



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 1998

Nottingham Hairdressing Training Agency

SUMMARY

Nottingham Hairdressing Training Agency offers high-quality training in hairdressing. Trainees also take NVQs in customer service. All training is delivered by the company and within work placements. Training sessions are well planned and well delivered, and achievement is effectively tracked. There are good relationships between employers and company staff, but co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is inconsistent. Many new systems have been developed, but it is too soon to evaluate their effectiveness.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Hair & beauty	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality trainee support
- ◆ training well planned and well delivered
- ◆ open-access policy
- ◆ effective use of management information
- ◆ pleasant, well-resourced environment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills underdeveloped
- ◆ little assessment in the workplace

INTRODUCTION

1. Nottingham Hairdressing Training Agency (NHTA) is a privately owned company, with two directors who manage the company. One has prime responsibility for administration and finance, the other for training and development. The company was formed in 1983 and has grown to become the largest TEC-funded training provider in this occupational sector in the Greater Nottingham Training & Enterprise Council (GNTEC) area. The company has a purpose-built training facility, approximately one mile from Nottingham city centre, as well as a commercial salon and training academy in the city centre.
2. In addition to offering hairdressing at NVQ levels 1 to 3, the company incorporates customer service qualifications into its programmes. It is also an approved centre for training and assessment qualifications.
3. The company employs 10 full- and 11 part-time staff, most of whom are trainers at the centre. At the time of inspection, NHTA had 197 trainees and 120 work-placement employers. Training takes place at the centre, at the commercial salon and academy, and within salon work placements.
4. Greater Nottingham covers an area of 84 square miles and has a population of approximately 637,000. Unemployment rates in the area are 5.8 per cent, compared with the national average of 5.1 per cent. Within the population as a whole, people from ethnic minority groups represent 5.8 per cent of the population. This increases to 7.4 per cent for school leavers. The number of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 37.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 53 per cent, for 1997.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. NHTA produced its first self-assessment report in July 1998, in response to external inspection. The self-assessment report was accurate in its proposed grades, although it failed to recognise all the company's strengths and weaknesses.

6. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 14 days at NHTA in August 1998. Inspectors interviewed 30 trainees, 12 employers and observed 12 training sessions. They met company staff and TEC representatives. Documents examined included trainees' portfolios of assessment evidence, contract documents, audit reports, records of trainees' reviews, individual training plans, reviews and minutes of meetings.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Hair & Beauty

Grade 2

7. There are 197 trainees in hairdressing. Four are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at NVQ level 1, 155 at NVQ level 2 and 38 at NVQ level 3. Ninety-two trainees are modern apprentices and the others are on various traineeship programmes. All NVQ level 2 trainees attend off-the-job training at the company's centre. This consists of one day each fortnight, and the training covers both practical and theoretical aspects. The rest of their time is spent in employment in salons where they are visited regularly by a training co-ordinator who offers pastoral support and assesses progress. All trainees have the opportunity to work towards an additional qualification, in customer service at NVQ level 2. The modern apprentices at NVQ level 3 attend off-the-job training at the company's commercial premises on a fortnightly basis. Most assessment is carried out off the job, supported by employers' witness testimonies and other work-based evidence. The self-assessment report identified both strengths and weaknesses. Some additional strengths and weaknesses were found and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ stimulating training sessions
- ◆ excellent short-term action-planning
- ◆ effective trainee achievement tracking systems
- ◆ well-staffed and well-equipped training centre

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ key skills are underdeveloped
- ◆ missed opportunities for work-based assessment

8. Training is well planned and frequently reviewed. It is varied and interesting and includes trainees' participation and discussion. Teaching is of a high quality to small groups of trainees. Each trainee's personal co-ordinator assists the trainer in training sessions. They are able to support the trainer in teaching practical skills and, therefore, this allows for individual coaching and support, short-term action-planning and review of previous targets. Additional sessions for supporting trainees are also available. These work particularly well for those who start after the rest of the group, those requiring extra help and poor attenders. Trainers, assessors and co-ordinators form a strong team to help trainees to progress towards achievement. They are exceptionally well qualified to deliver the training: many hold teaching qualifications. Systems recording trainees' progress are well documented and frequently monitored. Employers are made aware of trainees' progress and are encouraged to support trainees with further workplace training.

9. The robust strategy for internal verification procedures includes monitoring of assessor practice across customer service and hairdressing. Although some employers wish to become involved, currently, little assessment occurs in the workplace. There is some use of witness testimony to confirm trainees' work-based activity, but few employers hold assessor qualifications, and those who do are not always involved in assessment. This results in the loss of assessment opportunities for trainees at work. NVQ achievement rates are high in both hairdressing and customer service, and trainees can progress to higher levels. Trainees have received a Duke of Edinburgh Award and City & Guilds Silver Awards for their achievement.

10. Key skills are still under development – they are not yet integrated into the vocational training and are not being assessed. The first group of modern apprentices is due to complete its programme within a few months, and, although some work has been done to identify the key skills evidence, no assessment has yet taken place. The company has employed an external consultant to carry out staff training in the delivery and assessment of key skills in a vocational context.

11. NVQ achievement rates are high, at 74 per cent. This represents an improvement of 24 per cent since 1996-97 and reflects the inclusion in 1997-98 of customer service NVQs.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

12. The organisation has an equal opportunities policy, which was last reviewed in 1996. The policy is given to trainees and employers. The company monitors statistics relating to gender, ethnicity and disability throughout the programme. The strengths listed in the self-assessment report were confirmed during inspection, but some are standard practice, rather than real strengths. Other strengths were identified by inspectors. There were no weaknesses identified during self-assessment. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ active recruitment strategy
- ◆ open-access policy practised
- ◆ strategies in place to increase minority ethnic representation among trainees
- ◆ trainees understand equal opportunities issues

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor knowledge of equal opportunities
- ◆ ineffective monitoring of employers on equal opportunities
- ◆ no routine use made of equal opportunities monitoring statistics

13. NHTA uses a variety of methods to recruit trainees. Placement officers attend careers conventions at local schools, and run a stand at the annual careers conventions. They maintain close links with the careers service, and place regular advertisements in the local press. Equal opportunities statements are included in all advertising and publicity materials. The company operates an open-recruitment policy. It accepts any trainee for whom a work placement can be found, and placement officers make strenuous efforts to find suitable salons for all candidates.

14. The organisation has made efforts to increase minority ethnic participation, targeting local schools with a high representation of pupils from minority ethnic groups and becoming involved in local projects to mentor displaced young people from such groups. The proportion of minority ethnic trainees within the company has increased from 2.5 per cent in 1995-96 to 4.1 per cent. This compares with 5.6 per cent in the local geographical area. The proportion of male trainees on NHTA's programmes is good, at 7.6 per cent, since hairdressing is traditionally a predominantly female occupation. Although the company is easily able to access and monitor these statistics from the trainee database, the company's staff are not

familiar with them and do not use them routinely.

15. The organisation has an equal opportunities policy which is explained to trainees at induction. The policy is also shown to employers, who are asked to sign a statement expressing their understanding of, and commitment to, equality of opportunity. Trainees have a good understanding of equal opportunities and are able to give clear and accurate explanations about what it means to them. Employers, however, are unable to describe NHTA's equal opportunities policy and do not regard it as relevant to them. The company does not monitor or review employers' policy or practice with regard to equal opportunities.

Trainee support

Grade 2

16. NHTA's employees have clear job roles which identify their responsibilities with regard to trainee support. Procedures are in place to ensure that all trainees are individually interviewed before joining the schemes offered by NHTA. There is an induction programme, entry testing on basic skills and careers guidance, although arrangements for counselling on completion of programme are informal. Training co-ordinators review trainees' progress regularly. Inspectors were able to confirm most of the strengths in the self-assessment report. In addition, they identified further strengths and weaknesses not contained in that report. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality promotional materials
- ◆ well-structured initial interviews
- ◆ comprehensive induction
- ◆ well-documented trainee progress reviews
- ◆ trainee support roles clearly identified

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ no formal progression guidance

17. The promotional materials used by NHTA are comprehensive, informative and interesting. They are written in such a way as to encourage trainees to take a career in hairdressing and to understand the opportunities open to them. They also identify additional activities such as competitions and awards.

18. There are excellent procedures to arrange placement interviews. Trainees and salons are well informed, and interview progress is tracked on a computer database.

Trainees identify the type of salon in which they wish to train. The matching of trainees to salons is effective, owing to the placement officers' salon knowledge.

19. The induction programme is well structured and meaningful to trainees. It is delivered over two half days, and all activities are linked to hairdressing. This is a major factor in ensuring that trainees remember their induction sessions. However, for trainees who join mid way through a programme, induction can be less thorough. The induction programme does not include initial assessment to determine key skills requirements. Although one member of staff is qualified to assess prior learning and experience, this is not systematically used to help trainees to achieve.

20. Each group of trainees is allocated to a staff team, comprising a trainer and co-ordinator. They work effectively together to monitor trainees' progress. They also provide additional support for individual trainees in the training centre. Initial training plans are standard, and, as additional needs are identified, plans are adapted to address them. Some trainees decline the additional support offered, and, in these cases, trainees' achievements are adversely affected. When the training co-ordinators visit salon placements, they inform employers of trainees' progress. Emergency visits are arranged when problems arise. Review documents are thorough and cover all aspects of trainees' performance. Trainees and employers are positive about the support given. There is good liaison between staff and trainees, using formal and informal communications methods, with standardised procedures and documents encouraging the recording of decisions. Although trainees are asked to complete an evaluation form at the end of their programme, there are no formal structures in place to discuss the choices open to them.

Management of training

Grade 2

21. The company has a clear staffing and management structure. There have recently been changes to key personnel. The new operations and quality manager is replacing the current, informal appraisal system with a more formal and documented procedure. Hairdressing training has recently been supplemented by customer service NVQs, which have increased trainees' achievement rates. Most of the strengths listed in the self-assessment report were validated by inspectors, but some of them are normal contractual practice, rather than strengths. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective use of management information
- ◆ efficient systems for internal communication
- ◆ staff consulted on operational issues
- ◆ accurate, current data on trainees
- ◆ staff and trainees' achievements celebrated in displays in the reception area

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no formal appraisals during the past year
- ◆ some administrative systems not audited

22. The company has a comprehensive management information system which is used to both generate data about trainees and improve efficiency. For example, it is used to calculate trainees' review dates and to remind training co-ordinators when reviews are due. Training co-ordinators have recently been taught to use the system to log data about trainees for whom they are responsible. This has improved their effectiveness and saved administration time. Data about trainees' achievements and destinations are accurate and up to date.

23. There is a variety of formal and informal communication systems in the company. One system enables trainers to log practical issues which require the attention of managers or administrators. Other documentation is completed after trainee reviews, and allows training co-ordinators to tell managers about potential problems, using a coding system to denote urgency. Mechanisms for staff consultation are also in place. Regular, minuted team meetings provide a formal means for discussion. In addition, the company's directors operate an open-door policy, encouraging employees to share ideas and problems in a less formal way. Employees welcome this. Directors also meet staff to discuss their professional development in an informal way. However, a more formal and documented appraisal system, linked to staff development, was introduced only in the week immediately preceding inspection. This is not yet fully operational and is too new for its effectiveness to be accurately evaluated.

24. Employers recognise the professionalism of the company and the frequency of its communication. However, some administrative functions, for example telephone answering and the recording of messages, are not monitored or evaluated. Trainees and staff's achievements are prominently and attractively displayed on a noticeboard in NHTA's reception area. This provides a record of individual and group success, and is a source of pride to those involved in the organisation.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

25. The company has recently employed a quality assurance manager who, at the time of inspection, had been in post for three weeks. Quality assurance procedures are comprehensive. External verifier reports meet awarding bodies' requirements. The company seeks regular feedback on its training from trainees, but is not as effective in monitoring the opinions of employers. The self-assessment report accurately identified the company's weaknesses. Many of the strengths were normal practice and inspectors awarded the same grade as that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ results of trainee surveys evaluated
- ◆ lesson plans are evaluated and amended
- ◆ rigorous monitoring of achievement in hairdressing

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic evaluation or updating of procedures
- ◆ inconsistent use by employers of trainees' action-plans

26. The company has a detailed procedures manual in which systems are clearly described. However, some date back to 1993 and have not been reviewed or evaluated. This manual is the system by which staff access information on systems, including updates and changes to systems. The newly appointed quality assurance manager has devised a quality implementation plan, and some initiatives have already been activated. Two examples are an amended internal verification system and a different format for minuting meetings and recording action points.

27. The system for delivery of training is standardised and has been developed by the team of tutors and co-ordinators. The resulting materials used for training have been tested, evaluated and refined and are now of a high quality. They are clearly structured and easily understood by trainees, who enjoy working with them. Delivery methods are regularly reviewed and are changed where necessary. Staff discuss the effectiveness of each learning session, agree on amendments and change lesson plans accordingly. The end result is a consistent and clearly structured approach to off-the-job training.

28. Trainees' progress is tracked using a detailed and well-documented system. Short-term targets are set, and employers are notified. However, the system relies on trainees delivering this information to employers, which is not always effective. Although the company has plans to rectify this by posting the documents, no action has yet been taken. The purpose of these short-term targets is to encourage employers to complement the off-the-job training in the workplace. Even when they receive the information, they do not always act on it, and training opportunities are missed.