



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1998

Handsworth & Lozells Methodist Training Initiative

SUMMARY

Handsworth and Lozells Methodist Training Initiative provides prevocational training programmes and a range of support services for unemployed people in the local, multiracial communities. The quality of training is good, and a high standard of work is displayed in trainees' work portfolios. Seventy-four per cent of trainees progress to vocational training or employment. Staff are committed to the support of trainees and implementation of equal opportunities. However, access to training premises for people with disabilities is difficult. The company has developed strong links with outside organisations and support agencies. Management information systems are not fully developed, and there is no single coherent system for quality assurance.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ positive company ethos promotes learning and achievement
- ◆ high standard of work displayed in trainees' portfolios
- ◆ effective management of equal opportunities in all areas of training
- ◆ full commitment by staff to the provision of comprehensive support for trainees
- ◆ strong links with outside organisations and agencies
- ◆ effective systems for staff appraisal linked to staff development programmes
- ◆ total commitment by company to the improvement of provision

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ narrow range of learning materials used by trainers
- ◆ poor facilities and difficult access for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ systems for collection and use of management information are not fully developed
- ◆ absence of a single coherent system for quality assurance

INTRODUCTION

1. Handsworth and Lozells Methodist Training Initiative (HLMTI) was established in 1992. It is a company limited by guarantee, managed by a board of directors, whose members are from a variety of ethnic and employment backgrounds, including the unemployed. HLMTI is located on a single site, less than two miles from Birmingham city centre, situated between the commercial area of Soho and the thriving, densely populated, multicultural residential quarter of Handsworth. The training centre building was formerly a Methodist church. The aims and objectives of the company are to provide prevocational training for local unemployed adults, especially those from minority ethnic groups who have been socially excluded and marginalised. The provider offers a range of customised courses to meet individual trainees' needs within its programme. Programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQ) in business administration and information technology are available. The provider is an approved accredited training centre for the City and Guilds of London Institute and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). The prevocational programmes are funded through contracts with Birmingham & Solihull Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). HLMTI is a member of the Association of Community Training for Vocational Education (ACTIVE), a consortium of five local training providers, and is in receipt of European Social Fund monies to support the provision of community training projects.

2. The strategic location of HLMTI enables the company to draw its clients from the Handsworth, Lozells, Ladywood and Hockley districts, all of which comprise high levels of unemployed people from minority ethnic groups. Soho and Handsworth, with 44 per cent Asian and 21 per cent Afro-Caribbean populations, have traditionally been among the most economically disadvantaged and socially deprived districts in Birmingham. Recent data provided by the Birmingham Economic Information Centre indicates that, while unemployment levels for Birmingham as a whole are 11 per cent, Soho and Handsworth have unemployment levels of 17 per cent and 21 per cent respectively. Labour Force Survey research shows that unemployment levels among people from minority ethnic groups are almost twice those for white people. The unemployment rate for males from local minority ethnic groups is estimated to be over 40 per cent. A recent survey of the local area demonstrated that up to 15,000 people have difficulties with literacy and numeracy.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. HLMTI's self-assessment report was completed in May 1998, following consultation with the senior manager, the company's board of directors and training staff. The report was given to the trainees for consideration and comment, before submission to the Training Standards Council. The report is detailed and comprehensive, and makes clear judgements on company performance for each of the quality statements in *Raising The Standard*. Where appropriate, the report identifies evidence to support judgements, action required and staff responsibilities. Inspectors saw examples of action-plans implemented prior to inspection to address weaknesses identified through self-assessment. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were identified, but inspectors agreed with the findings of the self-assessment report and with the grades proposed by the company.

4. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at HLMTI in August 1998. Inspection was limited to the provision of prevocational training programmes conducted at the company's training centre. At the time of inspection, 11 trainees were in government-funded training, none of whom was on a work placement. Five trainees were interviewed, and three training sessions were observed. Meetings were held with the head of centre, training staff and the chair of the board of directors. A wide range of documents was examined, including management files, TEC contracts, trainee achievement data, trainees' work portfolios, assessment schedules and individual training plans. Learning resources and accommodation were also inspected.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Foundation for work		2	1			3
Total	0	2	1	0	0	3

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for Work

Grade 2

5. There were 11 trainees at the time of inspection. Training is aimed at equipping people from disadvantaged groups with those skills needed for progression into mainstream training and/or employment. Trainees are encouraged to be persistent in the pursuit of achievement of identified goals. Prevocational programmes are of 28 weeks' duration and include a 28-day work placement for those trainees progressing to NVQ courses. Training in information technology (IT) forms an integral part of the prevocational programme. Trainees displaying the appropriate skills may progress to courses leading to NVQ levels 1 and 2 in information technology or business administration. Training programmes are drawn up through negotiation between the trainer and trainee and include training elements to improve trainees'

personal effectiveness, creative awareness, communications skills, confidence and self-development. Training is delivered within a structured framework, but flexibility in teaching styles allows trainers to respond to the individual trainees' needs. Training is delivered to small groups or on a one-to-one basis. Inspectors agreed with the judgements made in the self-assessment report and the grade proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of work displayed in trainees' work portfolios
- ◆ staff/trainee rapport strongly supports the achievement of learning objectives
- ◆ trainees display enthusiasm and work diligently at all times
- ◆ trainers make good use of creative learning opportunities
- ◆ positive company attitude promotes learning and achievement

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor recording of assessment plans
- ◆ narrow range of learning materials used by trainers

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainers cross-reference evidence of trainees' achievements among different programmes. For example, computing competencies achieved in pursuit of City & Guilds course 4242, information technology, is used as evidence for accreditation for NVQ level 1 information technology.

6. The strong rapport between staff and trainees contributes to a supportive environment, in which trainees learn successfully and achieve progress. Trainers encourage trainees and praise success throughout their training. Trainees work enthusiastically and diligently at all times, and have confidence to work competently without supervision, as appropriate. Training sessions are well prepared and teaching is thorough. Trainers effectively cross-reference evidence of trainees' competencies among different courses to maximise its use for accreditation of achievement. The presentation and content of completed work in trainees' NVQ portfolios is of high quality. External verifier reports praise the quality of trainees' work. Trainees are assessed regularly, and procedures meet the requirements of awarding bodies. Plans for assessment are discussed with, and agreed on by trainees, but there is no overall scheme of assessment, and recording of assessment plans is poor. Trainees' achievements are good. Seventy-four per cent of trainees recruited during 1997-98 progressed to vocational training programmes or employment. Achievement targets set to wordpower and numberpower programmes, were exceeded. There are very few early leavers.

7. Training is delivered by experienced and appropriately qualified staff. The centre's manager holds Training and Development Lead Body (TDLB) awards for assessment, internal verification and accreditation of prior learning. Trainers hold assessor awards and are working towards internal verifier awards. Computer facilities for teaching information technology are adequate. Computer software and paper-based learning materials used to support IT training are, however, narrow in range, and fail to support the needs of all trainees adequately, especially those with specific learning difficulties. The training rooms and social areas are spacious and

of a satisfactory standard.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

8. HLMTI's support of equal opportunities is implicit within the company's mission statement and strategic plan. Detailed and comprehensive equal opportunities procedures are in place, ensuring that the company meets its legal obligations and contractual requirements. The staff and the board of directors are fully understanding of, and committed to, the effective implementation of equal opportunity policies, in all aspects of training. Staff and trainees have a good awareness of equal opportunity issues. Discussion of equal opportunities is included within the induction programme, and the staff/trainee handbook includes a clear statement of the equal opportunities policy. Some strengths identified in the self-assessment report related to meeting contracts. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high levels of staff commitment to supporting equal opportunities
- ◆ effective management of equal opportunities in all areas of training, including subcontracted provision
- ◆ complete and detailed policies and procedures
- ◆ evaluation of company performance has led to improvements in provision

GOOD PRACTICE

Evaluation and review of company performance in equal opportunities has revealed poor recruitment figures for people from local Asian communities and for people with disabilities. The company has responded by using the European Social Fund to finance the appointment of a new outreach officer to liaise with local support groups and community groups in order to raise awareness of training opportunities.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some documents have not been updated
- ◆ poor facilities and difficult access for trainees with disabilities

9. The company's support and strict implementation of procedures to assure equality of opportunity for all are well promoted. Posters with clear explanations of the meaning of equal opportunities are displayed in the training centre. The equal opportunities policy covers all training provision, including any training delivered by subcontractors and employers providing work placements. Staff and trainees are protected against discrimination. Before receiving trainees, employers are required to sign agreements which detail the required standards for training, provision and equal opportunities practices. The head of the centre makes regular visits to all work placements to monitor standards. Staff and trainees are aware of the grievance and complaints procedures. Complaints are dealt with within one week.

10. The equal opportunities policy is relevant to the particular needs of the trainees, and implementation procedures are clearly set out. Some documents, however, including the written terms and agreements for subcontractors, need to be updated to include reference to the *Disability Discrimination Act (1995)*. Staff responsibilities for the support and implementation of equal opportunities are clearly stated within job descriptions. Systems to gather information on trainees' recruitment and achievement are not systematic, but are effective. Analysis of data on trainees, gender, ethnicity and disability indicates that there is scope for increased recruitment of trainees from certain groups. For example, only 15 per cent of trainees were of Asian origin. In 1997-98, only 7 per cent of recruits were registered disabled. The company has responded by appointing a full-time outreach officer to increase liaison with outside support agencies and community groups. At the training centre, facilities for people with disabilities are poor. Access into the centre for people in wheelchairs is difficult. The provider is exploring the feasibility and cost of making its facilities more accessible to those with mobility difficulties.

Trainee support

Grade 2

11. Trainees receive support and guidance throughout training. Initial assessments are used to establish trainees' levels of skills and knowledge and to identify individual training needs and additional learning support requirements. Individual training plans identify achievement targets. Trainees' induction programmes address issues of health and safety and equal opportunities, and include information on the structure and content of programmes. Trainees' rights and responsibilities are included within the trainees' charter. Inspectors agreed with the judgements and the grading in the self-assessment report. Some further strengths and weaknesses were identified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough induction
- ◆ staff commitment to comprehensive support for trainees
- ◆ trainees support one another
- ◆ open celebration of trainees' achievements
- ◆ effective action-planning, delivered through review tutorials
- ◆ support available from specialist organisations

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no structured job-search programme
- ◆ some induction materials not suitable for trainees with learning difficulties

GOOD PRACTICE

An award ceremony forms part of the company's annual general meeting. Attended by the board of directors, staff and trainees, the event gives opportunity for open celebration of trainees' success and reinforces the reality of possible achievement.

12. Trainees receive effective learning support and personal guidance throughout their training programmes. Staff are committed to providing support, giving generously of their time, including unpaid hours. The strong rapport between staff and trainees aids the delivery of effective support to a client group with a range of diverse needs and difficulties. The company has good links with outside support organisations, drawing on these to secure specialist help for trainees when it is needed. The induction programme for new trainees is thorough, although the format of materials used in the induction information pack is not suited to the needs of those trainees with learning difficulties. Trainees receive advice and relevant information on opportunities for further training and employment. At present, there is no structured job-search programme. The company is advertising for an extra member of staff to co-ordinate this programme.

13. One-to-one trainee review tutorials are held fortnightly at which trainees are clearly informed of their progress and achievements. Action-plans for training are reviewed and revised, and training plan agreements are recorded. Trainees hold monthly meetings to discuss general issues and to review the progress and attainments of the individual members of the group. These meetings serve to reinforce the support which trainees give one another, as well as acting as an effective forum through which trainees' views, suggestions and questions can be communicated. There is open celebration of trainees' successes and achievement throughout training.

Management of training**Grade 2**

14. Management of training is co-ordinated by a senior manager. Training programmes are delivered by one full-time trainer and a part-time trainer who works on a voluntary basis four days a week. The recent award of European Social Funding has enabled the company to make full-time appointments for an administrative assistant and an outreach officer. These appointments are in response to weaknesses identified through self-assessment. The senior manager works closely with the company's board of directors. Members of the board have been involved in advising and supporting the development of management procedures and the formulation of the company's three-year strategic plan 1998-2001.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong involvement by board of directors in development of the strategic plan
- ◆ good management control of subcontracted provision and work placements
- ◆ strong links with outside organisations and agencies
- ◆ effective systems for staff appraisal linked to staff development programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ systems for collection and use of management information underdeveloped
- ◆ no formal structure for evaluating the effectiveness of policies and procedures

15. Documented policies and procedures for management of subcontracted training and work placements are good. Written terms and agreements give strong management control over this provision. Effective and comprehensive procedures are in place to ensure legal compliance with health and safety requirements. Detailed job descriptions give staff full awareness of their roles and responsibilities. There are clear procedures for recruitment and selection of staff; this maintains equality of opportunity. The company's values, aims, objectives and strategies are well understood by staff and are included within the strategic plan 1998-2001. Staff are aware of targets set for trainee recruitment and achievement, based on TEC contracts. The centre's manager has established strong links with outside organisations and support groups. Links with other training providers have enabled HLMTI to participate in community projects to address local training needs. The provider works in partnership with local further education colleges and works closely with support groups for people with disabilities.

16. Board of directors' meetings are held every six weeks, forming a central part of the management framework. Training staff have little contact with directors. Staff meetings are held fortnightly, and training staff contribute to management decisions. Lines of communication are largely informal, but effective. Much of the management of training is informal, and the company has yet to establish a structure with which to evaluate the effectiveness of policies and procedures. Systems for the collection and use of management information are not fully developed. The management information system is not fully computerised, and current and accurate data are not readily available. The company has established an effective staff appraisal framework linked to the staff development programme. Appraisal procedures include classroom observation of training, by the centre's manager and appraisal of the centre's manager by the chair of the board of directors. All appraisal session records are recorded, including clear action-plans which reflect the needs of the company and the individual member of staff being appraised.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

17. The directors and staff of the company are fully committed to improving the training provision. Through its quality assurance procedures, the company complies with the requirements of awarding bodies and its training contracts. At present, however, there is no single and systematic quality assurance process. The head of the centre, in consultation with company directors, is developing such a process to cover every aspect of the company's work and provision. The quality assurance policy and the standards and targets which the company is committed to meeting are reflected in the company's corporate objectives. Effectiveness of the new framework in the steady improvement of training provision has yet to be seen. The company

was accurate in its assessment of quality assurance provision. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as that proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and comprehensive quality assurance documents
- ◆ consistency in staff practices
- ◆ trainees' views sought on effectiveness of training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ absence of a single, systematic quality assurance process
- ◆ no procedures for devising and implementing action-plans to improve the quality of training

18. At present, there is no single coherent system for quality assurance. Implementation of a new overarching quality assurance framework is at the developmental phase. Currently, there are quality assurance arrangements for specific aspects of provision, but these have yet to be incorporated into the new overarching quality assurance process. There is consistency in staff practices in respect of quality assurance. Staff on all training programmes use standardised documents for trainees' reports, record sheets and reviews of trainees' progress. The company's strategic plan specifies standards and targets to be met, performance objectives and performance indicators. The views of trainees on the effectiveness of their training are obtained at monthly meetings and through questionnaires which trainees answer when they complete the programme. At present, the quality assurance procedures do not include the drawing-up of action-plans for the improvement of provision.

19. All staff have a responsibility for assuring the quality of provision – there is reference to this in their job descriptions. At present, staff do not have a full understanding of the new quality assurance process which is being developed. The process of self-assessment has been incorporated into the new quality assurance arrangements. The self-assessment report identified weaknesses in the company's quality assurance procedures. Action-plans to address these weaknesses have been successfully implemented.