



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1998

# Progressive People Limited

## SUMMARY

Progressive People Limited provides excellent prevocational training. Every applicant is selected for training and receives in-depth initial assessment, resulting in a training programme which effectively helps trainees to gain employment. Two highly qualified and experienced company directors deliver instruction, and the quality of training is high. The organisation is committed to ensuring that trainees have equality of opportunity. Support and guidance for trainees is thorough and encourages independence and self-sufficiency. Management of the training process is effective. There are robust quality assurance arrangements in place to ensure that training is continuously evaluated and improved.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	1

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	1
Trainee support	1
Management of training	1
Quality assurance	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ frequent and thorough progress reviews
- ◆ good management of work experience
- ◆ good personal guidance and trainee support
- ◆ good trainee progress and achievement
- ◆ good use made of trainees' feedback
- ◆ in-depth initial assessment process
- ◆ selection and training processes promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ trainees are challenged and motivated
- ◆ well-planned and expertly delivered training sessions
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ part-time staff have limited access to quality assurance procedures

## INTRODUCTION

1. Progressive People Limited was formed in November 1996. It is a small, family managed company which contracts with Northamptonshire Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) to deliver prevocational training for adults. At the time of inspection, there were seven trainees on the programme, and the total number contracted for the current year is 75. All trainees have significant barriers to finding employment, which arise from several causes, including low self-esteem, poor basic skills, learning disabilities, a history of offending or substance abuse and health problems. Trainees are all working towards milestones which are agreed on with the CCTE, and these usually include basic qualifications in literacy and numeracy skills. In spring 1998, the company's premises in Northampton were damaged in severe floods. The company relocated to alternative nearby premises in June 1998 and was fully operational by the time of inspection in August.

2. Unemployment in Northamptonshire has fallen sharply over the past 10 years and currently stands at 3.6 per cent, which is below regional and national levels. However, Northampton itself does have higher-than-average levels of long-term unemployment. The ratio of unemployed people to registered vacancies has fallen dramatically in the past three years, signalling a significant opportunity for long-term unemployed adults to get back into the labour market. In terms of national targets for education and training, Northamptonshire has the lowest level of achievement among its peers at foundation levels 1 and 3. The proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is 5.7 per cent. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above is 40.5 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The two company directors attended workshops, arranged by the CCTE, on the self-assessment process. They then conducted the self-assessment, taking into account trainees and employers' feedback. For each aspect, strengths and weaknesses were accurately identified and supported by valid evidence. Action-plans were drawn up and implemented to address weaknesses. Consequently, by the time of inspection, most weaknesses had been remedied and the inspection grades were, therefore, higher than those proposed by the company.

4. A team of two inspectors spent a total of six days at Progressive People in August 1998. They interviewed seven trainees, two employers, both full-time members of staff, two members of an advisory group and one member of job centre staff. Inspectors observed three sessions of learning.

### OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

#### Foundation for work

#### Grade 1

5. There are seven adult trainees on the prevocational programme. Six are based in house on a full-time basis; one is on work placement. The programme lasts for an average of 12 weeks. It consists of eight weeks' in-house training to develop employment skills, including personal presentation, job-search skills and literacy and numeracy skills. This is followed by four weeks' work placement. Trainees work towards milestones, which are drawn up by Progressive People for each trainee, and agreed on by the CCTE. These may include achievement of wordpower and numberpower qualifications, regular attendance and punctuality, attending job interviews and giving presentations. There are two full-time staff who deliver the programme. Many of the sessions are jointly run. Visits to the job centre, employment agencies and local employers are included as part of the programme. Staff have academic, training and assessor qualifications. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. The weaknesses identified by the company had been remedied by the time inspection took place. The grade awarded by inspectors is, therefore, higher than the self-assessment grade.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ well-planned and documented training sessions
- ◆ diverse and stimulating range of training methods
- ◆ good progress towards milestones
- ◆ excellent working relationships between trainers and trainees
- ◆ regular feedback from trainees is sought and acted on
- ◆ trainees are challenged and motivated

- ◆ high employment rates
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some unsuitable handouts used

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Trainees are encouraged to progress with accreditation as fully as possible. Some trainees are working towards wordpower and numberpower certificates at level 1, despite the fact that Progressive People receives funding only for foundation level.*

6. Training sessions are well planned and are supported by comprehensively written lesson plans. Good use is made of a wide range of training methods. This encourages full trainee participation and provides variety to ensure that the objectives of the session are met in the most appropriate manner. Trainees are well motivated, enthusiastic and committed to their programme. There are excellent working relationships between trainers and trainees and a conscious effort is made by the trainers to develop trainees' independence and self-sufficiency. Both verbal and written feedback from trainees is sought at the end of each session and is taken into account when planning future sessions.

7. Trainees are clear about the milestones agreed on and are fully aware of their progress towards them. Rates of progression are good. Two formal progress reviews take place during the programme, and these are well documented. Informal reviews are regular, and weekly records of work done and trainees' achievements are completed by staff. Trainees are given challenging work. Some trainees have been unemployed for many years and are reluctant to re-enter the job market. However, their attitudes towards work are challenged, and progress is made in helping them to accept employment as a normal part of adult life. At the end of the programme, almost half of all trainees obtain a job.

8. The new accommodation provides a high-quality learning environment, which is suitable for the range of training methods used. Facilities allow for group work, individual study and both formal and informal working areas. There is a wide range of resources and materials for trainees to use during job-search and basic skills sessions. These include published books and training manuals, as well as materials adapted for trainees' use taken from everyday resources, such as newspapers and directories. There is a good selection of literature on career options, as well as access to a computer. There are worksheets and handouts to develop a range of skills. While the level of these is entirely suitable for the ability of trainees, the content of some is inappropriate for adults.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

**Grade 1**

9. Progressive People is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all staff and trainees. There is a clearly documented and comprehensive equal opportunities policy. This has been developed with the assistance of a member of an advisory committee who also holds the post of chair of the Council for Ethnic Minority Communities. The policy meets legislative and TEC requirements. The company monitors trainees' gender, ethnicity and disability. Forty per cent of trainees who started on the programme during this contract year are women, 38 per cent are from minority ethnic groups and 9 per cent are those with disabilities. There is a code of practice and procedures to be used in the case of grievances, dismissals and appeals. This is issued to trainees during the induction programme. The self-assessment report accurately identified the strengths and weakness for this aspect. Other weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection, and the inspection grade is, therefore, higher than that proposed by the company.

#### STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and comprehensive equal opportunities policy
- ◆ equal opportunities understood/supported by all staff, trainees and employers
- ◆ rigorous reviewing and monitoring of policies and practices
- ◆ promotion of equal opportunities in selection and training processes
- ◆ good job outcome levels for trainees over the age of fifty
- ◆ successful targeting of under-represented groups for training
- ◆ all facilities accessible by those with disabilities
- ◆ clear and well documented complaints procedure

#### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ information regarding age profile of trainees not systematically analysed

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Work-placement arrangements are scheduled to cater for trainees' diverse needs. One Muslim trainee had special arrangements made to allow him to attend prayers on Friday afternoons.*

10. The company's equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and clearly expressed. It is fully understood and supported by staff, trainees and employers. The policy is reviewed, in consultation with the advisory group, on an annual basis. The company sets and meets its own targets for equal opportunities, including the recruitment of under-represented groups. Two members of the advisory group are actively involved in local community groups and provide the company with strong links to help to break down barriers for trainees. Data on gender, ethnicity and people with disabilities are systematically monitored. The proportion of the company's trainees from minority ethnic groups and with disabilities is higher than

that of the local population. Achievement rates are high, with 75 per cent of trainees from minority ethnic groups and 80 per cent of people with disabilities achieving a job or qualification during the last year.

11. The organisation has a non-discriminatory selection and training policy and accepts all applicants. The policy is supported by local job centre staff who provide trainee referrals. The organisation has a positive approach to trainees who are over the age of 50. During the current contract year, 29 trainees in this age group joined the company – 48 per cent of them gained employment at the end of their programme, despite limited job opportunities for this age group in the local area.

12. Progressive People currently has an action-plan which focuses on further extending its commitment to those with disabilities, whom the company is seeking to recruit to the advisory group. The company's new premises have a lift suitable for wheelchair users, and all facilities are easily accessible by those with disabilities. It has a very clear complaints procedure which is understood by trainees. However, there had been no complaints recorded at the time of inspection.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 1**

13. All trainees at Progressive People undertake an initial assessment, which is tailored to meet individual requirements and abilities. One member of staff is qualified to administer and interpret psychometric tests. Both staff members are qualified in careers guidance and one holds a certificate in counselling. Each trainee receives a high level of personal guidance and support. This is facilitated by the high staff-to-trainee ratio. The grade awarded by inspectors is higher than that proposed by the company.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ comprehensive and effective initial assessment
- ◆ individual training plans developed from assessment results
- ◆ frequent and comprehensive progress reviews
- ◆ high levels of personal guidance and support to achieve goals
- ◆ strong peer-group support
- ◆ well-structured and documented support
- ◆ staff effectively meet the needs of trainees with learning difficulties

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ inspectors identified no significant weaknesses

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*Some trainees need extra help to succeed in work placements. Most are not accustomed to regular routines and find the*

14. There is a range of initial assessment activities, selected and adapted to suit

each trainee. Tests are well administered in a non-threatening way, and the results are used to negotiate training plans. These are clear, comprehensive and realistic. Both staff members are committed to providing trainees with sufficient support to enable them to achieve their milestones and personal goals, and the support given is fully recorded. The support focuses on encouraging independence, and care is taken to ensure that trainees are actively involved in decision-making and learn to accept responsibility. During the first few days of the programme, trainees are allocated a partner to provide peer support. This system works well, as there is a strong team spirit among trainees. Progress reviews are regular and are effective and comprehensive. Realistic targets are set, and trainees are motivated by the challenges provided. The two staff are experienced in delivering training for those with learning difficulties and meet their needs successfully. Both staff members are qualified in careers guidance. There are weekly sessions during which trainees develop job-search skills and explore possibilities for employment. The company has an excellent range of resources and training materials to support this work. There are effective links with job centre staff, and local vacancies are promoted to trainees. All trainees visit the job centre each week, accompanied by a staff member, to look for suitable job vacancies.

## Management of training

## Grade 1

15. Management of Progressive People is carried out by the two directors. They also deliver the training programme. They are supported by part-time associate staff who are used occasionally, when additional staff cover is required. Management practice and working arrangements are appropriate to the size and specialised nature of the organisation. There is a strategic plan which provides a framework within which the company can grow. Individual responsibilities are clearly documented and understood. Effective long-term working relationships exist with work-placement providers and referral agencies. The advisory and health and safety committee supports the organisation and monitors performance and quality of training on a regular basis. The self-assessment report accurately reflected the strengths found by inspectors, and the weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection. The inspection grade is higher than that of the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ organisational values and goals understood by external agencies
- ◆ highly developed internal and external communications
- ◆ organisational targets are set and met
- ◆ effective network of support agencies and employers
- ◆ sound management information systems are used to inform decision-making
- ◆ good management of work placements

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poorly documented work-placement activities

16. The two directors of Progressive People take full responsibility for the delivery of the training and the organisation and management of the work-experience element of the programme. Training is monitored closely and adapted to meet trainees' needs. The directors are in regular contact with part-time associate trainers. There is an effective computer-based information system, providing accurate information on all aspects of the company's work. Information is updated regularly and reported to the advisory committee which meets quarterly. This informs the target-setting and decision-making processes which are successfully carried out.

17. Staffing procedures reflect good practice in equal opportunities. There is a staff-development programme which, for part-time staff, is not formally recorded. This is because the frequency of part-time staff use is low. They work for a local college, and Progressive People ensures that the ongoing development which they receive there equips them to deliver training session effectively. There are very clear job descriptions and lines of responsibility for the two staff members. They are effectively deployed, and their experience and qualifications are taken into consideration.

18. The organisation has extremely strong links with employers and other external organisations. Progressive People's values and goals are fully understood and supported by all. Training provided in the workplace is closely matched to individual action-plans. Work-placement activities are closely monitored and evaluated. However, this happens verbally, and there is little documentary evidence of the process.

## **Quality assurance**

## **Grade 2**

19. Progressive People meets the external quality standards of the awarding bodies and the requirements of the CCTE. There is a quality assurance policy and regular internal audits are undertaken. The organisation has recently developed a formal quality assurance manual of procedures and work instructions. The company obtains regular feedback from trainees and employers and uses it to improve the quality of training. This evaluation includes all training sessions. The inspection grade is higher than that proposed by the company, as some weaknesses had been addressed by the time of inspection.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ regular internal audits lead to improving performance
- ◆ training sessions' reviews have led to improvements in training
- ◆ rigorous internal verification systems
- ◆ actions for improvement clearly identified and implemented
- ◆ quality assurance arrangements are fully understood and implemented by employers

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ procedures and work instruction lack clear lines of responsibility
- ◆ part-time staff have limited access to work instructions

20. Progressive People has a systematic and well-planned approach to assuring the quality of its systems and procedures. Regular internal audits are carried out, non-compliance is clearly documented and remedial action is taken. The organisation consistently meets the requirements of the CCTE and, subsequently, has been identified as a low-risk provider. All training sessions are evaluated by trainees and reviewed by staff on a weekly basis. This review informs future session planning, in terms of training methods, resources and time allocations for activities. The achievements and destinations of trainees are monitored and used to inform decision-making. The directors are both qualified internal verifiers, and the internal verification system is rigorous and robust. Progressive People has a positive approach to self-assessment. The self-assessment report supplied for inspection was detailed and comprehensive. Judgements made were based on sound evidence and accurately reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. Action had been taken to remedy the weaknesses identified.

21. Employers and work-placement supervisors have a clear understanding of the quality assurance systems and follow the procedures. The quality procedures and work instructions recently developed cover a range of key activities. There are, however, no clear lines of responsibility for some of the instructions, and part-time staff have limited access to the quality manual and procedures. At the time of inspection, there was no long-term evidence to confirm that the quality assurance system is robust.