



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1999

REINSPECTION OCTOBER 2000

Charter Training Services Ltd

SUMMARY

Charter Training Services Ltd offers satisfactory training in management and professional, and retailing and customer service, with supportive workplace supervisors but little assessment in the workplace. Training in business administration is good, and trainees benefit from well-equipped information-technology workstations. Trainees have a clear understanding of equality of opportunity, and receive good pastoral support. Quality assurance policies and procedures are complex and not accessible to staff, but trainees' views on the quality of training are sought and discussed. At the time of the first inspection, management of training was unsatisfactory, especially regarding communications between training centres. Management of training was reinspected 16 months later. Communication within the company is now very effective and the company benefits from strong leadership. Management information is now collected and analysed, but insufficient use is made of the findings.

As a result of the reinspection of Charter Training Services Ltd, the original published report text for management of training has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the inspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Management & professional	3
Business administration	2
Retailing & customer service	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	3

REINSPECTION	
Management of training	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high standard of portfolios in management and professional
- ◆ comprehensive information-technology resources
- ◆ well-planned on- and off-the-job training in retailing and customer service
- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ rigorous internal verification processes
- ◆ effective internal communication
- ◆ strong leadership

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no theory training in management and professional
- ◆ insufficient workplace assessment in retailing and customer service



- ◆ no monitoring of ethnicity and disability data
- ◆ insufficient use made of management information
- ◆ quality assurance policies and procedures not understood by all staff

INTRODUCTION

1. Charter Training Services Ltd (Charter) was set up in 1989 and is based in Macclesfield. It has satellite centres in Warrington, Stoke-on-Trent, Chester, Crewe and Altrincham. At the time of the first inspection there were 42 staff and 274 trainees. There are now 50 staff and 243 trainees, including 136 modern apprentices, 19 national trainees, three trainees on other government funded youth training programmes, 68 adult trainees and 17 New Deal clients. Charter contracts with the following training and enterprise councils (TECs): Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral (CEWTEC), Manchester, South and East Cheshire, Staffordshire, CELTEC (the TEC for North Wales) and North and Mid Cheshire, the latter being the co-ordinating TEC for inspection. The organisation has contracts for work-based training for adults, modern apprenticeships, youth training, vocational training and national traineeships. It offers national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in management and professional, business administration and retailing and customer service. It also offers key skills training and assessment. Off-the-job training takes place in Charter's training centres.

2. With a total population close to 6.5 million, and a working-age population of just under four million, the Northwest of England is the second most populous region in the UK. In 1997, total employment stood at 2.4 million while the unemployment rate stood at 4.7 per cent of the workforce, compared with a national average of 5.1 per cent. At the time of the reinspection, unemployment in the region stood at 4.4 per cent compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent. Seventy-four per cent of employment is in the service sector compared with 19 per cent in manufacturing. The main areas of employment in the region are banking and financial services, which are particularly strong in Cheshire and Greater Manchester, agriculture, chemical and pharmaceutical manufacturing and the utilities.

3. The region has one of the highest proportions of individuals with no recognised qualifications at 2 to 3 per cent above the national average. The region is below the average in terms of degree or equivalent qualifications. More women than men have no qualifications and fewer women than men of working age have degrees or equivalent qualifications. Figures from the autumn 1997 Labour Force Survey show that the proportion of the workforce qualified to NVQ level 3 or above ranges from 41 per cent in Greater Manchester to 46 per cent in Cheshire.

4. The proportion of minority ethnic groups in Manchester is 7.3 per cent, in the CEWTEC and South and East Cheshire regions it is 1 per cent, in Staffordshire it is 1.7 per cent, and in North and Mid Cheshire it is 1.1 per cent.

5. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Cheshire, Halton, Warrington, Wirral and Manchester was 53 per cent, 33.8 per cent, 48.4 per cent, 45.3 per cent and 28.7 per cent respectively, compared with the national



average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, there were improvements to the figures in all of these areas. In Cheshire, Halton, Warrington, Wirral and Manchester the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more GCSEs was 54.5 per cent, 37.3 per cent, 49.7 per cent, 46.9 per cent and 30.2 per cent respectively, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. Charter's quality assurance manager produced the self-assessment report in preparation for the first inspection in January 1999, and a revised version in February. The same manager produced the company's annual self-assessment report in March 2000. This was submitted to inspectors before the reinspection, along with the company's updated action plan. All staff were consulted and their views were included in the self-assessment report. Trainees were also asked to comment on the company's strengths and weaknesses. By the time of the reinspection in October 2000, progress had been made in addressing some of the weaknesses identified by the company. Inspectors agreed with the grade given by the company for management of training in its self-assessment report.

7. For the first inspection, a team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days based at North and Mid Cheshire TEC's premises. They interviewed 49 trainees. Twelve interviews were conducted with off-the-job training staff and 20 with off-the-job management staff. Inspectors visited 19 workplaces and met with 12 supervisors and employers. Thirty-six trainees' files and 26 portfolios were reviewed. Other documents reviewed included contracts with the TECs, internal and external verifiers' reports, health and safety and equal opportunities policies, assessment reports, quality assurance and operating manuals, meeting minutes, staff development records, marketing material and monitoring data. Inspectors observed four training sessions, all of which were awarded a grade 2.

8. Two inspectors spent a total of six days with the company in October 2000. During the reinspection they visited all of the company's sites, where they interviewed all branch managers and eight staff. Two senior managers were interviewed at the company's head office. Inspectors reviewed documents held by the company during their visits both to the head office and to the branches.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Management & professional

Grade 3

9. Charter currently has nine trainees who are all modern apprentices, in this occupational area. The scale of the provision is small and strategies for training and assessment are at an early stage of implementation. There were two trainees in 1996-97; this number rose to 11 in 1998-99. Two major organisations, one engineering firm and a car dealership, employ trainees. Trainees are well motivated and aware of progression routes and opportunities. All receive an induction, which includes health and safety, equal opportunities and the NVQ and modern apprentice frameworks. Initial assessment includes the use of a skill scan, which is an initial assessment to identify any previously acquired learning or skills. Charter's staff carry out visits to workplaces. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and also identified

additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support from workplace line managers and provider staff
- ◆ high standard of portfolios
- ◆ excellent working relationships between on- and off-the-job staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little assessment in the workplace
- ◆ poor integration of key skills
- ◆ no planned theory training

10. The training environments experienced by trainees are of a high standard and offer opportunities for their personal development and enable them to gain experience of their chosen occupation. They are given day-to-day instruction on the job using appropriate tasks. Trainees are well supported by Charter and benefit from monthly visits by assessors and easy access to additional support if required. Employers are supportive of the training programme. Most employers set aside time within the working week for trainees to build their portfolios. One employer has appointed a senior manager as a workplace mentor for one group of trainees. Portfolios are of a good standard. Although a number are at an early stage of unit completion, use is made of work-based evidence directly related to targets agreed on during the monthly review process.

11. Relationships between staff from Charter and employers are very good. This benefits trainees who share in an effective partnership with employers and provider's staff. These three parties contribute to the review process and to the setting and monitoring of both realistic and challenging targets. There is little assessment at work. Given the supportive working environments, many opportunities for assessment in the workplace are currently being missed.

12. Key skills are being addressed as additional, rather than integral, to the training. The integration and matching of key skills to the vocational content of the qualification are poor. No initial assessment of key skills has yet taken place. Awareness and understanding of key skills among trainees is also poor. Charter's staff are undergoing training in key skills, but the impact of this on the training programme is not yet apparent.

13. Charter has effective formal methods for testing whether trainees have adequate understanding of the theoretical aspects of their vocational programmes. However, inadequate supplies of reference materials at training centres inhibits trainees' ability to strengthen their theoretical knowledge, as does the absence of a clear plan to provide theoretical knowledge.

14. While actual numbers of trainees are small, they all complete their programmes and all achieve their qualifications. So far, three trainees have completed their individual training plans.

Business administration

Grade 2

14. Charter has 139 trainees working towards NVQ levels 2, 3 and 4 in administration, 45 in using information technology at levels 2 and 3 and 48 in accounting at levels 2 and 3. All modern apprentices and national trainees are already employed and their companies contact Charter to provide training. Adults are referred by the job centre, or enrol under their own volition, onto the 16-week in-house training scheme. Occupational assessment is carried out at some centres at induction. Assessors are occupationally experienced to develop trainee's skills, knowledge and understanding. In 1998-99, 73 per cent of youth trainees completed their training programme, all achieving an NVQ in the business administration sector. Eighty-eight per cent of the adult trainees completed their programmes, with 58 per cent gaining a level 2 qualification and 25 per cent securing employment. There are 12 New Deal clients who are each following the full-time education and employment option, with four undertaking training in administration, three in accounting and five in the use of information technology at level 2. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good, clear system for cross-referencing evidence for key skills
- ◆ comprehensive information-technology resources
- ◆ high proportion of work-based evidence in portfolios
- ◆ good retention of adult trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some trainees unaware of target qualifications
- ◆ some training plans not updated

15. Trainees' progress toward their qualifications and their personal development are regularly reviewed. Work-based evidence of their competence, gained from activities performed in the course of each individual's daily work, is scrutinised by assessors. Trainees are given positive and helpful feedback and guidance on identifying opportunities for collection of further evidence. Tasks and timescales are agreed on with each trainee and recorded on an assessment plan. Evidence-gathering also occurs in the training centres, where good use is made of job-search facilities and training and actual employment applications. Qualified staff are able to match key skills directly from evidence used in the vocational areas and they set work-related projects to cover any gaps. This minimises the production of

necessary evidence and provides a real context for the trainees learning key skills. These practices meet the awarding body's requirements.

16. Each centre has modern, well-equipped workstations and provides access to software packages currently used in industry and commerce. Charter employs experienced work supervisors in each centre and a mobile information technology expert who is easily accessible to trainees for specialist advice. Demanding and achievable targets for completion of qualifications are set. When trainees achieve their goals earlier than planned, they are offered the opportunity to learn other, more sophisticated, information technology packages. Training, both on and off the job, is of a satisfactory standard.

17. Some trainees are unfamiliar with their individual training plans and are unaware of the qualifications they must achieve to complete their programmes. The individual training plans are not always updated to reflect the trainees' current rate of progress as units are achieved or reviews take place. Many trainees' portfolios do not contain a copy of the NVQ standards. Tracking sheets of trainee's progress are not completed until there is enough evidence to claim all of the units in the qualification.

18. Trainees are working in offices in a variety of high-tech environments including retail outlets, manufacturing companies, professional offices, property developers and banking. The working environments are diverse. Charter ensures that training and assessment are creatively designed according to each trainee's situation. In many cases, New Deal clients are achieving more than two units of an NVQ of achievement at level 2 and one has completed a full NVQ at level 2. All 12 trainees are still on programme.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

19. There are 19 modern apprentices currently working towards NVQs in customer service; 12 trainees at level 2 and seven trainees at level 3. This is a new programme to Charter begun in 1998 and to date, one trainee has achieved level 2 and progressed onto level 3. Modern apprentices are employed in a range of companies including a plumbing merchants, a commercial car-exhaust supplier and an engineering company. Trainees join the programme either as a result of recommendation by an employer, or personal recommendation. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that indicated in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good support from employers
- ◆ well-planned on-the-job training
- ◆ highly motivated trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor organisation of portfolios
- ◆ insufficient workplace assessment
- ◆ little off-the-job training

20. The on-the-job training programme is effective and trainees gain valuable experience of their chosen career. There are, well-recorded monthly reviews of trainees' progress. Employers are included in this process and their involvement, combined with regular visits from the assessor, helps to maintain the trainees' motivation. The process of regularly setting and monitoring targets with the employer and trainees effectively increases their understanding of the qualification.

21. The quality of the evidence in the trainees' portfolios is good. Trainees are well supported by their employers and are encouraged to take further qualifications to enhance their job skills. One company has increased the number of modern apprentices it takes from four to 20 since the programme was introduced in October 1998.

22. Most training on the job is provided on a one-to-one basis at work as a result of detailed planning. Portfolios contain copies of action plans arising from reviews. These action plans ensure that the trainee is aware of what is required at each stage of the programme.

23. Although assessors visit trainees regularly, at least every three weeks, much of the time is taken up reviewing the trainee's progress and advising on portfolio building. There are few direct observations by assessors of training at work; work-based supervisors' witness reports form most of the evidence in the portfolio. The lack of observation in the workplace is impeding progress. Each trainee has two portfolios which they keep, one containing the standards of the qualification, and the other containing evidence that the trainee collects. This is confusing for the trainees and prevents them from easily matching evidence to performance criteria. There is little formal off-the-job teaching of theory, although when it occurs it is effective.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

24. Charter has an equal opportunities policy for staff and trainees. This is regularly updated and refers to current legislation, including the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The company also has a separate policy for bullying and harassment and a grievance procedure. Organisations which provide placements or employ Charter's trainees are required to have their own equal opportunities policy, or accept the conditions of Charter's policy. Charter aims to operate an 'open door' policy of recruitment, so does not discriminate in any way during

selection of trainees. Charter employs 42 people, 28 of whom are women and 14 men. It currently collects statistical data relating to gender only. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good understanding of equality of opportunity issues among trainees
- ◆ trainees have same rights and responsibilities as staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ equal opportunities statements not included in all marketing materials
- ◆ no monitoring of ethnicity and disability data

25. Trainees are able to explain how aspects of inequality could affect them and their peer group. Systems at the training centre are organised to be fair to all. For example, there is a booking system which ensures that everyone, including staff, has equal access to computers, no-one can use the computers for longer than two hours at a time. Questionnaires requesting feedback from trainees on the quality of training consistently indicate that trainees' levels of self-confidence rise as they progress. A contract of rights and responsibilities, and a dress code, are agreed on at the outset of training, giving specific expectations of behaviour, support and progress, which are agreed on by all concerned. All centre staff, management and trainees treat each other with respect and as equals. Employers' implementation of equal opportunities is monitored during trainees' review visits, when trainees have the opportunity to report any concerns.

26. Learning aids are provided or adapted to the needs of some trainees'. For example, enlarged screens or Braille keyboards are provided for trainees with impaired vision, and a special keyboard was installed for a trainee with one arm. Most centres are inaccessible to wheelchair users and present problems to those with mobility difficulties. This is for a variety of reasons, such as narrow doorways, stairs, no provision of lavatories for the disabled. Some centres are accessible. Assessors are scheduled to visit people with such difficulties, either at work or in their homes.

27. Charter does not adequately analyse its surrounding community area, nor its actual or potential clientele. There are no plans to attract trainees from minority ethnic groups or under-represented groups to widen the range of trainees. Advertising and information distributed by the provider frequently does not include the equality of opportunity statements.

Trainee support

Grade 2

28. Charter endeavours to provide training for all applicants or, if more appropriate, refers them to a more suitable training organisation. Initial interviews are formulated to identify trainees' aspirations and potential or existing skills and

to match these to local needs. This leads to the creation of individual training plans which are used to record agreed target qualifications and timescales. All trainees attend group or one-to-one induction which covers NVQs, health and safety and equality of opportunity, as well as their rights and responsibilities and an explanation of the organisation. Progress reviews are carried out every four, eight or 12 weeks according to programme requirements. These are written up on the review form and recorded on the training plan. Support given is also recorded on the review form. The grade awarded by inspectors is higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good pastoral support
- ◆ excellent progression opportunities
- ◆ trainees referred to specialist agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ trainees not fully aware of NVQ process
- ◆ missed opportunities for accreditation of prior learning and achievement
- ◆ many business administration trainees have no initial assessment

29. A supportive environment is provided for trainees at all centres, where there is regular support available from friendly and approachable staff. The atmosphere in each of the centres is one of quiet industry and learning.

30. Employers ensure there is sufficient time available for NVQ work and to allow for regular visits by the assessor. Portfolio-building sessions are carried out at the trainees' pace and on a one-to-one basis with a tutor from Charter. Trainees are encouraged and supported so that they may progress to higher qualifications or job promotion after they have completed their set programme. Specialist help is sought for trainees who have a wide range of training or assessment needs and, if necessary, they are transferred to alternative agencies dealing with, for example, sight or hearing problems. The advice and paperwork provided by Charter are useful to trainees. Both the provider and the employers make many efforts to minimise barriers to learning. These efforts include flexible working times for some trainees and extended opening hours twice a week at all centres. Employers have a positive and serious attitude to work-based training. Support identified and provided for trainees is fully recorded in review documents.

GOOD PRACTICE

As a result of Charter's contract with CELTEC (the TEC for North Wales), Charter's assessor comes into regular contact with Welsh-speaking employers and trainees. In order to facilitate better working relationships with these parties, the assessor has started to learn the Welsh language.

31. Many trainees are not familiar with, or fully understand, the assessment and appeals procedures. Initial assessment is not systematically carried out on all trainees and many business administration trainees are not adequately assessed at the start of their programmes. Although Charter uses a skill scan to determine trainees' prior learning and it has an accreditation of prior learning policy and procedure, trainees' previous skills and experience are not systematically

identified or used towards their qualifications. Four members of staff are qualified to accredit prior learning but staff are not fully aware of the appropriate processes.

Management of training

Grade 3

32. The company's managing director is based in Macclesfield. Each of the other five training centres has a centre manager. There are 50 staff. A director of studies at board level operates between training centres. The company has achieved the Investors in People Standard. It has appropriate staffing policies and procedures and staff appraisals are held annually.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ poor communications and co-ordination between branches
- ◆ poor analysis of data
- ◆ shortage of work placements for adult trainees

33. Significant progress has been made in rectifying all of these weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the company in the self-assessment report prepared for the reinspection.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective internal communication
- ◆ strong leadership
- ◆ well-managed staff development process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ fragmented action-planning at branch level
- ◆ insufficient use of management information

34. One of the original weaknesses related to poor communication and co-ordination between branches. Charter Training has since worked hard to rectify this weakness through a range of initiatives and developments. One such development is a system whereby key information is communicated from head office to the branches using compact disks. These disks contain all of the company's procedures, training resources and documents. This system is being continually developed and updated disks are sent to the branches regularly. Staff must sign a receipt to confirm that they have received the update. Staff and managers are enthusiastic about this system and have found it extremely useful.

35. Good practice is now identified and shared. Communication has also been improved through planned meetings, which ensure information can be shared effectively with staff throughout the organisation. There are monthly managers' meetings, which are attended by the senior management team and all branch managers. Branch managers then hold meetings with their staff, to share the

information from the managers' meetings. In addition there are internal verifiers' meetings and informal meetings involving a range of staff. Minutes are usually taken at meetings and distributed to staff and managers. This is not always done, however, and in some cases the action points arising from meetings are not given specific targets. There are some instances where minor areas for action are repeated from one set of minutes to the next, over a six month period, resulting in some issues being unresolved for long periods of time.

36. Charter recently held a series of assessors' workshops, which were attended by assessors from different branches. The workshops are intended to enable assessors to share good practice. Although this is a relatively recent development, Charter plans to repeat the exercise in other areas. Communication between the branches and head office is encouraged, for example through the piloting of new procedures and documents. New initiatives are introduced in a planned and controlled way, with a specific branch nominated to conduct a pilot exercise and to provide feedback on its effectiveness before any changes are made at the other branches. Staff have a good understanding of who to contact within the company for support or information and readily contact staff at other branches.

37. There is very strong leadership within Charter, both at senior management team and branch levels. Senior managers make regular and frequent visits to the training centres. Staff viewed them as approachable and supportive. Staff confidently put forward ideas to senior managers, knowing that they will be given consideration. There is good teamwork within the branches and staff are very supportive of each other. The managers are knowledgeable about the local communities which are served by their branch, and have a good understanding of contractual requirements and their performance against contracts with the TECs. Good links have been established with a range of external organisations at both head office and branch levels. Branch managers have established strong links with key staff in organisations such as job centres, the careers service, libraries and local community groups. Similarly, senior managers have established links with relevant training organisations at a strategic level.

38. Charter has an effective staff development process, which is established and well managed. Staff appraisals are held annually, which enables the branch manager and staff members to identify any training needs and plan how these will be met. Plans are reviewed and approved at head office, and incorporated into the company's staff development plan, which is updated regularly. Staff have access to an extensive range of training activities at Charter and they readily take up these opportunities. Staff have a particularly good understanding of the training which they are currently undertaking, when they are aiming to complete it, how it will help them in their job role and which activities they might undertake in the future. However, staff are not given copies of the appraisal form and have no personal record of the targets which they have agreed. In some cases, the comments made on the appraisal form about staff performance lack specific detail, and there is no written action agreed to address issues highlighted. Staff have a good understanding of their roles and their short-term targets, which are set and reviewed at the staff meetings. Some staff's roles are currently evolving and,

although all staff have job descriptions, these do not always accurately reflect the duties and responsibilities being carried out.

39. One of the original weaknesses concerned a lack of work placements for adult trainees. Branch managers have made some progress in this area by establishing links with existing employers, holding open days and sending literature to potential work-placement providers. The work of one branch in this area has resulted in more trainees gaining employment, although the number of work placements has not increased. Charter has secured some funding from the TEC for a consultancy project to explore methods of securing work placements. It is anticipated that the project will be completed by the end of 2000.

40. Charter uses many forms of action-planning. It has an annual business plan, which is discussed at managers' meetings. The minutes of these meetings often contain specific action points for managers. The appraisal process at branch manager level identifies objectives for each individual manager. The budget at branch level is also used to enable managers to identify priorities and take action accordingly. The company's action plan arising from inspection contains many specific actions for named staff, with clearly defined target dates. In addition to this, managers also have their own personal objectives for the branch, which are not recorded. However, the planning process is fragmented. There is no single planning mechanism at branch level which covers the objectives and targets arising from the broad range of management processes and activities. Managers produce a monthly activity report for head office, which provides information on their progress against targets, staffing issues and other key areas of activity. However, this report addresses past activity rather than planning for future action. Managers focus on performance against contracts with the TECs. The company's action plan is under-used as a way of making improvements within the organisation.

41. Charter has worked hard to rectify the original weakness involving poor analysis of data. There have been some significant improvements made to the quantity and quality of information available to the branches. Branch managers now receive an analysis of equal opportunities data for all the centres and for the company as a whole, although this information is not used to guide management decisions. Staff at the head office have analysed trainees' feedback and communicated the findings to all branches. Branches have been given the raw data, a summary by branch and for the company, bar charts reflecting these summaries and an analysis of the key points by branch and for the company as a whole. The branches have taken little action in response to all of this information. The information provided to the branches has not been tailored for the recipients or for a particular purpose. Managers are unsure what they should do with this type of information and are overwhelmed by the volume of information which they receive. Managers have not yet reviewed what information is required by the branches, in what format, or for what purpose.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

42. Charter satisfies a number of external quality standards. It is an approved supplier for six TECs. It also meets the requirements of its awarding bodies. Feedback on the quality of training is regularly sought from trainees. There is a designated quality assurance manager who reports directly to the managing director. The provider's activities are supported by a series of cross-referenced operating procedure manuals. The quality assurance manager undertakes regular internal audits. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ robust internal-verification processes
- ◆ effective and open self-assessment process
- ◆ feedback from trainees regularly sought

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unwieldy operating procedures
- ◆ quality assurance policies and procedures not understood by all staff
- ◆ internal audit action plans lack rigour

43. Charter has good sampling plans for internal verification which ensure that all centres are visited regularly. Each of the six centres is visited monthly and all assessors are sampled by observation and through random selection of portfolios. All portfolios with completed units are seen, so, by the time all units have been completed, an NVQ portfolio will have been seen at least three times.

44. All staff, and some trainees, were involved in the self-assessment process and the report is open and critical. Trainees' feedback is systematically sought through the use of questionnaires at the start and end of programmes, and a mid-programme questionnaire is being piloted. Charter's staff at each branch attend trainees' meetings the main purpose of which is discussion of ways to improve training. They also provide support unobtrusively.

45. Charter's quality assurance procedures are not reviewed and lack control. They are designed to cover all of the company's operations, but are too complex. Staff find them difficult to use. They are given little training or guidance as new procedures are issued and they sometimes fail to understand or embrace them. Occasionally, poor control over documents allows branch staff to modify procedures without consultation.

46. The quality assurance manager carries out the Internal audit each year. Audit findings are recorded, and plans to address them drawn up, but action is sporadic and localised. Quality assurance does not feature as an agenda item at senior



managers' meetings. Managers attend these meetings, but not the quality assurance manager.