



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 2000

Selcare Services

SUMMARY

Selcare Services offers good foundation-for-work training for long-term unemployed people. There are high achievement rates and trainees benefit from being placed with supportive employers which provide good on-the-job training. Although there are some missed opportunities for assessment, off-the-job training is well planned and meets trainees' needs. Induction is good and the organisation provides a high level of personal support. Employers make a determined effort to break down stereotypical images. There are strong internal and external lines of communication and the provision is well managed. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory, and include effective self-assessment and continuous improvement.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Foundation for work	2

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high achievement rates
- ◆ high-quality work placements
- ◆ good on- and off-the-job induction
- ◆ thorough trainee reviews
- ◆ well-established links with external agencies
- ◆ highly effective quality co-ordination of the NVQ programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of awareness of the training programme by employers
- ◆ weak initial assessment
- ◆ no clear strategy for equal opportunities
- ◆ inadequate training resources in some areas
- ◆ no overall quality assurance plan

INTRODUCTION

1. Selcare Services is a subsidiary of the English Churches Housing Group (ECHG) which in turn is a national housing association. The role of ECHG is to provide housing and support for people who need it. In the Greater Manchester area, ECHG owns and manages sheltered and supported housing. Selcare Services operate three training units in the Greater Manchester area. The Bolton unit has been operating since April 1997. The Rochdale unit at Heywood and the Gorton unit in Manchester were established in November 1999. Selcare Services has a services manager who is responsible to the manager of the Greater Manchester Business Unit. Day-to-day co-ordination of the three units is the responsibility of a project co-ordinator. Off-the-job training is provided at each of the three units. The organisation contracts with Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), and the Rochdale and the Bolton and Bury Chambers of Commerce for Training and Employment (CCTEs) for the provision of work-based learning for adults and full-time education and training (FTET) for New Deal clients. The Bolton and Bury CCTE is the co-ordinating TEC for the inspection. There are 54 trainees on adult foundation for work programmes, four business administration trainees at Rochdale on a work-based learning for adults programme and six New Deal clients at Manchester on the FTET option.

2. Bolton is on the northwestern, and Rochdale is on the northern edge of the Greater Manchester conurbation, which has a population of 2.5 million, including 273,000 in Bolton and 208,000 in Rochdale. Gorton is in Manchester itself. Many Rochdale-based trainees live in nearby Heywood and Middleton. Local industries there include manufacturing, textiles, engineering and distribution, and other service industries. In Manchester there has been a dramatic decline in engineering and manufacturing industries, while the service sector has seen rapid growth. In October 2000, the unemployment rate in Bolton, Rochdale and Manchester was 3.9, 4.3 and 4.4 per cent respectively, and higher than the average rate in Greater Manchester of 3.6 per cent, or the national rate of 3.4 per cent. The unemployment rate in the northwest region was 4.0 per cent. People from minority ethnic groups make up 8.3 per cent of Bolton's population, 11 per cent in Rochdale and 12.6 per cent in Manchester. The largest minority ethnic group comprises people of Asian origin. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers attaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 43 per cent in Bolton, 38.5 per cent in Rochdale and 30 per cent in Manchester, considerably lower than the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. Selcare produced its first self-assessment report in 1998. The report only covered Bolton at that time. Staff attended training days led by the TEC. The report was completed by the services manager in 1999 using a toolkit. A second self-assessment was carried out in 2000 involving the additional centres at Heywood and Gorton. Training staff were consulted and advice sought from an external training provider. Employers' views were also obtained before a report was produced in August 2000. The report failed to provide much description about the occupational and generic areas. Inspectors agreed with all the proposed grades.

4. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Selcare Services during November 2000. Inspectors interviewed 37 of the 54 trainees across the three centres, seven employers, six workplace supervisors and two subcontractors. They also held discussions with provider staff and representatives from the community education service and other external agencies. Inspectors looked at a range of documents including trainees' portfolios, trainees' records, company plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature, meeting notes and awarding body documents. Business administration was not inspected as there were so few trainees. Six instructional sessions in foundation for work were observed and the grade profile is shown below:

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Foundation for work	1	2	2	1		6
Total	1	2	2	1	0	6

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Foundation for work

Grade 2

5. There are 54 adult trainees following foundation-for-work programmes at three training units. Twenty-five are at Bolton, 20 at Heywood and nine at Gorton. Trainees work towards a range of achievement targets, known as milestones. These include the completion of projects, a good attendance record and the attendance at various short courses such as basic first aid, manual handling and control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH). Those trainees who are identified as requiring literacy and numeracy support work towards wordpower and numberpower qualifications at entry level and level 1. Trainees at Gorton also work towards NVQ qualifications in motor vehicle service and repair at levels 1 and 2. Trainees at Bolton and Heywood work towards one or more of the following NVQs: distributive operations level 1, cleaning building interiors level 1, retail operations level 2, and administration at levels 1 or 2. All trainees at

Bolton are found work placements after two weeks. Placements include local charity shops and offices, other shops and large distribution centres. Trainees at Gorton go into work placements after eight weeks. These placements include tyre and exhaust fitting centres and local garages. There are no trainees on placement at Heywood. Staff are occupationally competent in the areas they assess. Most staff hold assessing awards. Those who do not yet hold these awards are currently working towards them. Three staff are qualified internal verifiers. All staff at Bolton have qualifications in identifying trainees' learning needs. None of the Selcare staff are qualified basic skills tutors.

6. Selcare identified seven strengths and five weaknesses in its self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the two strengths relating to additional training opportunities and the quality of on- and off-the-job training and identified additional ones. Three proposed strengths and two weaknesses are reported in the generic areas. Inspectors agreed with the other weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high achievement rates
- ◆ good on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ good learning opportunities in workplaces
- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications achieved

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some missed opportunities for assessment
- ◆ some employers unaware of the training programme

7. Achievement rates are high. Since April 1998, over 75 per cent of trainees have either progressed to employment or attained all the targets set out in their training plans. There are good achievements of these milestones in all three centres. In two of the centres, trainees progress quickly into work placements. Over 90 per cent of these trainees stay in their work placements for at least four weeks.

8. There is a well-structured off-the-job training programme to prepare trainees for placement. This preparatory training is very effective in developing trainees' confidence, team working and communication skills. Training in motor vehicle skills includes a good mix of theory and practical sessions. There are frequent breaks and a good variety of training methods to ensure trainees' interest is maintained. A wide range of resources is available to support the teaching of basic skills at all centres and staff make good use of visits to local stores and shops to develop trainees' interpersonal skills. Work-placement providers provide good training and a wide range of opportunities for trainees to develop their work skills. In some cases, particularly in the motor vehicle work placements, trainees are trained to use specialist machines. In some work placements trainees are trained to

use packaging equipment and computer software which is designed for tracking parcel deliveries.

9. Selcare has developed a wide variety of work placements to meet the range of needs of trainees. Work placements include small retail outlets, charity shops and large chain stores. All are carefully selected by Selcare staff who carry out stringent health and safety checks prior to placing trainees. Staff talk to trainees in depth to identify their needs and choice of occupations. The trainees are then matched to work placements that can provide appropriate support and training. Trainees are helped by Selcare to prepare curricula vitae, which are subsequently forwarded to the work placements. Every work placement interviews trainees and in some cases provides a trial period for trainees to see if the work and the environment are suitable. In one training unit trainees are encouraged to identify suitable placements close to their homes. Selcare then make every effort to open new placements as requested by trainees. Many work placements provide uniforms or protective clothing, which identify trainees as members of staff rather than trainees on work placement. This is valued by trainees.

10. Trainees are given opportunities to complete additional qualifications. These qualifications are relevant to the training being undertaken and are aimed at improving the trainees' employability. The selection of the additional qualifications takes full account of the training environment in which the trainee is working. Trainees achieve qualifications in manual handling, COSHH awareness, telephone techniques, fork-lift truck driving, office safety, slinger/banksman, and first aid at work and basic hygiene.

11. There are some missed opportunities for assessment. Trainees working towards motor vehicle NVQs gather evidence from the workplace in the form of job sheets. These are not promptly assessed against the standards and trainees are uncertain of their progress through the award. There is an over-reliance on worksheet evidence in the assessment of wordpower and numberpower. Opportunities to assess naturally occurring activities undertaken in the training unit or the workplace are missed. In one training unit some evidence in the form of witness statements has been gathered but this evidence has not been assessed for at least three months after it was collected.

12. Some employers are not aware of the NVQ standards which the trainees are working towards. This lack of knowledge prevents them from planning an effective programme of work activity to meet the requirements of the award. The training in the workplace is planned to meet the needs of the employer rather than the specific requirements of the training programme. Employers have insufficient knowledge of the trainees' individual training plans and although they participate in trainees' reviews, they are not given copies of the short-term targets agreed at those reviews.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

13. The Selcare Services equal opportunity policy is contained within the English Churches Housing Group human resources manual. Grievance, harassment and complaints procedures reflect current legislation. A manual is distributed to centre managers and a copy is kept in each of the three training units. Reviews and revisions to the documents are distributed and discussed at network meetings. Trainees and employees receive a copy of the equal opportunities policy at their induction. The organisation promotes equal opportunities in its recruitment literature and advertisements carry an equal opportunities statement. Fifty-two trainees are men and 12 are women. Nine trainees have a disability and five are from minority ethnic groups. All trainees are either long-term unemployed, ex-offenders or have other significant barriers to employment. The three units are not modified or adapted to cater for trainees with severe mobility difficulties. Selcare aims to achieve a match with the demographic profile of the local area adjacent to each of its three sites. Employers are required to adopt and comply with the equal opportunities policy and sign to signify their commitment. Some equal opportunities data are collected. Some of the strengths identified by the provider relating to treatment of trainees were combined and additional ones regarding employers and new initiatives were found. Inspectors agreed with the proposed weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

For all employee recruitment to the organisation the front sheet of the application form is removed prior to shortlisting. This sheet contains personal details. This action ensures that applications are only assessed in terms of the job specification criteria. Internal applicants who have worked as volunteers are subjected to the normal application process, thereby ensuring jobs are gained solely on merit.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible training arrangements to assess needs of people from minority groups
- ◆ high awareness of equal opportunities issues by employers
- ◆ good range of equal opportunities initiatives

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no strategy for equal opportunities
- ◆ inadequate access for trainees with restricted mobility

14. Training programmes are managed in a flexible way to accommodate trainees' cultural or religious practices. Trainees may set their own hours, in liaison with their trainer, provided they adhere to the requirement of 30 hours a week. Trainers inform trainees that a quiet room is available for Muslims if they wish to pray. Trainers inculcate an atmosphere of tolerance of other people. Some trainees have learning difficulties. Some have other disabilities. Several employees have disabilities, and by their presence demonstrate to trainees that barriers to employment can be overcome. They act as role models to some trainees. Some trainees act as volunteers within the organisation. They help support other trainees.

This helps them develop their understanding of others' difficulties and disabilities. One trainee suffers from claustrophobia. Trainers re-arranged training rooms, and seating arrangements to ensure he was seated where he felt comfortable. Subcontractors are brought in to give English-language teaching and support to speakers of other languages.

15. Employers demonstrate a high awareness of and commitment to equal opportunities in the workplace. Trainees who progress to work placements are encouraged to participate in a variety of tasks within a challenging range of occupations. Employers accept and accommodate trainees with diverse needs. Training in the workplaces is well structured and designed to give trainees the maximum opportunity to develop employment skills. In all work placements employers ensure that barriers are not created which may prevent trainees moving into non-stereotypical roles. Male trainees are currently working in administrative posts and retail positions traditionally filled by females. Allowance is also made for trainees with a background of health problems. Arrangements are often made for trainees in warehouse placements to work on light duties to ensure confidence and self-esteem is maintained. Provider staff work closely with employers to ensure that they are supported with developing a positive approach to equal opportunities.

16. Selcare has recently undertaken a variety of initiatives to improve equality of opportunity within its provision. Through self-assessment it has recognised the need to modify the induction programme and is currently piloting a new style and format at one of the centres. The more interactive induction package ensures that equal opportunities has a high profile and is more memorable to the trainees. It also encompasses more than the awareness of basic equal opportunities issues. This is seen as more appropriate given the particularly vulnerable nature of some of Selcare's trainees. One of the centres is very active in carrying out market research and has identified a gender imbalance on one of its programmes. Follow-up work is continuing to address this issue. As part of the improvement plan equal opportunities has become a standard agenda item in all network and management meetings. A variety of issues have already been addressed through this initiative and sharing of good practice is beginning to occur. For example, some preparatory work has begun in redefining specific employee roles and responsibilities and a need for a more systematic and coherent approach to the whole area of equal opportunities has been identified.

17. There is no formal strategy or any action plan for monitoring and evaluating equal opportunities across the three units. This has led to individual units operating autonomously and in many examples issuing out-of-date equal opportunities policy statements. Provider staff are not routinely informed of local developments or trends. There is no evidence to suggest that targets for ethnic minorities or disability are set or achieved in any of the three areas. The organisation has few internal and external audits, and provides minimal staff training in current legislation. Equal opportunities is not explicitly referred to during trainee reviews and is often inferred rather than addressed openly. This is the only formal opportunity for trainees to discuss any concerns. On completion of induction there is no structured review of equal opportunities issues. The trainees are aware and

are informed about the complaints and appeal procedures, but some trainees do not understand their importance.

18. The buildings lack structural adjustments to accommodate some people with disabilities. There are no toilets for wheelchair users. All three training units have some access problems, such as narrow corridors, steps or stairs and differing floor levels. This has led to trainees with restricted mobility not being referred to some areas of work.

Trainee support

Grade 2

19. All trainees are referred to Selcare from the local jobcentres. All prospective trainees are interviewed and are given basic skills screening during the interview. Trainees receive an induction on their first day of training. An individual training plan and personal training plan are agreed during the first week. Additional support is given to prepare trainees to move onto placement. Trainees receive an induction into their work placements. Selcare staff visit trainees at work placements every two weeks and review their progress every four weeks. Trainees receive guidance and support with job search during the off-the-job training and on a drop-in basis when they are on work placement. The self-assessment report identified five strengths and three weaknesses. Inspectors confirmed two of the strengths, although both related to personal support. Two strengths are reported in foundation for work. An additional strength was identified. One of the weaknesses related to management of training and another to foundation for work. Inspectors confirmed the third weakness and identified two additional weaknesses. Inspectors awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough on- and off-the-job induction
- ◆ clear and effective advice, guidance and personal support
- ◆ highly effective review process
- ◆ wide celebration of trainee success

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak initial assessment
- ◆ some basic skills needs not addressed
- ◆ poor recording and monitoring of additional support

20. All trainees receive a thorough and comprehensive induction on the first day of training. The induction covers the history of Selcare, terms and conditions of the programme, health and safety, equal opportunities, complaints and grievance procedures, support available, the training course content and the NVQ appeals procedure. Trainees are given a detailed induction pack with written details of the

subjects covered. There is good reinforcement of the induction during the first week of training. On starting placement, trainees receive a thorough induction from the work-placement supervisor, which includes safe working practices and roles and responsibilities. Checklists are routinely used to monitor understanding of the induction process and its content on the part of trainees.

GOOD PRACTICE

In one case a trainee whose first language is French started on the motor vehicle programme. Staff identified difficulties with understanding terminology and arranged for the technical words to be translated into French. The trainee was able to understand the work better and progress through the NVQ more easily.

21. Trainees receive high levels of personal support. Clear advice is given about realistic outcomes from the programme. Prospective trainees wishing to undertake motor vehicle training are clearly informed that the course is not intended to enable them to become fully qualified mechanics but is aimed at giving them sufficient skills to take up employment within the motor vehicle sector. Good one-to-one support is given as required. Trainees are well prepared for interviews, and are provided with suitable clothes as necessary to improve presentation. Staff have a wide range of skills and experiences which enable them to give clear and objective advice to trainees, including welfare rights, housing, unemployment issues and in-work benefits. At the monthly staff meetings the progress and needs of each trainee are discussed and targeted support is agreed with the most appropriate member of staff. There is good support for job search. Trainees who leave the programme without a job are able to return to the training units for job-search support such as updating their curricula vitae, and access to newspapers and stationery. Staff have a good understanding and awareness of the local jobs market and use this to good effect in matching trainees to suitable vacancies.

22. There are regular and frequent progress reviews. Every four weeks trainers meet with trainees to discuss their progress. Where the trainee is on a work placement the workplace supervisor is fully involved in the review process. The review is comprehensive, often lasting for 45 minutes or more. The trainer checks trainees' progress against previous targets and identifies any changes to the personal training plan. The trainer clearly records the progress made since the last review, and the skills that have been learnt or developed, and identifies any barriers to achievement. Trainees, the reviewer and workplace supervisor all make comments on the review sheet and then sign to acknowledge the contents of the review. Targets are agreed although not all are systematically recorded.

23. The success of trainees is widely celebrated. There are many good examples of trainees who have succeeded in achieving their goals. Photographs are displayed within the training units to provide positive examples of the success of the programme. There are frequent formal presentations to trainees when they achieve milestones. Members of the subcontractor responsible for some of the certificated courses are invited to attend the training centres to present the awards. These ceremonies are regularly attended by the TEC and local work-placement representatives. The success of trainees is also celebrated at other award ceremonies, which are reported in the local press. In Gorton the trainee of the year competition is widely publicised. The prize is an opportunity to go rally driving for a day. This is very effective in motivating trainees and encouraging them to work hard.

24. Initial assessment is not consistent across the three units. Basic Skills Agency screening test is carried out but further assessment of basic skills fails accurately to

identify trainees' level of need. In Gorton trainees are required to do more than one screening test, which is unnecessary. Skills testing is carried out at Gorton but the results are not always used to determine the appropriate level of NVQ.

25. Most trainees have experienced significant periods of unemployment and lack motivation and confidence. For those trainees not targeted to achieve wordpower or numberpower there is little structured support to address basic skills needs such as improving spelling or punctuation. There are no staff appropriately qualified to give professional basic skills support.

26. Although Selcare provides a significant amount of additional support to their trainees there is poor recording of the support. Each trainee is often supported by a number of members of staff who each remember what support the trainees need, and what support they have had. There is no monitoring of the support given to determine its effectiveness. Selcare have acknowledged the weakness in this system and monthly case conferences are now held for staff to update each other as necessary.

Management of training

Grade 3

27. Staff recruited by Selcare Services are subject to the personnel policies and practices of the ECHG. As well as the three training units, Selcare has an office in Longsight in Manchester. This office is used predominately for staff training events and some of its non-TEC funded activities. Foundation-for-work training is provided at all three training units while the business administration programme is offered at the Heywood site. All New Deal clients are based at the Gorton centre. Assessment and verification of wordpower, numberpower and some other qualifications are subcontracted to local organisations. Training for the fork-lift truck operator's licence, COSHH training and manual handling courses are also subcontracted. The Selcare Service Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the three units and reports directly to the manager of the Greater Manchester Business Unit. Other staff employed by the organisation include a project co-ordinator, three project managers, four administrative staff and eight employment assessors/facilitators. The Heywood unit is currently staffed by a team of four including the project co-ordinator. This is approximately half of the number of staff at each of the other units. Selcare Services has a business plan, which comes from all three training units. The organisation has developed an action plan to address weaknesses in the management of training. Inspectors validated the strengths regarding communication links and considered the business-planning process to be normal practice. Inspectors agreed with the weakness about control of on-the-job training and use of data. They reported the other weaknesses in the generic aspect of trainee support. Inspectors identified additional strengths and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective internal lines of communication
- ◆ good staff appraisal and development
- ◆ well-established links with external agencies

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of accurate data to inform business decisions
- ◆ inadequate training resources in some areas
- ◆ weak control of on-the-job training activities
- ◆ insufficient staff at Heywood

28. Selcare Services operates from three training units in neighbouring TEC areas. Two of these units have been acquired in the last year and because of this the provider has established a good communications structure to ensure that information flows readily between staff. Formal weekly individual training unit meetings take place, which involve all staff, monitor performance against contract profiles, and provide a forum for discussion about trainees and their progress through their training. The results of these meetings are recorded and posted on notice boards. The services manager is provided with notes from these meetings. In addition there are monthly network meetings where training unit managers meet with key Selcare Services staff to discuss strategic issues such as staffing and funding bids. Many effective informal meetings take place in each of the units and this ensures that trainee issues are quickly raised and dealt with. The provider has recently introduced a monthly newsletter, which provides general information about training and other developments. This publication is copied to all staff who value the communication.

29. ECHG has strong links with key support agencies such as the probation service, Manchester prison visitor centre, and Cheshire victim liaison scheme. These links have been developed and extended to include relationships with a local prison's basic employability training programme. Other initiatives include a range of supported housing projects, which house mainly unemployed people in the three training unit areas. These positive linkages provide an opportunity for unemployed people to access training through Selcare's foundation-for-work programme. Selcare also make good use of the close relationship with community education centres, particularly in Bolton. A representative from the Bolton education centre visits Selcare regularly to provide trainees with details of adult education provision. Brochures are clear and attractive, and provide details of programmes and enrolment systems and methods and levels of payment. Provision includes literacy, numeracy and information technology, and access courses to further and higher education. Different modes of attendance are offered and programmes can be accessed through tutor-supported distance learning in a variety of locations. Many trainees have used the service.

30. Selcare implements a comprehensive staff appraisal and development system. All staff follow a closely monitored probationary period at the start of their employment with Selcare. A thorough induction period is followed by a series of individual monthly probationary reviews. On successful completion of the probationary period, which is three months for fixed-term contract staff and six months for permanent staff, employees become part of the annual appraisal system. The annual appraisal date is set in advance and both parties complete pre-appraisal documentation which is discussed at the appraisal. Objectives and targets are set as part of the process, and job descriptions are updated. Staff are measured against the key performance indicators set at the previous appraisal. Staff development needs are also discussed. Selcare has been piloting a quarterly review system since April 2000. All staff are trained in the appraisal process within Selcare. All appraisers receive a one-day training programme on appraisal techniques and appraisees receive a half-day session on the process. Staff development is a high priority for Selcare, which has set a training budget for job-specific training and a budget for external training. All staff involved in the NVQ process are required to obtain the relevant assessor awards. A range of other training opportunities are available which are fully funded and supported by Selcare. These include key skills practitioner awards, first aid, advice and guidance qualifications, equal opportunities and support-related short programmes.

31. Computer spreadsheets have been used in the past to collate data from the three units. This system has failed to produce accurate information. The organisation currently uses a manual system to collect statistics but at the time of inspection figures were inaccurate and failed to reflect the true position of trainees on the programme. The provider is currently developing a new computer spreadsheet to remedy the problem but this has yet to be fully implemented. Data such as the number and range of referrals and successful applications, early leavers and average length of stay are not routinely and systematically collected and analysed to inform business-planning decisions.

32. The three training units are used to provide off-the-job training, for up to three days each week for foundation-for-work trainees. At one centre adult trainees on business-administration programmes are also trained. Accommodation in the three training rooms in this centre is limited. Access to IT training is restricted to the first floor. There are not enough staff. A member of staff from a nearby training unit is providing support while Selcare is in the process of recruiting additional staff. This has resulted in a lack of work placements for either the business-administration or foundation-for-work trainees. Another unit does not have enough training rooms or space for confidential interviews.

33. Trainees who are in work placements are given good opportunities for developing employment skills. However, there is no structured approach to the identification of training activities within the workplace. Selcare provide employers with information about the range of activities which both trainees and Selcare have identified through the initial assessment process and then rely on the high level of commitment to training shown by the employer. Selcare does not have any direct control over the way in which trainees are moved around

departments within the workplace or over the trainees' progress and development. There is little work-based assessment. Selcare staff rely on work-placement staff being able to assess trainees' progress and provide appropriate training opportunities.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

34. The services manager is responsible for quality assurance within Selcare. Both the quality administrator and the project worker with responsibility for NVQ co-ordination report to the services manager on quality assurance issues. The organisation has a written quality assurance system with policies covering training, staffing, and management and business development. A company quality policy identifies the Selcare commitment to ensuring quality within its organisation. The procedures within the quality assurance manual are currently under review as part of the continuous review process within the organisation. A representative from the organisation's regional office who is not directly involved in the training operation audits the system. Selcare contract with one TEC and two CCTEs and are subject to audit and review on a regular basis. All NVQ programmes are approved by one awarding body and are externally verified on a regular basis. Feedback is gained from some trainees and is analysed. Staff feedback is gathered through a series of internal business and quality meetings. Employer feedback is not currently gathered systematically. Selcare have produced two self-assessment reports. The first report was produced in 1999 and the current one was completed in August 2000. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, and found one to be normal practice and another to belong in another generic area. Additional strengths were identified. Inspectors agreed with all the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade as the one proposed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective quality co-ordination of the NVQ programmes
- ◆ all staff fully involved in the quality assurance processes
- ◆ continuous review of the quality assurance system

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no overall quality assurance plan
- ◆ failure of quality assurance system to ensure continuous improvement
- ◆ management information system not used to measure improvement

35. As part of the quality assurance review process, Selcare appointed a project worker to the role of NVQ co-ordinator. This person has responsibility for

ensuring consistency across all three training units and is the co-ordinator for all awarding body issues. Acting as a single point of contact for the awarding body and all external verifiers, the role ensures that information is circulated to all units and that issues raised by external verifier visits are recorded and monitored both centrally and in the individual units. The role also ensures consistency in trainee registrations and certification claims. Each training unit is visited on a weekly basis when support and guidance is given to individual assessors. The NVQ co-ordinator also ensures that regular assessor and internal verifier meetings take place and that all meetings follow a set agenda and are minuted with clear action points. The individual has internal verification responsibility for some programme areas. The NVQ co-ordinator supports staff working towards trainer and assessor awards.

36. Internal verification is controlled centrally by the NVQ co-ordinator. All training programmes have their own internal verification matrix, which identifies planned internal verification activities. In programme areas, which lack an occupationally competent internal verifier, Selcare uses a sub-contracted internal verifier. This has been particularly successful in the motor vehicle programme area where the person has established quality systems and procedures and has assisted in the training of assessors and internal verifiers and now oversees assessment and internal verification in that area. Internal verifier sampling of portfolios takes place on a 25 per cent ratio across all schemes and random sampling takes place by the NVQ co-ordinator. All training programmes have a comprehensive trainee-tracking system and assessment plan.

37. All staff have an excellent working knowledge of the organisation's quality assurance system. Staff are introduced to the quality system as part of their induction. Regular meetings take place between assessors and internal verifiers in each programme area. These meetings are minuted and action points addressed. Meetings between assessors and internal verifiers from all three training units take place on a six-monthly basis. The internal communication meetings provide opportunities to discuss and share best practice across the diverse training programme areas. At the weekly team meetings, staff identify quality issues which the unit manager then takes forward to the senior management team meetings. Staff are also involved in the current review of the quality procedures.

38. The current quality procedures used by Selcare were introduced in February 2000. As part of the self-assessment process, issues were identified which led to the current quality review and the decision to make quality review a continuous process. A review team for the quality manual was established which is currently led by an individual from outside the organisation, who has a broad knowledge of quality assurance. Other members of the team are from the senior management of the three training units and the quality administrator. Review meetings take place every month and sections of the manual are taken back to the training units for all staff to consider and comment upon. Representatives then report their findings at the next review meeting. Quality statements from *Raising the Standard* are used as measures in the quality review. Internal auditing is carried out across the occupational and generic areas on a planned basis.

39. Quality assurance arrangements are thorough, but there is no overarching plan to ensure monitoring and review of all quality assurance measures on a planned timescale. Although direct observation of off-the-job training is carried out effectively, there are no performance indicators to ensure that this happens to each individual tutor on a planned basis. Subcontracting agreements are in place in some areas but are currently out of date.

40. The views of trainees, employers and work-placement supervisors on the services provided by Selcare are not systematically gathered. The provider's monitoring system relies heavily on verbal feedback obtained by employment assessors during visits to the workplace. At present, Selcare gathers feedback from trainees at two of its training units. It has not been fully successful in gathering information from trainees when they leave. Where feedback has been gathered, analysis of findings has taken place, but the small size of the samples has reduced its effectiveness. There is little monitoring of the effectiveness of workplace reviews. Subcontractors' quality is not systematically monitored through direct observation of the services provided. Monitoring does not form part of the contracts, which are in place with some subcontractors. Not all subcontracting arrangements are written down.

41. The management information system within Selcare does not produce information in an easily accessible and understandable format. The system does not lend itself to analysis of trends or compare performance against TEC profiles. There is no central system to measure performance on an ongoing basis.

42. Selcare started the self-assessment process in Bolton in 1998. Staff attended training days provided by the local TEC. The first self-assessment report was compiled with assistance from the TEC contract manager and was completed in 1999. A toolkit approach was used to help compile the first self-assessment. The second self-assessment process involved all three centres as the Heywood and Gorton units had been established. This resulted in consultation with three TECs, each of which provided support and staff training. The current self-assessment was completed in August 2000 and involved consultation with staff and advice from an outside training partner. Views of trainees and employers were sought and staff were given awareness-raising sessions on completion of the report. The action plan from the self-assessment report confirmed the self-critical approach of the organisation and improvements had been made by the time of the inspection. The self-assessment provided background for the inspection team but did not clearly identify the methods of training provision or give detail on the organisation's approach to the generic areas. Strengths and weaknesses were found to be mainly accurate, with inspectors identifying additional strengths and weaknesses. Proposed grades were found to be accurate in all cases.