



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT DECEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION JANUARY 2001

ETS Training

SUMMARY

ETS provides training opportunities in five occupational areas across a large part of Devon. Training programmes in retail and customer service are good and meet trainees' and employers' needs. Trainees make good progress and produce portfolios of a high standard. Training programmes in engineering, manufacturing, business administration and hospitality are satisfactory. Engineering and manufacturing trainees have a wide range of learning opportunities and benefit from effective placements. There is a mentor for business administration trainees in each workplace. Hospitality trainees receive good help with portfolio-building. Trainee support is satisfactory. Trainees receive frequent reviews of their progress and these are flexibly arranged. ETS has an open door management style, effective communications and a good staff development programme. Training in the workplace is not planned properly. Training in key skills is underdeveloped. At the first inspection, aspects of the promotion of equal opportunities were found to be inadequate. Staff did not receive training related to equal opportunities. There was little monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities in the workplace. Aspects of quality assurance, including internal verification, were unsatisfactory. During the past year, ETS has instigated many new management systems and procedures. The company now promotes equal opportunities effectively. Arrangements for quality assurance are good. Internal verification is carried out rigorously and the quality of the training is monitored thoroughly.

As a result of the reinspection of ETS, the original published report text for equal opportunities and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall 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
Engineering	3
Manufacturing	3
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	2
Hospitality	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Equal opportunities	2
Quality assurance	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements for trainees
- ◆ frequent and effective reviews of trainees' progress
- ◆ effectiveness of programmes in meeting the needs of employers and trainees
- ◆ good internal lines of communication



KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ narrow range of assessment methods

INTRODUCTION

1. ETS Training (ETS) was established in 1968 as Engineering Training Services (SW) Ltd. ETS now operates primarily within Devon. The company offers training services to subscribing members and other associated organisations within both the engineering and non-manufacturing sectors. ETS is part of the ETS Group with registered charity status. It contracts with Prosper Training and Enterprise Council (TEC).

2. During the recession in the engineering industry in the mid-1990s, ETS expanded its provision through modern apprenticeships, national traineeships, and work-based training. The organisation currently has centre approval from several awarding bodies to assess for qualifications in engineering, manufacturing business administration, retail and customer service, care and hospitality. Previously, ETS worked in partnership with both a local further education college and a private training provider to run its first-year foundation courses for engineering modern apprenticeships. At the time of the first inspection, there were 332 trainees on government-sponsored training programmes, of whom 98.9 per cent were employed in companies throughout South and East Devon and Barnstaple. At the time of the reinspection there were 289 trainees including 151 advanced modern apprentices, 108 foundation modern apprentices and 30 trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people.

3. ETS has a chairperson who works in a voluntary capacity and employs 10 members of staff including a chief executive, general manager, centre co-ordinator, two training sales co-ordinators, an engineering development officer and four administrative staff. These staff are based at the company's head office in Sowton, Exeter. In addition, 15 self-employed assessors carry out trainees' reviews of progress, and assessments in the workplace. Key skills training is carried out at the Sowton centre.

4. In 1999 Devon had an economically active population of approximately 500,000. This figure now stands at 646,903. The unemployment rate in the county is currently 2.4 per cent, compared with the national average of 3.5 per cent. The majority of employment is now in manufacturing, the wholesale/retail trade and health and social work. Twelve and a half per cent of school leavers opted to take a job with training rather than remain at school or college to gain qualifications. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 49.1 per cent, close to the national average of 49.2 per cent. The proportion of persons in Devon from minority ethnic groups remains at less than 1 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. The organisation's self-assessment report was first produced in 1998, to include revised action plans in September 1999 prior to the inspection. This was the company's first self-assessment report. Many staff were involved in its production, including the self-employed assessors who assessed trainees and carried out reviews of their progress in the workplace. The organisation produced an updated self-assessment report in October 2000 which included the two areas to be reinspected. All provider staff were consulted and contributed to the report. A further update was provided for inspectors prior to the reinspection which gave the grades awarded by the provider for the areas to be reinspected.

6. Seven inspectors spent a total of 24 days at ETS Training in December 1999 observing training activities, looking at trainees' portfolios and interviewing appropriate personnel across the organisations involved in the training. Inspectors interviewed 80 trainees and 48 employers and workplace supervisors. They held discussions with 28 of ETS's training staff. Inspectors looked at trainees' files, management information and promotional material. There were few trainees in the occupational areas of management and professional, and health, care and public service, and these were not inspected.

7. For the reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of six days at the company's premises during January 2001. They conducted 14 interviews with members of ETS staff, and 14 interviews with trainees. They did not observe any training sessions. They visited seven employers and interviewed eight members of employers' staff. Inspectors also looked at assessment records and trainees' portfolios, as well as documents relating to equal opportunities and quality assurance.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

8. ETS has 51 engineering trainees who between them are working towards NVQs at level 2, 3 or 4 in mechanical engineering, electrical and electronic programmes, fabrication and welding, engineering maintenance and engineering production. There are currently 32 modern apprentices, and 19 trainees following the work-based training programme. Trainees attend one of two subcontracted colleges of further education, or go to an employer, for the foundation stage of their engineering programme. On this, they work towards NVQ level 2F and three additional units. Most trainees are employed and attend on-the-job training at companies. These vary from small or medium-sized enterprises making, for example, small-machined components for medical equipment to larger firms making precision turbine blades. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to two local colleges of further education. Trainees attend one of these for one day a week

throughout the training period. ETS does not employ any staff to carry out the engineering training, and subcontracts two self-employed assessors who also carry out the trainees' progress reviews. The frequency of trainees' reviews exceeds contractual requirements. The two assessors also act as internal verifier to one another. The retention rate for modern apprentices has declined over the last three years. In 1998-99 there were seven leavers out of 41 who began the programme and the achievement rate was 57 NVQs per 100 leavers. Conversely retention rates on work-based training programmes have increased over the last three years. In 1998-99, 28 left out of 68, and those completing the programme obtained 82 NVQs per 100 leavers. The self-assessment report did not list strengths and weaknesses clearly. It did not contain critical judgements. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good training opportunities in effective placements
- ◆ effectiveness of programmes in meeting the needs of employers and trainees
- ◆ the motivation of trainees to excel and obtain additional qualifications

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poor assessment practice
- ◆ workplace supervisors' poor understanding of the NVQ process
- ◆ narrow focus of trainees' progress reviews

9. Foundation training is satisfactory. Trainees use a good range of machinery and receive appropriate assessment. The training programmes at college are relevant to the trainees' workplace activities. The company, however, has no systematic arrangements for ensuring the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training or for monitoring the colleges' training programmes. Trainees move on to good placements in east Devon and south Devon. Placements are usually in small to medium-sized engineering companies making a variety of components. These placements offer good training experiences and enable the trainee to generate sufficient evidence to complete their portfolio and cover all the NVQ competencies. In a small number of instances where trainees are unable to meet all the NVQ specifications through their normal work, they develop the requisite competencies through projects carried out under simulated work-based conditions.

10. Employers and trainees find the NVQ units selected relevant to workplace tasks. The company's assessor in consultation with the trainee and the employer selects the units. If the trainees' workplace circumstances change, then the units are changed accordingly. For instance, an apprentice at a paper mill was required to have a knowledge of electronics and hydraulics. This need was met by ensuring the trainee took NVQ units on instrumentation. Trainees are well matched to the programmes they undertake, in terms of ability and aptitude.

11. In the majority of work placements, trainees are enabled to develop skills beyond those required of the registered NVQ. Some trainees progress from the apprenticeship to management and degree training. Many trainees are following ordinary or higher national certificate courses. Other courses are also offered such as abrasive wheel training and specialist machining courses. Trainees welcome the opportunity to work towards additional qualifications and it motivates them to excel and have high aspirations.

12. NVQ assessors are appropriately qualified. They assess trainees, however, by evaluating their logbooks and work in portfolios, rather than by direct observation of their performance in the workplace. The evidence in trainees' portfolios is seldom backed up by witness testimony. As the assessors hardly ever observe trainees in the workplace, the internal verifier is unable to observe the process of assessment. Although the assessor meets the trainee every five weeks, assessment is usually only carried out when the trainee is nearing the end of a unit.

13. The workplace supervisors do not fully understand the requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. They do not ensure that the trainees are allocated work activities that enable them to demonstrate all the requisite competencies for their NVQ level 3. The trainees themselves have to ask the supervisors for work that will enable them to provide evidence for their portfolios. The supervisors do not have information on key skills. Opportunities for the development and assessment of key skills in the workplace are missed.

14. Trainees receive progress reviews every five weeks. The trainees' assessor carries out the reviews and helps trainees with their theory work by providing them with appropriate booklets and handouts. Reviews focus on the trainees' progress towards achievement of the NVQ and on the extent to which trainees met targets set at the previous meeting. The trainees are then set targets for the next five weeks. The reviews attended by inspectors were somewhat bland. Trainees received little praise for making good progress. There was little detailed discussion of the trainees' performance and the rapport between the assessor and trainee was weak. Trainees said that they felt they could not raise any personal problems during reviews. They also expressed the wish that the assessor could occasionally see them at their actual place of work instead of in an office. Employers do not have a long-term view of trainees' progress. They do not maintain a progress plan for the trainees showing targets and deadlines for the completion of NVQ units.

Manufacturing

Grade 3

15. ETS currently has 35 trainees on manufacturing programmes all working towards an NVQ in performing manufacturing operations at level 2. Of these, 10 are national traineeships, also working towards attainment of key skills, and 25 are on work-based training programmes. All trainees complete the mandatory units of the award and select varying optional units, which are as relevant as possible to their employment. Trainees are employed in a range of companies including food

processing, engineering machining, glass blowing, engraving and packing. Training takes place over a wide geographical area in the Southwest. All trainees are employed, and most are recruited by agreement between the employer and ETS. Existing employees are given the opportunity to achieve their qualification while continuing with their normal employment. The average length of time that trainees spend on their training programmes is 59 weeks. Of the 44 trainees commencing training between 1997 and 1999, three have left having obtained their award and 17 without achieving their qualification. All assessment is carried out at the workplace by qualified, occupationally experienced, assessors. The self-assessment report failed to list any clear strengths or weaknesses and is insufficiently judgmental.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effectiveness of training in meeting the needs of trainees from different occupational areas
- ◆ highly motivated and enthusiastic trainees
- ◆ wide range of workplace experience for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ over-reliance on witness testimonies
- ◆ failure to allow trainees to manage their own portfolios
- ◆ little involvement of employers in the training process
- ◆ poor retention rates

16. ETS promotes training to a wide range of companies throughout the Southwest. Interested employers encourage employees to join the training programmes offered by ETS. Currently, 13 employers send employees on the training programmes. Prospective trainees are interviewed at work to ensure that relevant training can be offered them. Following a successful interview, trainees take part in a comprehensive induction process, held at the workplace, and are given full information about their chosen qualification together with details of other matters, such as health and safety, equal opportunities and grievance procedures. Some trainees, however, have difficulty in recalling important aspects covered during induction.

17. All trainees are employed, and many have worked at their particular workplace for some time. All trainees are volunteers, have their employers' support, and are well motivated and enthusiastic about their training. Trainees are recruited from a wide range of employers covering many differing occupational areas, from engineering to food processing. All trainees work towards the same NVQ at level 2, but the content of the qualification is customised to match the specific occupational area in which individual trainees work.

18. During their training, trainees have frequent and regular reviews of their progress and these are carried out by an ETS assessor. During these workplace reviews, trainees and assessors agree on evidence to be collected before the next planned visit, in order to demonstrate competence against the NVQ specifications. If trainees are having difficulty understanding particular aspects of the NVQ, assessors arrange to visit more frequently to help them, for instance, to gather evidence for their portfolios. The outcomes of the reviews are carefully recorded and trainees are given a copy for their portfolios. Employers are also given a copy, but are not usually involved in progress reviews. Employers say they would welcome a greater involvement in the training process.

19. Most trainees do not have a good understanding of their NVQs and the assessment process. They are sometimes unable to identify those aspects of their current work through which they can gather evidence towards particular units and/or elements of their NVQ. All assessment is carried out in the workplace. Assessors, however, rather than the trainees, take responsibility for deciding what evidence should go in portfolios. Trainees are not allowed to exercise sufficient initiative in organising their portfolios themselves. The content of portfolios does not reflect the different jobs which trainees have. There is over-reliance on witness testimonies and opportunities for observing trainees carrying out tasks in the workplace are missed.

20. Trainees on national traineeships are assessed in key skills which are an integral part of their training programme. Trainees have the opportunity to attend key skills sessions at the ETS centre to help them identify how they may develop these skills at work. Where trainees may have little, or no, access to computers, training in the key skill of information technology is carried out at the centre. Trainees have little understanding of key skills, however, and are unable to identify how they may develop them in the workplace.

21. All trainees enjoyed their training programmes and valued the qualification that they were working towards. Additionally, trainees felt that their training had enabled them to take a more active role within the company as a whole. As part of the evidence gathering, trainees are required to ask colleagues questions relating to, for example, health and safety policies at their workplace. This enabled trainees to come into contact with other employees they would not normally be working with and gave them a greater insight into the operation of the company as a whole.

22. Retention rates are poor. Forty per cent of trainees leave the programme without achieving their NVQ. The programme started at the end of 1998, and details of trainees' achievements are not fully available.

Business administration

Grade 3

23. On the business administration programme, 101 trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. There are currently 72 modern apprentices, 22 national trainees and seven trainees on work-based programmes. Training in key skills is

provided at the company's premises in Sowton. In the workplace, trainees gather evidence of their acquisition of competence in key skills for their portfolios. All modern apprentices are employed, many being in post before commencement of programmes. All other trainees are in full-time work but some are on temporary contracts. The length of the programme varies from one to three years and takes account of individual requirements. A mentor in the workplace supports all trainees. Trainees are employed with solicitors, investment groups, estate agents, manufacturers of machine tools, shoes and textiles, a refuse collection company, and an ambulance service in the west country. The self-assessment report was insufficiently detailed. Inspectors found both strengths and weaknesses the company had failed to identify.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees' ability to identify good opportunities for gathering evidence in the workplace
- ◆ trainees' success in gathering key skills evidence through work-based tasks
- ◆ key skills integrated into main portfolio

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak assessment practice

24. All trainees are in suitable employment and most obtained this prior to the commencement of the training. Trainees' workplaces are of a good quality and staff in them offer encouragement and support to the trainees. Trainees are well qualified academically and between them, their qualifications range from eight GCSEs at grade C or above, to post-graduate awards. Excellent relationships exist between trainees, employers and ETS. Most trainees say they are always kept up to date with information and have not had any problems. Trainees are aware of the requirements of the scheme and have no difficulty in recognising opportunities for gathering evidence of their competencies. Assessors have developed good training materials for theory. Modern apprentices' achievement rates have improved over the last three years. In 1998-99, of 64 modern apprentices who started their programme, 70 per cent completed it and were employed at the end of the year. Most trainees attend the company's training centre for specific training on health and safety and first aid.

25. Trainees also receive training in key skills at the company's training centre. They also develop key skills through their activities in the workplace. Whenever possible, trainees demonstrate competence in key skills at NVQ level 3. Evidence of their attainment in key skills is an integral part of their portfolio evidence of acquisition of all the requisite competencies for their NVQ.

26. The individual training plans kept in the trainees' folders are not updated regularly. There is little accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience

and some trainees have to repeat work they have already carried out elsewhere. Assessment is not carried out as a continuous process. There is little assessment through observation of trainees' work. Trainees are only assessed when they have completed all the units for a qualification. The external verifier has asked that trainees should have their work for NVQ units assessed progressively, in accordance with national guidelines and the requirements of awarding bodies.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 2

27. ETS has 123 trainees in this occupational area working towards NVQs in retail and customer service at levels 2 and 3. All the trainees are employed and all training takes place in the workplace. There are 74 modern apprentices, 30 national trainees and 19 are engaged in work-based training. ETS assessors visit trainees every four to five weeks to review their progress towards achievement of the NVQ. Self-employed assessors are both trained and occupationally qualified to carry out reviews and assessments. ETS began training in this occupational area three years ago. Trainees' achievement rates are rising and are currently standing at 63 per cent. The early leaver rate has decreased over the past three years and currently stands at 47 per cent. Inspectors found a number of strengths that were not identified in the self-assessment report. The company did not award itself a grade in the original self-assessment report. Subsequently, it gave itself a grade 2 and inspectors agreed with this.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good match of qualification to trainees' employment
- ◆ trainees' good portfolios on the customer service programme
- ◆ good progress by trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor integration of key skills with content of vocational programmes
- ◆ little involvement of employers in NVQ process

GOOD PRACTICE

To help trainees learn, one assessor had produced 'activity sheets' for several units at both levels 2 and 3 in retail. These offered questions and advice on types of evidence that could be used to meet the criteria listed. Trainees were appreciative of these and felt they enabled them to make a positive start to a unit.

28. ETS's staff who are occupationally qualified and suitably experienced visit trainees and their employers before the commencement of the training programme. They ensure there is an appropriate match between the work the trainees carry out and the qualification for which they are aiming. The trainees feel the NVQ is attainable within the timespan of their programme period and they approach the assessment process and evidence collecting confidently and with enthusiasm. Good training and assessment are carried out exclusively in the workplace and trainees are encouraged to gather relevant evidence through their workplace activities. Currently, there are no workplace assessors and all assessments are carried out by self-employed assessors on behalf of ETS. Each assessor is responsible for up to 60 trainees. Assessors design their own approach to training and assessment. These assessors visit trainees every four to five weeks although

the frequency of these visits increases as the trainee nears completion of his or her programme. When carrying out reviews of trainees' progress, they all use the same review form. This is signed by the assessor, trainee and workplace supervisor, and a copy is given to each.

29. All trainees take pride in their portfolios and in the evidence they collect, and are able to explain the relevance of the portfolio contents. The portfolios of trainees on customer service programmes are of good quality, comprehensive, and well presented. The portfolios of trainees on retail programmes are satisfactory. On customer service programmes, trainees are seldom assessed through observation of their work. When they are, however, they find the feedback they receive helpful and it enables them to make further progress.

30. Most trainees complete work for their NVQ level 2 in less than a year and for their NVQ level 3, in 12 to 15 months. The self-employed assessors are committed to monitoring the trainees' progress fairly and rigorously, and they do all they can to encourage the trainees to make progress and complete their programme successfully.

31. Key skills training takes place at ETS's premises. Trainees work through one-day projects on each key skill. These are offered on a rolling programme and trainees are able to undertake the projects when they feel ready to do so. The training covers the content of each skill and completion of an assessment record. Gaps in trainees' coverage of key skills are identified and each trainee is able to gather further evidence of competency in key skills in the workplace. Many trainees believe that these one-day off-the-job training sessions provide them with sufficient evidence for completion of their key skill evidence. In practice, however, this is not the case.

32. Several employers commented on their own lack of knowledge of NVQs and the paucity of information on NVQs provided by ETS. Their views are rarely sought and they felt they made little contribution to the assessment process. Witness statements in customer service are not being used extensively. Trainees spend much time collecting evidence in the form of their written work.

Hospitality

Grade 3

33. There are currently 22 trainees, of whom 19 are modern apprentices, one is a national trainee and two are on worked-based training. Of the 19 modern apprentices, eight are chef apprentices, two are restaurant apprentices, one is a housekeeping apprentice, five are pub and three are hospitality services apprentices. The other three trainees are working towards an NVQ level 2 in serving food and drink, or housekeeping. In addition, all trainees are offered the opportunity to gain a basic food hygiene certificate. All the trainees are employed and work for establishments ranging from small family run hotels and restaurants to nationally owned hotels. All the occupational training is carried out in the workplace by the trainees' workplace supervisor. Hygiene training and key skills

training are implemented away from the workplace. Assessment and verification are carried out by two people who are vocationally experienced and hold the relevant assessment and verification qualifications. One is a self-employed assessor. ETS has offered hospitality programmes for one year and to date no trainee has achieved a qualification. The self-assessment report did not substantiate strengths with any evidence. It did not identify any weaknesses or give any grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ full involvement of workplace supervisors in training programme
- ◆ good help and support for trainees with portfolio building
- ◆ the wide range of qualifications available to trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no long-term assessment planning
- ◆ poor integration of key skills with the content of vocational programmes
- ◆ little training support material

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of good practice in ensuring the needs of trainees are met. One trainee has nearly completed work for NVQ level 2 and is about to leave early to take up employment abroad. The assessor has made arrangements to visit the trainee twice a week to help him cover all the requisite work for the qualification.

34. All the trainees interviewed acknowledged the high level of support they receive from their assessor and supervisor. They make good use of opportunities to collect evidence in naturally occurring situations in the workplace. The trainees' workplace supervisor is involved in the assessment process by providing records of observations of trainees' work. Two supervisors are currently working towards assessor qualifications. All trainees are encouraged to maintain a diary. Assessors visit trainees at least once every four or five weeks but more frequently if necessary.

35. Assessors also arrange to visit at a time convenient to all concerned, and when they will be able to observe the trainee carrying out particular tasks. For example, in some cases the assessor has visited trainees during the evening and weekends in order to observe them at work. Trainees are given good support with portfolio building and help in referencing evidence. In one case, a trainee who has poor literacy skills is receiving extra support to cope with work for his NVQ. Trainees appreciate and value the help they receive.

36. Between them, staff have a wide range of experience in the hospitality industry. Work placements are good and enable trainees to cover a diversity of skills. Trainees are offered training leading to a wide range of NVQs at levels 1, 2 and 3. If trainees change their job roles, their target NVQ is also changed, if necessary. All evidence already collected is referenced to the new units. If a trainee changes employer, staff will endeavour to continue the trainee's programme. The provider has assisted trainees to find employment where this has been necessary.

37. Training and assessment for the occupational units are work-based. Trainees interviewed did not have a detailed training or assessment plan. The planning of assessment is on a short term basis. At the end of an assessment visit, the assessor will indicate which units or elements will be the subject of assessment next time, but trainees are not given detailed assessment plans in writing. On some trainees' progress sheets the assessment planning is limited to one sentence with no reference to the elements or units involved. All individual training plans in trainees' files showed the expected completion date of all their NVQ units to be the same as the programme completion date. Training and assessment are not systematically planned and trainees rarely know how their programme will develop. Although the visits from assessors are regular, they focus almost exclusively on assessment and little consideration is given to the training experience and other relevant issues.

38. Modern apprentices receive little key skills training or assessment. Trainees can attend a one-day workshop at ETS premises on key skills. Two trainees interviewed who had attended these said they found them useful and interesting. No attempt is made to use appropriate evidence from occupational units and cross-reference this to key skills units. The trainees see key skills as a separate aspect of the programme and also as additional work.

39. Some trainees have better access to training materials, such as handouts and textbooks, than others. There is a recommended textbook for each unit but few trainees have purchased this. Most rely on the textbooks available at their place of work, many of which are out of date and not NVQ-specific. Assessors provide trainees with photocopies of sections of books if requested, but these do not necessarily help the trainees develop a broader understanding of their NVQ. Workplace supervisors acknowledge that some trainees' work experience is restricted in scope and trainees do not have the opportunity to see a wide range of contrasting methods of working.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

40. At the time of the first inspection there was inadequate monitoring of the effectiveness of employers' equal opportunities policies. ETS monitors employers equal opportunities policies on an annual basis. If employers are still developing their own policy, ETS offers them a draft policy and checks to ensure that this policy is in use. An equal opportunities statement is included in handbooks issued to both trainees and employers. The proportion of persons in the local community from minority ethnic groups is less than 1 per cent. The number of female trainees on the engineering course has risen to 7 per cent. On the business administration programme, the proportion of male trainees is 47 per cent and this proportion has fallen by 2 per cent. The number of trainees from minority ethnic groups has risen slightly to four and one trainee is classed as having a disability. Of the nine full-

time staff at ETS, eight are women. There are no staff from a minority ethnic group and none is classed as having a disability. Of the 15 assessors used by ETS, seven are women. ETS continues to work in partnership with another provider who offers training leading to NVQ level 1 for people who have specific learning needs. ETS provides further training to NVQ level 2, although there are currently no trainees on programmes. The latest self-assessment report identified four strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with strengths identified in the new report, one of which was included in the original report. Inspectors considered the other strengths to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors found an additional strength and agreed with one of the weaknesses identified in the report.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ inadequate monitoring of employer's equal opportunities policy
- ◆ trainees' poor understanding of equal opportunities
- ◆ no analysis of equal opportunities data
- ◆ little staff training related to equal opportunities
- ◆ poor promotion of equal opportunities

41. The company prepared an action plan to address the weaknesses found during the first inspection and to build on the strengths. A self-assessment report was prepared for the reinspection. This evaluated progress in implementing the action plan and identified revised strengths and weaknesses. The new self-assessment report showed who had responsibility for carrying action out, and specified the dates by which the action had to be completed. Inspectors agreed with the revised grade given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective equal opportunities policy
- ◆ equitable assessment methods for trainees with particular needs
- ◆ thorough staff training on equal opportunities issues
- ◆ effective promotion of equality of opportunity through training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic evaluation of new procedures

42. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy for the ETS group as a whole. The current policy is dated December 2000 and replaced one drawn up in the previous year. The policy is complemented by a number of procedures covering a range of issues such as complaints, grievance, discipline and the appeals against NVQ assessment. Before trainees take up a work placement, ETS staff check that the employer concerned has an effective equal opportunities policy. If the employer's policy is found to be inadequate, ETS provides the employer with the draft of an appropriate policy. The employer is required to sign

a commitment to implement the policy. ETS staff visit the employer again after six months to check compliance with the policy.

43. The company promotes equality of opportunity by ensuring that assessment methods are flexible and can meet the needs of all trainees. For example, some dyslexic trainees have received additional support from their assessors to help them understand the process of cross-referencing evidence to NVQ unit standards, and theory questions. One trainee who had problems working in a group was offered key skills training and assessment on an individual basis, during an off-the-job training session. Assessors visit individual trainees on a monthly basis and help them with the NVQ process, and key skills, as required. Trainees have freephone access to the provider and they can contact their assessor at home. Assessors react quickly to address trainees' concerns and trainees value the assessors' commitment to help them. In some instances, assessors provide support to trainees at their homes.

44. ETS has introduced training sessions for staff to help them increase their knowledge and understanding of equal opportunities. These sessions encourage staff to draw on their own experiences. For example, field staff can share their experiences of working with people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Staff felt that this sharing of experiences was effective in helping them understand equal opportunities. Group exercises are used to help staff understand the problems faced by disabled people. Staff found the training sessions memorable and thought-provoking. Suggestions from staff raised during the training sessions are acted upon to improve the promotion of equal opportunities. Improvements have also been made to training sessions provided for trainees. Equality of opportunity is now covered in key skills sessions, one-to-one sessions in the workplace as well as during induction. At the first inspection, trainees' poor understanding of equal opportunities was identified as a weakness. Trainees' understanding of equal opportunities is now greatly improved.

45. ETS maintains data on trainees' recruitment, retention and achievements in terms of gender, ethnicity and disability. This information is now analysed in order to identify ways of improving the promotion of equal opportunities. Reports are produced containing monthly statistics which indicate the company's success, or otherwise, in promoting equal opportunities and widening access. Data on applicants are considered carefully in order to devise initiatives to recruit more persons from groups under-represented on training programmes.

46. The company's promotional material is now available in a variety of forms, including Braille, large print and video-film. The company has established a careers stand. The materials on this promote equal opportunities through pictures of trainees from groups under-represented on training programmes. The company uses success stories of former trainees to promote its training programmes.

47. Initiatives from assessors have led to trainees' work towards NVQs being used as a means of helping trainees understand equal opportunities. For example, a trainee following the business administration programme has produced an

assignment, which identifies clients' needs. These needs include the accessibility of work premises disabled and elderly people. Another trainee has researched, designed and produced an assignment, which looks at the job roles in relation to gender, at a local factory. The training provider has provided training sessions to increase employers' awareness of equal opportunities. A trainee who represented her employer at this session was to produce an equal opportunities policy, which is now used by the employer. This trainee has now been given a job entailing greater responsibility. She has also been able to use her work in producing the policy as evidence towards achievement of the NVQ.

48. Many improvements have taken place, and some new procedures have been introduced. Evaluation of these new procedures, however, has not yet been carried out fully. The form for recording trainees' progress reviews has been improved. The form now enables staff to record issues related to equal opportunities. Some staff, however, do not complete the form in enough detail or with sufficient thoroughness.

Trainee support

Grade 3

49. ETS markets training opportunities to companies throughout the south west. Working in partnership with these companies, employees are encouraged, and supported, by employers and ETS to participate in training. Company staff interview prospective trainees to determine whether they can work towards a qualification relevant to their current employment. Applicants thought unsuitable for the programmes offered are referred to the careers service or to other training providers that offer more specialist support. Following a successful interview, trainees take part in a comprehensive induction process, which gives trainees details of the chosen qualification and includes information on health and safety and equal opportunities. ETS offers all trainees a comprehensive induction at the workplace. Trainees receive frequent and regular visits from company staff who carry out reviews and assessment in the workplace. Additional visits are arranged for specific reasons, such as assistance with portfolio building. Trainees receive key skills sessions at the Sowton centre.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent and flexibly arranged reviews of trainees progress
- ◆ good and well recorded support for trainees
- ◆ effective arrangements for trainees to receive post-programme support and advice

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of systematic assessment of basic skills
- ◆ little accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience
- ◆ failure to use initial training plans effectively

50. Trainees are spread across the south west and assessors maintain good contact with them. They make frequent visits to the workplace during the training programme to carry out progress reviews and to set the trainees clear targets for the completion of NVQ units. Arrangements for the reviews are flexible and the frequency of reviews is determined by the individual needs of the trainees.

51. There is good recording of trainee support. The company has a trainee liaison record file with a separate sheet for each trainee. Records are kept of all contact with trainees, concerning a wide range of issues not necessarily directly related to training. Copies of any relevant correspondence is also kept within this file. By consulting the file, ETS's staff can readily familiarise themselves with all the particular issues raised by trainees. Confidential information, however, is recorded elsewhere and access to this is carefully controlled. ETS's staff encourage trainees to maintain contact with the centre on completion of their programme and offer career or further training advice that they may require. ETS's staff also try to ensure that any trainees who do not obtain their awards within their maximum specified time on the programme, are given support and advice to help them gain their qualification. There is also a high level of both pastoral and training support for trainees throughout their training. There are numerous examples of the provision of additional assistance for trainees. Trainees who have left the area have been transferred to other programmes and their training records have been forwarded to their new training provider. Trainees who have moved to other occupational areas have been transferred to training leading to an NVQ more relevant to their new work. ETS produce, and distribute to all trainees, a quarterly newsletter celebrating trainees' achievements, listing new trainees and giving general information. There is also a 24 hour free-phone telephone contact number which is widely promoted and available for trainees to use if they have a problem.

52. Trainees receive little initial assessment in basic skills. ETS's staff identify trainees' needs for additional learning support by observing how trainees respond during initial interviews and how they perform during the early part of their training programme. Trainees who are identified as needing additional support, receive it. For example, a trainee that suffers from dyslexia receives additional help to answer theory questions and compile the portfolio. ETS's staff have recently attended training and workshop sessions on initial assessment.

53. There are no systematic arrangements for giving recognition to trainees' previous qualifications and attainment in key skills, and for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience. Many trainees have previously attended further education courses, for example, and have achieved a range of qualifications. For example, one trainee has achieved an NVQ level 2 in hairdressing and another a general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) at advanced level in art and design. Achievement of these qualifications is noted in the trainees' respective training plans. ETS's staff have not taken any steps, however, to ascertain whether some of the portfolio evidence produced in order to gain these qualifications, meets the specifications of the NVQ the trainees are now working towards.

54. Individual training plans are compiled following induction. Discussions between trainee, employer and ETS cover details of all aspects of the proposed training. Company staff ensure that the qualification trainees are working towards is relevant to their current employment. However, training plans are not used as working documents and do not always reflect all aspects of the trainees' experience on the programme. They do not include details of additional support required or take account of elements of the target award that trainees may have already achieved through a previous qualification. Training plans are not always kept up-to-date. For example, they do not always cover work for additional awards that trainees may undertake, such as basic hygiene certificates.

Management of training

Grade 3

55. Ten members of staff are employed in the training section of the ETS group at its centre in Sowton. The chief executive, general manager, centre co-ordinator, training/sales co-ordinators together with the administrative staff operate from the centre. ETS contracts 12 self-employed assessors to carry out most reviews of trainees' progress and assessment. An exception to this is where local colleges are used to provide foundation engineering training and assessment. The company has recently been successfully re-assessed for the Investors in People Award, which it first gained in 1995. ETS is in the final stages of acquiring additional ground floor premises at the Sowton centre for the provision of key skills training and open learning facilities. The self-assessment report identified some strengths and only one weakness. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open management style
- ◆ clear lines of communication
- ◆ good system for twice-yearly staff appraisals
- ◆ clear relevance of staff development programme to the business plan

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ weak management information system
- ◆ unplanned training programmes in the workplace
- ◆ poor management of key skills training

56. ETS's staff work closely and well together at all levels in the organisation. The general manager and the centre co-ordinator make themselves readily accessible. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Together, they celebrate successes such as the starting of a trainee on NVQ training with an employer. The

chief executive operates an open style of management whereby senior staff are available and accessible to all staff in the organisation to answer queries or concerns. Staff appreciate this approach and feel valued by the organisation.

57. Communication lines are clear. Senior and key staff meet each week. There are monthly meetings of all staff at which current issues and developments are considered. All assessors receive a newsletter every fortnight, or more frequently, and this keeps them up to date on salient issues such as those relating to external verification. Quarterly meetings of assessors are held for the purpose of sharing ideas and good practice and these are well attended. Effective use is made of informal networking between assessors to ensure that those operating in distant towns and districts feel less isolated.

58. Staff appraisal is well established. All staff are appraised twice yearly by the chief executive who takes full responsibility for carrying out the process. Staff appraisal is comprehensive and allows staff the opportunity to review targets and objectives and establish future training needs. The chief executive is appraised by the chairperson of the organisation. The chief executive reviews the performance of assessors annually. The outcomes of staff appraisal are reviewed and a comprehensive staff development and training plan is drawn up which reflects the requirements of the business plan. Key training needs have been identified and these include training related to equal opportunities and key skills. Training is available to all staff including assessors and where possible, the company enables staff to join its own commercial training programmes.

59. The organisation has piloted systems for collecting data on trainees, but these are unreliable. At the time of inspection, data on trainees' achievement and retention rates was difficult to obtain. The pilot system is an initiative of the TEC and as yet only produces simple data. ETS acknowledges the shortcomings in its recording of data. It is currently considering alternative ways of collecting data.

60. Trainees benefit from good work experience in their work placements. Their training programmes in the workplace are seldom detailed or structured. Trainees are not provided with an overall work-based training plan to help them progress towards the achievement of their qualification and gather evidence of their attainment of the requisite NVQ competencies in the workplace.

61. Key skills are introduced to trainees early on in their training programme and covered in trainees' individual training plans. Trainees attend structured training days on key skills at the Sowton Centre. In many instances, and particularly on engineering programmes, the learning materials for key skills have little relevance to the trainees' occupational area. Furthermore, key skills training is not an integral part of many training programmes. Trainees receive little help in developing and acquiring key skills in the workplace.

Quality assurance

Grade 2

62. At the first inspection ETS had written quality assurance policies and procedures which complied with the requirements of the local TECs and awarding bodies. Trainers and assessors are set targets to produce good training and to meet the quality assurance requirements of the awarding bodies. Assessors meet each quarter to share information about assessment practice. Internal verifiers meet in advance of the assessors' meetings. The company has now appointed additional internal verifiers, made changes to the internal verification processes, and collects feedback from trainees and employers through questionnaires. A new co-ordinator for quality assurance has been appointed. The quality assurance manual and many of the procedures have been reviewed and updated.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ insufficient monitoring of subcontractors' provision
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of assessors' performance
- ◆ failure to gather feedback from employers
- ◆ failure of internal verification procedures to meet awarding bodies' requirements
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous self-assessment process

63. The chief executive and general manager made effective quality assurance a significant management priority following the first inspection. They involved all staff in rectifying the weaknesses in quality assurance identified in the first inspection. Improvements to the quality assurance system have been made in accordance with the action plan drawn up after the first inspection. Several of these improvements are specified in detail in the organisation's corporate plan. All the weaknesses identified through the first inspection have been addressed. Inspectors agreed with the strengths identified in the revised self-assessment report and in particular, with the identification of internal verification as a strength. They awarded the same grade as that given by the company. All the weaknesses had been addressed. Inspectors considered the strength identified in the first inspection relating to the regular review of the quality assurance manual to be normal practice. Other strengths referring to the collection of feedback and involvement of staff in continuous improvement have been included in new strengths as a result of reinspection. Internal verification has now been identified as a key strength. Inspectors agreed with one weakness relating to insufficiently established quality assurance systems. The inspectors awarded the same grade as that given by the provider.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ highly effective action planning
- ◆ extremely rigorous internal verification
- ◆ good methods for collecting and analysing feedback

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ Some quality assurance systems not yet fully established

64. After the first inspection, the company drew up an action plan for the improvement of its provision. It has appointed new staff and has given existing staff new responsibilities. A centre co-ordinator is now responsible for ensuring that the quality of provision is consistently good across all occupational areas. Action has been taken to make the process for reviewing trainees' progress more thorough. Staff now visit trainees at least once a month to review their progress, and more frequently if required. Progress reviews are monitored carefully. Trainees are set targets and their progress towards reaching these is monitored by employers and ETS staff. Assessments take place more regularly than before. The recording of trainees' progress towards achieving the NVQ is thorough and more accurate. Action-planning as part of the quality assurance process has proved effective. It has led to improvements in the assessment and internal verification processes and in employers and trainees' understanding and promotion of equal opportunities. The quality of subcontractors' provision is now monitored systematically. Trainees receive training in key skills throughout their programmes and are able to complete key skills units early in their training.

65. The first inspection identified weaknesses in assessment and verification practices. The weaknesses related mainly to inadequate monitoring of assessors' performance and the failure of internal verification procedures to meet awarding body requirements. The organisation has introduced systematic monitoring of assessors including the observation of assessors carrying out assessment in the workplace. Internal verifiers hold discussions with trainees being assessed, record their comments and discuss these with assessors. Internal verifiers now use standard questionnaires for trainees and assessors as a means of checking their understanding of the assessment process. In one case, their use has led to a change of assessor for a trainee. Questionnaires are reviewed by the newly appointed centre co-ordinator. The centre co-ordinator has introduced the practice of monitoring all trainees' portfolios with the aim of ensuring they are well presented and of a consistently high standard. Internal verification is planned and sampling exceeds the requirements of the awarding bodies. Additional assessors and internal verifiers have been recruited to ease workloads in all occupational areas. Good use is now being made of witness testimonies to trainees' acquisition of NVQ competencies in the workplace. ETS staff brief work-placement supervisors well about witness testimonies and employers understand how to use them. In some occupational areas, the witness testimonies are specially prepared and detail the specific NVQ competencies the trainees are required to demonstrate. Trainees are credited with NVQ units as they complete them. Internal verification of assessment takes place throughout the programme. Assessors and internal verifiers meet at least quarterly. Minutes of their meetings are copied to those who are unable to attend. A weekly bulletin is sent to all staff, including self-employed assessors. This provides updates on NVQs and organisational priorities.

66. As the first inspection identified, the organisation has good arrangements for gathering feedback from trainees at various stages of their training. Feedback is acted upon to improve the training programmes. The company has strengthened these arrangements by giving trainees stamped addressed envelopes in which to return their responses to questionnaires. The response rate has now increased significantly. Early in 2000, a questionnaire was sent to employers but only about 4 per cent responded. Following the first inspection, the company altered the structure of this questionnaire and the employers' response rate rose to 75 per cent. Staff analyse responses from trainees and employees to the questionnaires. They have written a detailed action plan to rectify weaknesses in provision, which the trainees and staff have identified. Responses are acted upon. For example, employers are now more involved in designing training programmes and in providing witness testimonies to trainees' acquisition of competencies. Trainees now meet with assessors at the induction stage. Additional training in equal opportunities is now offered to employers either on ETS's premises or in the workplace. It is too early, however, to judge whether this is proving effective. The action plan is reviewed regularly at staff meetings.

67. The company's quality assurance manual and associated procedures are updated regularly. All staff are aware of their responsibilities and have comprehensive job descriptions and copies of the procedures relevant to their work. Staff are committed to continuous improvement and they are all fully involved in the process of self-critical review. Some new developments are in their infancy and have yet to be fully evaluated and established as normal practice. Staff have strengthened the co-ordination of assessment practices across the occupational areas, in particular by the use of standardised documents.