relationships with both trainees and their workplace supervisors. At progress review visits, training co-ordinators make connections between the work which trainees do for their employers and the NVQ awards' requirements. They encourage trainees to progress at a pace which is appropriate to their abilities. Most trainees understand their NVQ programmes and assessment régimes clearly. Short-term achievement targets are agreed on between supervisor and trainee and are subsequently monitored at each review visit. Where trainees fail to meet their targets, action is taken.

8. Some assessors from ReMIT evaluate trainees' performance in the workplace. However, most evidence in trainees' NVQ portfolios is based on witness testimonies by workplace supervisors. Opportunities for direct observation of trainees' performance in the workplace, by assessors themselves, are missed in some placements. Many workplace supervisors are unaware that they qualify to assess trainees' competence by observing their on-the-job performance. Few employers have taken the opportunity to train their own staff as assessors.

9. ReMIT's own training centres offer excellent resources for off-the-job training and assessment. In some areas, ReMIT subcontracts training to other providers which also offer a good environment in which to learn. Some have the latest instructional systems available in this field, making extensive use of computer-aided learning. Off-the-job training is usually well organised. Trainees are enthusiastic and involve themselves fully in their training. Most trainees have the opportunity to pursue studies which lead to nationally recognised qualifications in addition to their NVQs. ReMIT has various means to recognise the outstanding achievements of its trainees. The company has gathered the support of employers and colleges to enable it to do this. For example, a national truck manufacturer awards a prize for the apprentice of the year.

10. Some off-the-job training is poor. Trainees make slow progress, and teachers make few links with the work-based element of the programme. Many trainees have only a slight awareness of the mandatory key skills requirement in their programmes. In some regions, opportunities for assessment of key skills depends largely on the use of college assignments and simulated work.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

11. ReMIT's regional training managers are the focal points for assuring equal opportunities. They have responsibility for this work delegated to them from the company's director of employment affairs. The company has a sound equal opportunities policy. ReMIT takes its responsibilities seriously. Equal opportunities practice forms part of the company's quality management system. The policy is stated in a staff handbook, issued to all new employees. All trainees receive a copy of the policy in a booklet which also contains the general information trainees require on training. These documents describe in detail the supporting procedures through which equality of opportunity is promoted and secured. The recruitment patterns among trainees are monitored in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. ReMIT lays contractual duties on those employers with which it places trainees requiring them to operate in ways which guarantee equality of opportunity. ReMIT's self-assessment report highlighted many of the main strengths and weaknesses which were identified by inspectors, who awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-formulated policy
- ◆ thorough reviews of effectiveness of policy
- ◆ staff trained regularly to raise equal opportunities awareness
- ◆ initiatives to break down occupational stereotyping
- ◆ strong commitment to recruiting under-represented groups
- ◆ good complaints procedure

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ uneven promotion of equal opportunities at work
- ◆ change is reactive, rather than aspirational

12. ReMIT's equal opportunities policy is part of a quality management system which meets the ISO 9002 quality standard. It is formally reassessed every year as part of the company's overall management review. The supporting procedure is regularly checked, both internally and by external auditors. Staff are familiar with the policy and seek to implement it fully. Few staff have undergone formal training in equal opportunities practice, but general awareness-raising is regularly carried out. Changes in legislation, areas of concern or matters of special interest are notified to staff by ReMIT's head office, through their attendance at regional training managers' meetings, held every six weeks. Equal opportunities are a standard agenda item at these meetings. Area managers relay important information to their field staff. An equal opportunities working party was established in January 1999, with representatives from each region. This group is responsible for strengthening the link between the regions and head office to ensure that good equal opportunities practice is quickly shared and becomes common practice across the company.

13. Training co-ordinators are responsible for setting up work placements and monitoring them to ensure that the employers and subcontractors with which they work, implement ReMIT's equal opportunities policy. Their findings are recorded on a standard form which is noted by regional training managers. To be effective this process depends on every individual doing what is required, without fail. In practice, there is no co-ordination. Some employers told inspectors that they had received little information about equal opportunities, either when placements were arranged or afterwards. Nearly half of all subcontractors had not signed their contracts at the time of inspection. Employers are issued with a comprehensive guide which includes a 10-point equal opportunities plan for use during recruitment and training. ReMIT's performance against the equal opportunities targets set by TECs is generally good. However, action to address any shortfalls is reactive, rather than preventative. In a few areas where the local TEC does not set any targets, ReMIT does not compensate for this neglect by setting internal targets. Some training co-ordinators are unaware of the targets set by TECs, becoming aware of goals to be met only when they are missed and more senior managers take corrective action.

14. The company's regional organisations play an active part in taking initiatives to break down gender stereotyping and barriers to equal opportunity about which the industry may have grown complacent. There are now many examples of women succeeding in the traditionally male-dominated working environment of the motor mechanic. ReMIT places regular features in trade magazines showing the achievements of trainees from minority ethnic groups. The company has also committed itself to be positive about disability and displays the appropriate symbol on its documentation.

15. ReMIT has a complaints procedure, of which trainees are aware. Information about any dissatisfaction is actively sought from trainees, when they qualify or leave, in a questionnaire. The company's quality officer reviews returns. Adverse comments or complaints from other sources are investigated and, if proved true, a complaint action report is prepared. A person with appropriate knowledge and authority investigates these complaints and ensures that remedial actions are taken to the satisfaction of the regional training manager. Every three months, all complaints are analysed by the equality officer to identify any trends which may be developing.

Trainee support

Grade 2

16. ReMIT informs many potential trainees about a career in the motor vehicle industry, while they are at secondary school. The company produces a booklet which school pupils use to help them arrange a work experience placement in the motor vehicle industry. When potential trainees enquire about ReMIT training programmes, they are sent a comprehensive information pack. This helps them to decide about the suitability of the industry for themselves. Before acceptance onto a training programme, applicants are tested to assess their ability in numeracy, literacy and comprehension. Once on a programme, all trainees are given a comprehensive induction to their NVQ programme by a training co-ordinator. Their employer, and the further education college which they attend, also provides their own induction. ReMIT's training co-ordinators check that induction has been effective. ReMIT's self-assessment report highlighted many of the main strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors who agreed with the grade in the report for this aspect of provision.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough assessment of the effectiveness of induction
- ◆ strong initial guidance to inform career choice
- ◆ high level of pastoral support
- ◆ good teamwork among training co-ordinators and assessors
- ◆ informative documentation

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ initial assessment does not reliably identify additional support needs or accredit prior learning

17. The employers with which ReMIT works provide good support for trainees in the workplace. Training co-ordinators visit each trainee at work during the first four weeks of training. Subsequently, they visit every eight weeks to review trainees' progress and provide pastoral support. Each visit offers an opportunity for employers to discuss their assessment of the trainees' attitude, behaviour and progress since the last review. Trainees freely express their views on each of these assessments. An assessor also carries out a separate review of each trainee to discuss progress in more detail and to set targets which encourage trainees to achieve. Trainees are required to carry out a risk assessment of their workplace, drawing on information from their induction.

GOOD PRACTICE

Separating the training co-ordinator and assessor rôles highlights areas in which trainees need additional support. A group of trainees on the south coast, from several employers, had fallen behind with its portfolios. The local training co-ordinator and assessor team had brought them into a college during a holiday for portfolio-building classes. Trainees attended voluntarily. They warmly praised the current support arrangements.

18. ReMIT does not make good use of the results of initial assessment to guide the formulation of individual training plans. The results of the tests taken by applicants before entry are used to assess only the applicants' general suitability for the training programme. Training plans take little account of existing skills or prior learning. Initial assessment sometimes fails to identify the trainees' need for additional learning support. Extra help is sometimes delayed until trainees encounter a problem at work. Because training co-ordinators are assigned primarily to a support role, pastoral care at work is particularly good. Some co-ordinators are not occupationally experienced, which limits the level of training support they can provide. The co-ordinators and assessors work well in teams. Review documentation is well designed, providing an opportunity for employers to identify areas for improvement in trainees' attitude and behaviour.

Management of training

Grade 2

19. ReMIT manages its training across England, Scotland and Wales as a unified operation. Inspection covered provision in England only. The company organises its training through six regions in England and Wales. Each has a regional manager and an assistant regional manager. In each region, area managers guide the work of teams of training co-ordinators and assessors. Head office staff in London include the managing director, the national training director, his assistant and the finance manager. Assessors and training co-ordinators are self-employed. The requirements of the modern apprenticeship programme have prompted ReMIT's most recent and largest operational change. Each region operates in line with company policy, but, nevertheless, retains a high level of autonomy. Variations are often necessary to meet the differing contractual requirements of the TECs with which each region works. Flexibility also enables individual regions to try out new ideas on behalf of the company as a whole. The company has well-established systems and procedures which meet its business requirements. It has achieved the Investors in People Standard. The company's self-assessment report identified some strengths which would have been more appropriately related to quality assurance. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear communication throughout the training process
- ◆ good management of on-the-job training
- ◆ thorough staff development and appraisal
- ◆ good use of the company's management data
- ◆ effective management of subcontracted co-ordinators and assessors

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor control of some colleges

GOOD PRACTICE

At ReMIT's London office, computerised records are held on the background and progress of every trainee. Records include a summary of any issues about attendance, the details of which are held at regional offices. Trainees' individual learning plans are updated at meetings of regional managers, which are chaired by the managing director. The process involves about 8,000 trainees.

20. ReMIT is committed to staff development. All members of staff, including training co-ordinators and assessors, are appraised annually. Their training needs are carefully identified and related to the requirements of the company. Staff are kept up to date with the regulations of the awarding bodies and with developments in equal opportunities, health and safety and assessment. The counselling and guidance aspects of training co-ordinators' rôles have gradually become more demanding, but the company has been less effective in meeting their growing need to be experts, in such areas as drugs awareness, than it has been in the longer established aspects of a trainer's work.

21. Communication in ReMIT is good. Regular staff meetings, an effective internal postal service, and an extensive array of national review groups help to ensure that everybody is aware of the company's activities and aims. Review groups address immediate issues, such as the improvement of standard documents. They provide a forum for sharing good practice among regions. External communications are sound. The strong links which the company has with national bodies in the transport industry, contribute to its continued prominence in motor-vehicle training.

22. Regional and area managers ensure that standards of on-the-job training are monitored by assessors and training co-ordinators. Data are used extensively by managers to assess performance. Analysis of these data guides target-setting in many of the company's operations, but not the management of trainees' learning experience. Further education colleges are responsible to ReMIT for most off-the-job training. ReMIT's policies are set out in the contracts which it concludes with these colleges. However, ReMIT's staff do not systematically evaluate whether or not policies are properly applied. The company relies on regular informal contact among college staff, ReMIT training co-ordinators and assessors to ensure that colleges' obligations are met. Many colleges have not signed their contracts or returned them to ReMIT. Contracts outline qualitative, as well as managerial, goals. Management control at ReMIT over the issue and return of contracts is poor, with many sent out after work with trainees has begun. College staff are often unaware of contracts' details. Many trainees do not make the progress which they should, at college. Problems are often identified late. Lack of clarity and control contributes to the poor relations which are sometimes found among ReMIT's regional offices and further education colleges.

Quality assurance**Grade 3**

23. ReMIT has a well-established, thoroughly documented and annually reviewed quality assurance system. The company uses the ISO 9002 quality framework as a basis for its system. Copies of the quality assurance manual are held in each regional office. Staff are kept informed about updates and amendments. As a result of the company's self-assessment process, its quality assurance system has been extensively modified. Many changes had taken effect by the time of inspection, but others were still at an early stage of implementation or development. The company's self-assessment report did not list all the strengths and weaknesses identified either through its own process of self-assessment or by inspectors. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented quality assurance policy and procedures
- ◆ wide distribution of quality assurance documents
- ◆ regular review of the quality assurance system
- ◆ rigorous system of internal verification
- ◆ decisively addressed problems
- ◆ self-assessment has led to improvements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak internal verification in some colleges
- ◆ colleges' external verification reports not notified to ReMIT
- ◆ over-reliance on trainees to maintain assessment schedules
- ◆ underdeveloped analysis of employers and trainees' views
- ◆ trainees' achievement data do not inform quality assurance nationally

GOOD PRACTICE

ReMIT was concerned that its trainees in one college in the south were not being taught according to their individual training plans. The company discussed the problem with the college without result. ReMIT has now terminated the contract and established its own training centre locally. The dispute was meticulously documented.

24. The company's most recent review of its quality assurance system coincided with its first self-assessment using the Council's guidelines. These processes led to extensive modification of some aspects of training. An investigation carried out by ReMIT, following complaints from trainees, also identified an urgent need for changes to quality assurance procedures. Staff throughout the company, are aware of its new quality assurance requirements. They have all been given details of the recent changes in procedure.

25. Trainees' views are sought at the end of their programmes, using a questionnaire. Few trainees have returned the completed form. The company has tried various ways to improve the rate of return. A prepaid envelope was issued with the questionnaire, but this had little effect. A cash payment for completed questionnaires improved the return rate to 40 per cent. A current initiative involves adding a raffle number to each questionnaire, with the chance of winning a

substantial prize. Early indications of success are promising. The company has also started to collect trainees and employers' views at various points during the training programme. The process is too immature for useful analysis. Details of trainees' achievements are collected, but central analysis has not been used to identify trends over time. The quality assurance system as a whole is not adequately informed by data, a problem which is made particularly acute by the wide geographical distribution of trainees who are clustered in ones and twos.

26. ReMIT has a rigorous system for the internal verification of trainees' portfolios of evidence. Portfolios are returned to trainees with clear guidance on the improvements or additional evidence required. Control over the verification processes of some subcontractors is inadequate. External verifiers expressed concern about poor internal verification at one college. ReMIT's internal verifiers now carry out all internal verification of the work of their trainees at that college. Some colleges do not notify ReMIT about external verifiers' findings. The company both relies on these colleges to address the issues and loses significant evidence for its quality assurance system. Both the company and the colleges concerned have acknowledged this practice to be a weakness; they plan to share the reports in future.

27. In a few cases, ReMIT's assessors do not visit trainees often enough to ensure that they make progress as quickly as they should. When an assessor postpones a visit, the onus is too frequently placed on trainees to arrange the next assessment. Trainees who are uneasy about assessments, or who lack confidence to approach staff, suffer, as a result. The quality assurance system includes no means to address this problem quickly. On occasion, long periods elapse before a training co-ordinator or an assessor deals with lapses in assessment schedules. Management data about trainees' achievement levels are used to improve the quality of training provision in some regions. Where a trainee has been slow to progress against the agreed target, additional staff visits are arranged. In some cases, colleges and other subcontractors have lost their contracts, in order to resolve trainees' problems.

28. A serious complaint, made eighteen months ago, about the quality of training provision and about employers' willingness to ensure that trainees achieve a qualification, was dealt with resolutely. Where appropriate, managers and staff from ReMIT and its associated employers were replaced. ReMIT has changed its quality assurance system and raised the frequency of training co-ordinators' visits. ReMIT's staff and its associated employers now work more closely together. Trainees across the country regard the recent changes as having brought about a dramatic improvement. ReMIT is making progress in tightening control over training and assessment and recognises that it will need to continue to do so for some time in order to be certain that all trainees are receiving a good service.