



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION OCTOBER 2000

The Training Partnership

SUMMARY

Hairdressing trainees In the Training Partnership receive varied and effective training which broadens their experience and develops high levels of competence. Retailing provision is satisfactory. Trainees progress well through their qualification, despite receiving little structured training. Trainees now have a good understanding of equal opportunities, but equal opportunities data are still not used effectively to improve provision. There is satisfactory support for trainees, who benefit from frequent workplace visits. Trainees' individual training plans, however, lack detail, and are not consistently updated. The company has effective systems for staff appraisal and development, and have devised a good staff induction since the first inspection. Key skills were underdeveloped when the first inspection took place, but are now satisfactory. The management of subcontracted provision has improved, and no longer represents an area of weakness. Internal verification continues to be thorough and well organised in retailing, and is now satisfactory in hairdressing.

As a result of the reinspection of The Training Partnership, the original published report text for equal opportunities, trainee support and management of training has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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 reinspection. 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 |
|------------------------------|-------|
| Retailing & customer service | 3 |
| Hair & beauty | 2 |

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

| REINSPECTION | GRADE |
|------------------------|-------|
| Equal opportunities | 3 |
| Trainee support | 3 |
| Management of training | 2 |

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good progress made by all retail trainees
- ◆ hairdressing training exceeds NVQ requirements
- ◆ frequent, flexible workplace visits
- ◆ thorough staff appraisal and induction
- ◆ comprehensive internal verification procedure in retailing



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little structured training in retailing
- ◆ underdeveloped use of equal opportunities data
- ◆ ineffective use of some individual training plans

INTRODUCTION

1. The Training Partnership (the Partnership) is a privately run company which began trading in April 1998. When the first inspection took place, it had a contract with Staffordshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to offer national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in hairdressing, retailing and customer service and business administration. By the time of reinspection, the contract had extended to include NVQs in care. The company had 42 trainees following government-funded programmes at the time of the first inspection, consisting of eight national trainees and 11 modern apprentices taking hairdressing qualifications, and five national trainees and 13 modern apprentices following retail programmes. A further five trainees were taking NVQs in business administration. This sector was not inspected because of its small size. When the reinspection took place, the Partnership had 51 government-funded trainees in total. Eight advanced modern apprentices were taking hairdressing qualifications, with nine foundation modern apprentices and 22 advanced modern apprentices following programmes in retailing. There were six advanced modern apprentices taking NVQs in business administration. Six modern apprentices had begun care programmes, three of them at foundation level and three at advanced level. All of these trainees are employed. In addition to its TEC-funded work, the company undertakes a range of other activities. It provides training for trainees funded by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) through several further education colleges, acts as a subcontractor to several training providers in northeast England, and undertakes private recruitment training and consultancy work for local companies. The company has considerably extended this aspect of its work since the first inspection. The Training Partnership was set up by its two partners. Initially employing one internal verification manager and one assessor, its staff group numbered 26 at the time of the first inspection, and has now increased to 44. Since the first inspection, the internal verification manager has changed roles, and now manages all aspects of training, under the title of operations manager. Three regional team leaders, a training and development team leader, a lead internal verifier and an assistant internal verifier have been appointed. There are 28 assessors, an increase of eight since the first inspection, and seven administrators.

2. The Partnership moved from its location in Newcastle-under-Lyme shortly after the first inspection, and is now based in new premises approximately two miles away. These comprise administrative offices, one large and one small training room. The company has an arrangement with the local college, situated just across the road, to use training and tutorial rooms there as and when required.

3. Traditionally, Staffordshire, particularly North Staffordshire, has had a specialised local economy primarily based around ceramics, steel and coal. Although the steel and coal mining industries have declined significantly, the ceramics industry remains a major global producer with a worldwide market. However, it is currently facing difficulties including reducing employment levels, caused by increasing imports and the threat of new technologies. In line with the

West Midlands, Staffordshire has a predominance of employment in the manufacturing sector, which accounts for approximately 30 per cent of jobs in the region. Newcastle-under-Lyme is one of three Staffordshire districts which experienced an economic decline in excess of the national average in 1998-99.

4. In 1998, the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Staffordshire was 46 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 1999, the percentage achievement had risen to 48.1 per cent in Staffordshire, and 47.9 per cent nationally. In 1998, 69 per cent of young people continued in full-time education, with 15 per cent entering work-based training, and 5 per cent finding employment without training. The proportion of young people continuing in full-time education fell to 62 per cent in 1999. Eleven per cent entered work-based training or found employment. Four per cent of the population in Staffordshire were unemployed compared with the national average for England of 3.8 per cent. By the time of reinspection, the unemployment rate in Staffordshire had fallen to 2.8 per cent, compared with a fall nationally in October 2000 to 3.4 per cent. When the first inspection took place, in November 1999, just under 2 per cent of the population were from minority ethnic groups compared with the UK figure of 5.5 per cent. The regional unemployment ratio was the same at the time of reinspection, but the national ratio had risen to 6.2 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The Partnership's first self-assessment report was written in by the company's two partners, in consultation with the rest of the staff team. Key members of staff attended workshops supported by Staffordshire TEC, and held briefing meetings with colleagues. The views of trainees and employers were gathered through questionnaires, and one-to-one discussion. In preparation for reinspection, the Partnership's management team sought the views of trainees, employers and company staff, paying particular attention to the issues identified as weaknesses during the first inspection. The two partners, in consultation with the operations manager, the key skills co-ordinator and the equal opportunities mentor, wrote a report for the reinspection, detailing the progress made by the company in the areas to be reinspected, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and giving grades. This report was discussed at a full staff meeting.

6. For the first inspection, three inspectors spent a total of nine days at the company's premises in Newcastle-under-Lyme in November 1999. They visited two subcontractors and seven work placements, and interviewed 13 trainees, four work-based supervisors and seven members of the Partnership staff. They observed two training sessions, one graded 3 and one 2, and four assessments. They examined a range of documents, including contractual information, policies and procedures, trainees' portfolios and files, and information about staff recruitment, appraisal and development.

7. Reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors, who spent a total of six days at the Partnership's premises in October 2000. They visited four workplaces and interviewed eight trainees, four workplace supervisors and two members of the subcontractor's staff. They held 10 interviews with members of the Partnership's staff, and examined a range of documents, including contractual information, policies and procedures, minutes of meetings and staff records.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

8. There are 18 trainees in this occupational area, 13 modern apprentices and five national trainees. All are employed in large retailers in Staffordshire, working on the shop floor in various departments. Assessment is carried out in the workplace by the Partnership's assessors, who visit trainees weekly at pre-arranged times. All the assessors come from retailing backgrounds and have appropriate assessor qualifications. Off-the-job training has recently started. The company has not had government-funded trainees long enough for achievement data to be available. Retention of trainees on programme stands at 76 per cent. The self-assessment report provided a brief, factual introduction to the occupational area, and claimed a

number of strengths and some weaknesses. Although these indicated that the company had reflected thoroughly on this aspect of provision, inspectors did not agree with all of them, and identified additional strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than the one given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective short-term target-setting
- ◆ good progress made by all trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor involvement by employers in NVQ
- ◆ little structured training

9. Retail trainees are all employed by well-known retailers and have the opportunity to gain experience in a good range of departments. Many complete a customer service NVQ at level 2 before progressing to a retail operations NVQ at level 3 and some trainees achieve customer service NVQ level 2 as an additional qualification. Assessors from the Partnership visit the trainees once a week, on a set day. The trainees value this routine and look forward to these regular visits. The assessors are reliable and always keep their appointments. Every trainee sees their assessor for about 30 minutes. This can be longer if the assessor is carrying out a shop-floor observation. At the end of the visit, assessors set an action plan for the trainee. This provides trainees with a valuable focus as it details exactly what evidence they have to gather for the next visit, as well as recording the dates on which elements of the NVQ have been achieved and signed off. The action plan is recorded on a carbonated sheet. One copy is given to the trainee and one copy is returned to the office so that the Partnership's central records can be updated and levels of achievement or slow progress identified. Weekly reports on trainees' progress are also sent to each store manager.

10. Working relationships between assessors and trainees are good. The frequency of assessors' visits motivates trainees to gather evidence on a regular basis. It enables them to maintain their enthusiasm and their interest in completing their programmes. Trainees are very clear about their progress and understand which units they are currently working towards. They are working through their qualifications systematically, and at a rate of progress which is good for the retail sector. Trainees understand how to gather supporting evidence and are encouraged by their assessors to match their own evidence against the standards in the NVQ. Some are able to do this without guidance, but others find it difficult to understand the process. They are given additional help by their assessors. Retail assessors carry out detailed observations. These are clearly referenced in the trainees' portfolios. Three trainees working for one employer have had four out of the five customer service units signed off, without the assessor carrying out any workplace observations. This is not, however, normal practice within the organisation.

11. Trainees work in very busy retail environments which are often short staffed. Employers see the NVQ as a valuable motivator for their staff, but most do not allow trainees any time during their working day, other than the weekly assessment visits, to work towards their qualifications. Trainees have to gather evidence, and build their portfolios in their own time. This puts them under considerable pressure. The Partnership does not negotiate with employers to allow trainees time to work towards their NVQ.

12. The Partnership has provided two risk assessment workshops for trainees over the past 12 months. These have taken place in the evening but have been poorly attended. They are designed to increase the trainees' awareness of health and safety. There is currently no other off-the-job training in the areas of customer service and retailing. Training programmes are being written to cover issues such as display work, and the legal aspects of retailing. However, these have not yet been completed, and it is too early to say how effective they will be. Trainees are provided with support material, written by the Partnership to develop their understanding of the theoretical aspects of retailing. A series of projects linked to the retail NVQ are also available. However, the projects have to be completed in the trainees' own time. There is no link between theoretical work undertaken for the NVQ and the on-the-job training. Trainees do not feel that completing the NVQ has enabled them to receive any training additional to that provided to all employees in their stores. Some feel that the NVQ has not increased their level of knowledge or skill.

Hairdressing

Grade 2

13. The Training Partnership subcontracts its hairdressing provision to two other training providers. One is a large national training organisation, whose trainees are based with one local employer. The other is a local company, which is newly contracted, and closely managed by the Partnership. Trainees with this company work in one of two salons. There are 19 trainees currently on programme, of whom 11 are national trainees and eight are modern apprentices. All are working towards an NVQ at either level 2 or level 3. All training takes place on-the-job, and work-based assessors carry out all assessments. Two work-based assessors have assessor awards; the other four are working towards these qualifications. One assessor has a verifier qualification, and another is working towards this. Trainees have not been on programme long enough for achievement data to have been gathered. Retention of trainees stands at 78 per cent. All staff are occupationally qualified and experienced. No self-assessment report was written for hairdressing as the company was unaware of the need to self-assess subcontracted provision. The provider did not propose a grade for this aspect of provision.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of occupational competence of trainees
- ◆ effective work-based assessments
- ◆ on-the-job training far in excess of NVQ requirements

GOOD PRACTICE

One modern apprentice is closely involved in training part-time staff who only work on a Saturday. She is responsible for organising training sessions lasting two hours a week, to ensure that these part-time employees understand, and can carry out, gowning, shampooing, conditioning and health and safety. The trainee is responsible for organising the Saturday employees work rota, and for deciding when they are capable of working on the shop floor. She uses evidence from these activities to build her level 3 portfolio.

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some assessments carried out by unqualified assessors

14. Hairdressing trainees quickly gain occupational competence, and have the opportunity to develop their skills to a high level. This is mainly owing to all training being done on the job by highly skilled staff, and to all assessment being work-based. Many of those on level 2 NVQ programmes are operating as stylists and some have their own group of clients. Much of the level 2 work carried out by trainees consists of advanced cutting and colouring techniques normally expected from a trainee following a level 3 programme. Some trainees are entered for colour trophy competitions sponsored by nationally recognised colour manufacturers. The skills required for this type of work are complex and demand level 3 competence, and significant experience, in colouring techniques. Trainees are also given responsibility for the monitoring and training of level 1 trainees. Some trainees employed in one of the salons use both their own company's web page and other hairdressing information available on the Internet to obtain information for their portfolios, which are of a very high standard.

GOOD PRACTICE

One level 2 modern apprentice is part of the Irish World Cup hairdressing Team. Sponsored by her employer, she attended the finals of the World Cup, in Paris, and gained the highest individual marks in the team event. The models used for the competition were photographed, and have been used to produce large displays which are prominently placed in the salon. Photographs from the event, accompanied by a written account, form part of the trainee's portfolio. The event has proved an effective motivator and a source of pride, both for the trainee concerned, and for others in the salon.

15. Trainees receive regular, well-managed assessments carried out on the job by work-based assessors. Trainees employed in one of the salons spend a period of four weeks with each stylist/assessor. This develops their experience, and means that they benefit from exposure to a range of methods. It also gives them access to a varied client group, which gives them the opportunity to cover many aspects of the NVQ range. The fact that assessors are based in the workplace ensures that assessment opportunities are both frequent and readily available. Trainees fully understand the assessment process and they decide when they feel ready to be assessed. Assessments are planned jointly by the trainee and the assessor and an appropriate model is either provided by the salon or brought in by the trainee. All client treatments carried out during an assessment are charged at a reduced rate to increase and maintain the availability of models for the trainees. Work-based assessors also carry out in-depth observation of the trainees working in the salon. These observations are comprehensively recorded and cross-referenced to the NVQ requirements. Assessors are thoroughly conversant with the requirements of the NVQ, and observations efficiently encompass many aspects of competencies required by the awarding body. Other appropriate methods of assessment are used, including witness testimonies which record any incidental achievement, such as when trainees are dealing with clients' requests. Each trainee has a large form on which the results of assessments are recorded, and achievement monitored. These forms are displayed for all trainees to see. This sharing of achievement motivates

the trainees to progress and promotes a healthy sense of competition. One-employer gives a financial incentive to encourage progress and an increase in wages is made each time a trainee achieves 20 completed assessments. All trainees make fast progress on the training programme. In one subcontractor, reviews are carried out on the premises by the Partnership's staff. In the other, they are done by the subcontractor's staff. In both instances, reviews are carried out satisfactorily.

16. Some work-based assessment is carried out by trainers who are still working towards their assessor qualifications. Two are also working towards their level 3 NVQ in hairdressing. The assessments are signed off by these assessors and are not countersigned by a qualified person. Although the trainers are occupationally skilled and are assessing fairly and rigorously, their unqualified assessor status means that their judgements are technically invalid. Internal verification of the hairdressing programme has failed to identify this issue. The external verifier's report from last year commented on the need for assessments by unqualified people to be countersigned. Neither the salon nor the Partnership have addressed this in the 14 months since the external verifiers visit.

17. Trainees are encouraged to take part in activities which are outside and above the requirements of the NVQ qualification. They are involved in a range of competition work, including European and national competitions, and the apprentice of the year award. They receive specialist training in theatrical hairdressing by a visiting wig-dressing specialist. Trainees are also sent on specialist courses provided by leading hairdressing operators. The cost of the courses is subsidised by the employer. One of the hairdressing employers is a trichologist, an expert in diseases of hair and the scalp. The skills involved in this area of work are shared with the trainees and many of them are competent in carrying out the treatments and product applications connected to this specialism.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

18. The company has a named person with responsibility for equal opportunities. She took on this role just before the first inspection, and has since then had her job description rewritten to include her equal opportunities role. She now has the title of equal opportunities mentor and reports directly to one of the partners. Before the first inspection, she devised a new equal opportunities policy for the company. This was reviewed and updated in August 2000, and new procedures were written to accompany it. The policy is given to all trainees during their induction, and to employers and subcontractors. There is a separate complaints procedure. There are 51 trainees, 17 of them men. One trainee is from a minority ethnic group. At just under 2 per cent, this proportion is consistent with minority ethnic representation locally. There are no trainees on programme with a physical disability. Data about the gender, ethnicity and disability of staff and trainees are collected. The

company prepared an update for reinspection, which outlines its progress over the past year with regard to equal opportunities, and accurately identifies one strength. The two other strengths claimed in the report represent no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with one of the weaknesses cited by the Partnership. The other is not couched as a weakness, but describes actions being undertaken by the company with regard to equal opportunities.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ no promotion of equal opportunities

19. The second and third of these weaknesses have been successfully rectified since the first inspection. Although there have been improvements in the company's analysis of equal opportunities data, this remains an area of weakness.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear, comprehensive range of equal opportunities policies
- ◆ very clear understanding of equal opportunities by trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic use of equal opportunities data

20. The Partnership has six equal opportunities policies which relate specifically to gender, race, employment, age, disability and sexual orientation. There is an integrated equal opportunities policy which summarises the six individual policies. The company also has a policy on harassment and a grievance and appeals procedure. All these policies were in place at the time of the first inspection. Over the past year, they have been thoroughly reviewed and updated, and the equal opportunities mentor has supplemented them with procedures which clearly outline employers' roles and responsibilities with regard to equal opportunities. All of the Partnership's staff have copies of these policies. Trainees receive a shortened version of the equal opportunities at the induction to their programme.

21. At the time of the first inspection, the monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace was poor. Employers were not given a copy of the Partnership's equal opportunities policy, and there was no system for checking trainees' understanding of equal opportunities, nor for ensuring that they were protected from discrimination. Employers are now sent a copy of the Partnership's equal opportunities policies and a copy of the employer's policy is requested in return. An extract from the company's equal opportunities policy is included in the Partnership's guide for employers, which was written recently. Trainees have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities with regard to equal opportunities. The company now checks their understanding through the use of

questionnaires, which use open questions, asking trainees to explain what equal opportunities means to them. The experience of trainees in the workplace is monitored at progress review meetings, during which equal opportunities are specifically discussed. The equal opportunities mentor has visited most trainees at work and established a confidential telephone help line. She has written to all trainees to tell them about the help line. So far, there have been two calls, one directly from a trainee, and the other through an assessor.

22. The company collects data on equal opportunities on a monthly basis. Since the first inspection, this process has been extended to include hairdressing trainees. The information is detailed and the recording is systematic. At the time of the first inspection, these data were neither analysed, nor used to improve provision. The data are now analysed, but are still not used in decision-making. Although they are discussed at staff meetings, and used to extend staff awareness of equal opportunities, the data are not yet utilised systematically or effectively to analyse the Partnership's performance with regard to equal opportunities. Over the past two years the company has recruited more than 20 new staff. Applications are made to the company by letter and curriculum vitae. There is no application form to ensure that candidates are all considered using the same criteria. However, since the first inspection, the Partnership has improved its procedure for interviewing staff. Standard questions are now asked of applicants, and the answers graded using a predetermined scale. Separate equal opportunities monitoring forms are sent to applicants but these have not been analysed.

23. The Partnership did not promote equal opportunities at the time of the first inspection, either within the company, in its marketing, or externally. This weakness has now been satisfactorily rectified. Equal opportunities are now a standard item on the agenda of the fortnightly team meetings. The equal opportunities mentor advises staff on how to ensure that they promote equality of opportunity within their occupational area to increase the number of men and those from minority ethnic groups. She provided training on this issue during one staff meeting. The company has recently established contact with the training department of one of the major retailers where trainees are employed, to explore ideas for improving recruitment from minority ethnic groups. All new marketing materials used by the Partnership have to be scrutinised by key people within the company to ensure that they comply with the company's equal opportunities policies. The company still does not liaise with local community groups or place advertisements in newspapers and other publications that are likely to be read by members of other ethnic groups.

24. The company's new premises, a converted house on two floors, has poor wheelchair access. The company has an arrangement with the local college, situated just across the road, to use its premises for trainees with impaired mobility.

Trainee support

Grade 3

25. Most of the trainees who are recruited onto NVQ programmes are already in full-time employment. The Partnership recruits new trainees in the workplace through personal contacts and advertising posters placed on employers' notice boards. Trainees who are interested in achieving an NVQ are interviewed at work by one of the two partners, who examine each person's current job role and previous qualifications before deciding on the most appropriate programme for them. The company does not actively recruit within schools or the careers service, but a few trainees are referred by careers officers for 12-week 'taster' programmes. They attend an interview at the Partnership's premises. The company then tries to find suitable employment for them. Induction for employed trainees is provided at work by a senior member of the company's management team. Trainees sign an induction checklist to confirm that they have been given all the necessary information. Inspectors agreed with the strengths and weaknesses cited in the Partnership's update for reinspection.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no initial assessment of basic skills for subcontracted trainees
- ◆ no initial assessment of key skills
- ◆ unsystematic accreditation of trainees' prior learning
- ◆ some ineffective use of individual training plans

26. The company has successfully rectified the second and third of these weaknesses, but the first and fourth have not been satisfactorily resolved.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent, flexible workplace visits
- ◆ senior management involvement in trainees' reviews

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of formal initial assessment of basic skills in hairdressing
- ◆ some ineffective use of individual training plans

27. Induction for retail trainees is carried out on the job. For hairdressing trainees, induction is carried out at the subcontractors' premises. Induction is adequate to ensure that trainees recollect essential information. Trainees are visited weekly in the workplace by their assessor. Since the first inspection, useful record sheets have been introduced which detail what has been discussed during the visit, and clearly indicate the action points agreed between trainee and assessor. The visits provide trainees with effective support and give them confidence in their assessors. Trainees consider that the regular visits ensure that any problems they may encounter will be sorted out quickly and effectively. In addition, they have access to an emergency telephone number, which they can use if they need support

between visits. Trainees demonstrate a clear understanding of the appeals procedures, and know the format in which they should put a complaint in writing if they do not wish to discuss it personally with their assessor.

28. In addition to the regular workplace support which trainees get from their assessors, they receive formal reviews of their progress from a senior member of the company's staff. Most of these reviews are carried out every eight weeks, which is more frequently than required under the TEC contract. These reviews are used to discuss trainees' progress and highlight any problem areas. They are thorough and detailed, and give the trainee the opportunity to discuss any problems they may be experiencing. The fact that the reviews are carried out by one of the company's managers, rather than an assessor, makes a clear distinction between reviews and assessment visits. It also gives trainees, and employers, the message that the company sees reviews as an important part of the programme.

29. The Partnership has a system for initial assessment. This includes a basic skills assessment, a brief psychometric test and a skill scan. Since the first inspection, a satisfactory process for the initial assessment of trainees' key skills competence has been introduced. At the time of the first inspection, hairdressing trainees did not receive any initial assessment of their basic skills levels. This weakness has not been addressed. Although the subcontractor uses an appropriate key skills initial assessment, and observes trainees in an attempt to estimate whether they have any basic skills needs, this is not systematic, and remains inadequate.

30. The company has improved its practice with regard to the accreditation of trainees' prior achievements. Previously, prior qualifications were discussed at the initial interview and were sometimes recorded on the trainee's individual training plan, but were not always accredited. A more systematic approach has now been adopted, and a useful reminder assists assessors in identifying prior learning and qualifications.

31. At the time of the first inspection, individual training plans were not personalised to each trainee and they were all very similar. Since then, there has been some improvement in the use of individual training plans. These now include the specific learning objectives for each trainee, and outline the training required, and how this is to be provided. However, some individual training plans do not contain details of any additional support offered to trainees. This means that there is no clear record or overview of some trainees' situations. It is company policy not to give trainees copies of their individual training plans. Trainees do not recognise their individual training plans as important documents which provide a record of their specific programme, progress and needs.

Management of training

Grade 2

32. The company is run by two partners. It has grown considerably since the first inspection. The internal verification manager has taken the role of operations

manager, reporting to the partners. He is part of the management team. Three team leaders, a training and development co-ordinator and a lead internal verifier act as middle management, directing the activities of 28 assessors and seven administrators. All employees have a job description which details their role, and their lines of accountability. The company achieved the Investors in People Standard in October 1999. The report written for the reinspection outlines the changes made with regard to management of training since the first inspection, and claims four strengths. Inspectors agreed with two of these, and considered another to represent no more than contractual compliance. They did not agree with the fourth.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ lack of integration of key skills with vocational programme
- ◆ poor management of subcontracted provision in hairdressing
- ◆ failure of staff meetings to result in setting of clear targets
- ◆ inappropriate use of performance data

33. The first, second and fourth of these have been satisfactorily rectified by the Partnership. There have been some changes of practice with regard to the third, but it remains an area of weakness.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ staff very loyal to company values
- ◆ thorough staff appraisal and induction
- ◆ staff development effectively linked to business objectives

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some inconsistent recording of staff meetings

34. The Partnership's staff are enthusiastic about the company, and their role within it. All of them, including those employed only recently, are clear about the company's mission statement, and firmly support its values. They are proud to work for the company, and very positive about the opportunities and the level of support they receive. Although there have been recent, significant changes to the company's staffing structure, employees fully understand their own and each others' roles and responsibilities. They consider management to be open and approachable, and are keen both to adopt new ways of working and to contribute suggestions for improvement.

35. The Partnership has a comprehensive appraisal system. Employees are appraised three months after joining the company or changing roles within it, and annually after that. The process is thorough, and begins with a lengthy self-evaluation, followed by a discussion with a line manager about their performance,

progress and areas for development. Part of the appraisal involves the identification of staff training needs. These are used to influence the company's training plan, which is clear and coherent. The plan takes into account not only the results of staff appraisal, but also organisational needs and external requirements. It includes detailed timescales, and is effectively linked to the company's business objectives. Over the past year, the good arrangements for staff appraisal and development have been complemented by an extended and improved staff induction programme. The induction now lasts four weeks. It includes a structured introduction to the company and the new employee's work role and a lengthy period of mentoring, during which progress and immediate training needs are evaluated through regular progress reviews, the outcomes of which are recorded on action plans. New staff who have taken part in the revised induction are very positive about its thoroughness, enabling them to settle quickly into the company.

36. The first inspection identified a weakness with regard to the integration of key skills. The recently appointed key skills co-ordinator had just completed the key skills practitioner award, and another employee was working towards this. However, the company had been slow to introduce key skills. Key skills are now fully integrated into occupational qualifications. Three more members of staff have obtained the key skills practitioner award and another is working towards it. The key skills co-ordinator has held a series of informative key skills workshops for assessors and trainees, during which key skills requirements are clearly explained. The key skills co-ordinator visits modern apprentices in the workplace every eight weeks to support them with the gathering of key skills evidence. These visits are pre-planned with the assessor. They are well structured, effective and valued by trainees, who gain confidence and make good progress.

37. The Partnership subcontracts all of its hairdressing provision. At the time of the first inspection, it had subcontracting arrangements with three other training companies. There were formal contracts established with all three providers. However, although these clearly described financial arrangements, and referred to issues of TEC compliance, they did not lay down the Partnership's requirements for training, assessment and verification. The Partnership's monitoring of two of the subcontractors was judged during the first inspection to be inadequate. The subcontracting arrangement with these two companies was terminated early in the year 2000. Relationships with the third subcontractor were, and continue to be, much closer and more constructive. Some poor practice by this subcontractor with regard to assessment and verification had, although recognised by the Partnership, not been addressed at the time of the first inspection. With close support from the Partnership, it has now been eradicated. Although the formal contract still lacks detail, the relationship between the two companies is sufficiently positive and cordial to ensure effective monitoring.

38. The company collects a range of data about the performance of trainees and assessors. This has increased greatly in scope over the past year. At the time of the first inspection, the information collected allowed the Partnership to establish what percentage of their programme each trainee has achieved, and the number of completed portfolios for which each assessor is responsible. However, these data

were not used as a basis to influence good practice. Clear targets were not set, and staff were unsure of what was expected of them. Since then, the operations manager has implemented a new system for the evaluation of staff performance. He has established a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) covering assessment, workplace visits, administration and other functions related to training. Assessors are graded against the indicators on a regular basis, using a scale of one to five. They receive regular feedback on their performance, and those who receive an unsatisfactory grade are given constructive support to improve. The KPIs provide detailed evidence which informs employees' annual appraisals. Assessors have clear targets for the number of portfolios they are expected to put forward for internal verification each month. There is room for negotiation to accommodate the differing needs of trainees. Staff have responded very positively to the introduction of the KPIs, and value the impetus these give them to improve aspects of their work. They are able to cite examples of how the indicators have led directly to enhanced performance, and have, therefore, improved the experience of their trainees. The system is still relatively new, and is not yet fully established. Some KPIs have proved unsuitable and are being revised. Some staff at middle and senior management level are not yet covered by KPIs, and are not able to share the experience with their staff.

39. All staff participate in weekly team meetings, which are used for the discussion of operational matters, as well as issues such as assessment. Full staff meetings are held at the Partnership's headquarters each fortnight, and regional team meetings take place during the intervening week. Employees feel able to express their views freely and consider that the regular meetings keep them informed about the company's activities. The meetings are formal, and minutes are taken and distributed to participants. However, minutes do not always include clear action points or identify a timescale within which the issues raised should be addressed, nor do they identify the person responsible for carrying out the actions identified. Although each team meeting begins with a consideration of the previous week's discussion, it is not always clear what has been done as a result of previous decisions taken. Progress against the targets set in meetings is, therefore, hard to assess.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

40. Quality assurance within the organisation is led by the two partners, in conjunction with the internal verification manager. They have devised quality assurance procedures which cover a range of operational issues. These are made available to the staff whom they concern. The company is subject to external audit from Staffordshire TEC, and from the awarding bodies with which it contracts. It regularly evaluates the views of trainees. The self-assessment report relating to quality assurance accurately recognised some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors, although some of the strengths claimed represent compliance with contract. The company over-estimated its performance with regard to quality assurance, proposing a grade higher than that awarded by inspectors.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive internal verification procedures in retailing
- ◆ good use of trainees' evaluations to improve training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor internal verification in subcontracted provision
- ◆ immature quality assurance system
- ◆ overgenerous self-assessment

41. The company's managers hold strong views about quality assurance, which they describe as fundamental to the organisation. These views are freely shared with staff. A range of policies and procedures have been written. These cover issues such as internal verification, assessment, administration, and equal opportunities. However, they are not yet complete, and do not refer to all aspects of the company's activities. For example, the equal opportunities policy is not complemented by operating procedures to ensure adherence to it. An internal verification procedure is being written to accompany the internal verification policy, but it is not yet finished. Policies and procedures are distributed to staff to whom they apply, and are given to new staff during induction. However, there is no manual to provide an overview of quality assurance within the organisation. The company's quality assurance systems are immature and do not yet have a coherent quality assurance plan to ensure coverage of all aspects of the training the company provides, or to evaluate the effectiveness of individual aspects.

42. The Partnership's internal verification manager has developed a system for the internal verification of retailing training. This is thorough and effective. Comprehensive monitoring sheets ensure even coverage of units by both assessors and trainees. Feedback to assessors is detailed, and developmental. Internal verification issues are discussed during team meetings, and workshops are held to improve assessment practice. These are well received by assessors. Ten per cent of each portfolio is sampled during internal verification. In hairdressing, internal verification is carried out by the two providers to whom the training is subcontracted. In both cases, it is unsatisfactory. In one, the internal verifier is unsure how to proceed, and has not carried out any verification since the contract began four months ago. In the other, internal verification failed to identify the fact that unqualified assessors are signing-off assessments. The Partnership has shared the good internal verification practice developed in the retailing sector with one subcontractor, but is not doing so with the other.

43. The company regularly sends out questionnaires to gather the views of trainees. These have recently been re-designed on the basis of staff discussions, and allow for the collection both of statistical information, and of more detailed data. The questionnaires are analysed, and the results discussed in staff meetings. Where appropriate, they are used to improve the training. For example, analysis of recent questionnaires showed that trainees felt that they had insufficient time with their tutor. To address this, guidelines have been written to make clear to assessors

how much time they should spend with trainees, and to ensure that incidents where a trainee's working commitments interfere with an assessment visit are investigated. The questionnaire was also amended on the basis of feedback from trainees. Data on trainees' achievements and destinations are gathered, but because the company has been in existence for such a short time, it is too early for any significant analysis of this information to have taken place.

44. The Partnership's self-assessment report was written after detailed discussions with staff who contributed to the judgements made and to the grade proposed. The self-assessment process was regarded as a developmental one by the company. Although not formally incorporated into the company's quality assurance procedures, it has been used to improve training. The first version of the report contained actions for improvement, many of which had been undertaken by the time of inspection. The report provides a context for each of the areas discussed, and offers some judgements about the quality of provision. However, it lacks critical reflection, and most of the indicative grades are higher than those awarded on inspection.