



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT NOVEMBER 1999

REINSPECTION JANUARY 2001

Oldham Engineering
Group Training Association
Limited

SUMMARY

Oldham Engineering Group Training Association Limited provides training in engineering and business administration for modern apprentices, national trainees and young people on other work-based training programmes. Training in business administration is good. On-the-job training is particularly effective and business administration trainees are able to gather evidence of their competencies through naturally occurring situations in the workplace. On- and off-the-job training in engineering is good but some assessment lacks rigour. Key skills training is not fully integrated with engineering and business administration programmes. Trainee support is good. Trainees receive good pastoral support and they have frequent opportunities to discuss their progress. Promotion of equal opportunities is sound. The management of training is satisfactory. There are good arrangements for staff development. Staff appraisal is thorough but some actions agreed during appraisal are not followed through. The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of training is effective. The internal audit of the quality assurance system is good and provides improvements to the quality assurance procedures. Good practice is not sufficiently shared among staff.

As a result of the reinspection of Oldham Engineering Group Training Association Limited, the original published report text for quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings. This summary page, the overall report introduction and the inspection findings introduction have also been amended to reflect the findings of the reinspection. All other sections of the original published report, which have not been subject to full reinspection, have been left in their original form.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	3
Business administration	2

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ rich variety of on-the-job learning opportunities
- ◆ success of many business administration trainees in gaining additional qualifications
- ◆ well-equipped training centre
- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates
- ◆ good pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ good arrangements for staff development and staff appraisal



- ◆ effective monitoring of the quality of training
- ◆ good internal auditing of quality assurance system

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some insufficiently rigorous assessment
- ◆ failure to make key skills training fully integral to programmes
- ◆ insufficiently demanding achievement targets for trainees
- ◆ inadequate use of individual training and development plans
- ◆ ineffective management of some subcontractors
- ◆ underdeveloped information systems
- ◆ little sharing of good practice



INTRODUCTION

1. Oldham Engineering Group Training Association Limited (OTC) is a non-profit-making organisation. It is an association of member companies and it trades under the name of OTC. It provides training in engineering and business administration for modern apprentices, national trainees and young people and adults on other work-based training programmes. The training aims mainly to serve the needs of the 109 companies which are members of the association. There is a subsidiary company, which provides other services for member and non-member companies, particularly in the field of health and safety.

2. OTC has contracts with Oldham Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise (CCTE) and Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide training for modern apprentices and other work-based training for young people. The company also has contracts with the CCTE to provide training in engineering and business administration for national trainees and other young people and other training in engineering for adults. At the first inspection, there were 185 young people on the training programmes and no adults. There are now 177 young people and seven adults on the training programmes. Most trainees are employed, or have work placements, with member and non-member companies. OTC also has a contract from a local further education college to provide the New Deal full-time education and training option in business administration and engineering. There is one New Deal client. OTC has another contract with Manchester TEC for school students aged 14 and 15 to attend OTC's training centre for one day each week and work towards NVQs at level 1 in engineering and information technology. Some students progress to an NVQ at level 2. There are 11 students on this programme. This programme is not within the scope of the reinspection.

3. OTC is an approved assessment centre for business administration, engineering and using information technology. The company operates from a large, two-storey training centre in Oldham, which contains engineering workshops, computing facilities, training rooms and offices. At the first inspection, there were 18 full-time staff, three part-time staff, three part-time subcontracted trainers and one part-time subcontracted assessor. There are now 23 full-time and three part-time staff including one trainee in business administration, two subcontracted assessors and three subcontracted trainers. Off-the-job training and some assessment for the level 2 programmes take place at the training centre. Assessment for level 3 NVQs is carried out in the workplace by OTC's training officers. Fourteen staff hold assessors' qualifications and 12 are qualified as internal verifiers. Fifteen of the 17 trainers hold teaching or training qualifications. The other two are working towards a training qualification. Four staff are qualified in the accreditation of prior learning. At the first inspection, two further education colleges were subcontracted to carry out training and assessment in accounting. OTC no longer contracts with one of these colleges. A further local further education college is subcontracted to provide national and higher national certificates in engineering.



4. OTC's members are small, medium and large companies in the Oldham Metropolitan Borough and the Tameside area of Greater Manchester. Oldham has traditionally been a centre for textile manufacturing. More recently, the aerospace industry has come to the town. Manufacturing and engineering remain strong in the area. Sixteen per cent of businesses are in the manufacturing and engineering sectors and these employ 34 per cent of all employees. There is, however, a movement of employees away from the industrial sector to the service sector. The engineering sector in the area is declining, and employment in it is falling. Total employment in the area is also forecast to decline by more than 2 per cent each year over the next four years. Tameside is also a strong manufacturing centre with 30.3 per cent of the working population employed in production jobs. The unemployment rate in Oldham is 3.8 per cent, and in Tameside it is 3.6 per cent. Unemployment rates are highest for the under-25 age group. This is an expanding group in Oldham, where 28.5 per cent of those unemployed are aged between 18 and 24. In Tameside, the proportion is 30.9 per cent. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in Oldham and Tameside was 39.9 per cent and 40.1 per cent respectively, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. By 2000, the figures had risen to 42.4, 42.1 and 49.2 per cent respectively. The proportions of people in Oldham and Tameside from minority ethnic groups are 8.7 per cent and 4.1 per cent respectively. The unemployment rate for people in these groups is higher than that for the rest of the local population.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

5. OTC prepared its first self-assessment report in September 1999. The company involved its entire staff in the self-assessment process. Most staff have attended training sessions on self-assessment. All staff received a copy of *Raising the Standard* and the chief inspector's first annual report. The chief executive led the self-assessment process. Managers and staff participated in discussion groups to assess the various aspects of the programmes. The senior management team used the findings from these discussions as a basis for the self-assessment report. These managers were also responsible for setting the self-assessment grades. The self-assessment report is clearly presented and closely follows the guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. All staff received a copy of the self-assessment report.

6. The most recent self-assessment report was prepared in November 2000. The chief executive again led the process. All staff have been involved in the self-assessment process, through meetings and discussion groups. Some have had further training. Information gathered from trainees and employers has been combined with the findings of the staff discussions as a basis for the self-assessment report. Senior managers again set the self-assessment grades. The report provides a thorough and clear description of government-funded training at OTC, again closely following the guidelines in *Raising the Standard*. The evidence on which the judgements are made is clearly illustrated.

7. At the first inspection, four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at OTC. Inspectors examined company's documents, trainees' portfolios, and records of assessment, verification and attendance. They visited 11 employers and work placement providers and four subcontractors and interviewed 64 trainees representing 35 per cent of the total, 12 members of OTC's staff, 17 workplace supervisors and managers and two subcontractors' staff. Inspectors observed six progress reviews and nine training sessions. The grades awarded for the training sessions are given in the table below.

8. At the reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of four days at OTC. Inspectors examined management files and data, trainees' portfolios, records of assessment and verification, external auditors' reports, agreements with subcontractors and the contracts with Oldham CCTE and Manchester TEC. They visited three employers and one subcontractor and interviewed five trainees, five members of OTC's staff, two workplace supervisors and one subcontractor.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Engineering	1	1	4			6
Business administration		3				3
Total	1	4	4	0	0	9

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

9. OTC offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 and 3 in a variety of engineering disciplines. There are 141 trainees. Of these, 102 are modern apprentices on the engineering manufacture programme, 15 trainees are on the national traineeship programme in engineering and 24 trainees are on other training programmes. Trainees are working towards NVQs in engineering manufacture (foundation), engineering production, technical services, engineering design, engineering maintenance and electrical and electronics servicing. Trainees are employed by, or are on work placements at, member companies of the association or other firms. Those not employed have a conditional offer of employment upon completion of their training. Employers and work placements cover a broad range of engineering activity including manufacturing, tool making, fabrication, maintenance and electronics. Most programmes start with engineering foundation training at OTC's training centre where there is a machine shop, a welding and fabrication workshop and facilities for the assembly and testing of electrical and electronic circuits. Trainees attend the training centre either on a block- or day-release basis.

10. OTC's staff provide the training. There are six training staff. One is a chartered engineer; five are qualified as assessors and two as internal verifiers; one holds a qualification in health and safety and three are qualified in first aid. All the training staff hold teaching or training qualifications. Trainees on the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes receive additional training leading to examination-based, nationally recognised qualifications in one of electronics servicing, electrical installation, mechanical production or fabrication and welding. Training for the qualification in electrical installation is subcontracted to a local further education college. Subcontracted lecturers prepare trainees for the other qualifications. Training takes place at the training centre. Modern apprentices also work towards a national or higher national certificate in an appropriate discipline on a day-release basis at a local further education college. Assessment for the foundation programme is carried out in the training centre. All other assessment occurs in the workplace. Since April 1998, trainees have achieved 108 NVQs at level 2 and above, per 100 leavers. Forty-four per cent of leavers completed their programmes. Inspectors agreed with most of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the company. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ rich variety of on-the-job learning opportunities
- ◆ trainees' high achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some insufficiently rigorous assessment
- ◆ employer's lack of knowledge of NVQs
- ◆ insufficient integration of key skills training with vocational content of programmes

11. Initial off-the-job training in the training centre is of a good quality. The training is carefully planned and tailored to meet the needs of trainees and employers. The workshops have a wide range of equipment and there is an exceptionally high standard of housekeeping. Trainees receive a sound introduction to engineering. Staff set good standards for the trainees to follow. The subcontracted off-the-job training leading to additional qualifications is also particularly good. Trainees are placed with members and non-members of the association. The placements represent a diverse group of engineering companies. Most trainees have a work placement that matches their own aspirations and abilities or are with an employer who suits their needs. Trainees receive good on-the-job training. It is varied and covers a wide range of activities. If an employer or work placement provider cannot enable a trainee to develop and demonstrate all the requisite competencies for an NVQ, the trainee is seconded to another member company which can. Trainees' achievement rates are high. Trainees achieved 108 NVQs at level 2 and above per 100 leavers. This includes four NVQs at level 4. The average for the Chamber at level 2 and above is 50, and for England it is 59.

12. Assessments in the workplace lack rigour. OTC's training officers are responsible for assessments. Most of the evidence is based on witness testimony taken from logbooks. This is not always signed off by a competent person. There are few records of individuals authorised to authenticate witness testimony. There is little assessment through direct observation of trainees' work or through structured questioning of the trainee. Most employers and work-based supervisors lack knowledge and understanding of NVQs. Many see the training programme as OTC's responsibility. There is no involvement of employers in assessment. There is only one work-based assessor. This assessor is not involved in training or assessing trainees. Many employers also see the NVQ as being of secondary importance, compared with the other qualification towards which the trainees are working. Key skills training is an integral part of programmes of trainees who have started since September 1999. For all other trainees, key skills training and assessment are provided at the end of the programme when they have completed work for the NVQs and other qualifications. Trainees do not understand key skills and see little point in them. Trainees feel demotivated when, having completed work for their NVQ and other qualifications, they have to do more work in order to complete their modern apprenticeship or national traineeship. Trainees' completion rates are low. Only 44 per cent of trainees who have left since April 1998 have completed their programme.

Business administration

Grade 2

13. OTC offers modern apprenticeships, national traineeships and other training in administration, accounting and using information technology (IT). There are 44 trainees. Ten trainees are on the modern apprenticeship programme in business administration; of these six are working at level 3 and four at level 2. There are 16 trainees on the national traineeship programme in business administration. Three of these trainees have completed an NVQ at level 2 and are working towards the level 3 qualification, as an additional element to their programme. Two trainees are on a national traineeship programme in accounting. There are 13 trainees on other training programmes in administration; of these, 11 are working at level 2 and two at level 3. Three trainees are on other training programmes in accounting; all are working at level 2. Nineteen of the 44 trainees are working towards an NVQ in using information technology at level 2 as an additional qualification. OTC is an approved assessment centre for NVQs in administration and using information technology. Training and assessment in accounting are subcontracted to two local further education colleges. All the trainees are working in local companies. They are either employed or have a conditional offer of employment for when they complete their training. Administration and information technology trainees attend scheduled off-the-job training sessions at OTC's training centre. Accounts trainees attend off-the-job sessions at the further education colleges. Nineteen trainees also have a further half-day in the training centre working towards the additional qualification of an NVQ in information technology at level 2.

14. There are three training officers in administration. All are occupationally qualified and suitably experienced. They are all qualified as trainers and assessors. Two are qualified as internal verifiers. One holds five qualifications in key skills. A subcontracted specialist in accounting visits the training centre regularly. The achievement rate of the year to March 1999 is 52 NVQs at level 2 and above per 100 leavers. This is slightly higher than the average of 50 for the Chamber and is a significant increase on the rates for the previous two years. The number of trainees leaving with an NVQ has risen consistently from 14 in the year to March 1997, to 48 in the year to March 1999. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some weaknesses were overstated and they awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective on-the-job training
- ◆ good use of naturally occurring evidence
- ◆ opportunities for many trainees to achieve additional qualifications
- ◆ good information technology resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficiently demanding achievement targets for trainees
- ◆ failure to make key skills training fully integral to training programmes

15. Trainees benefit considerably from the training they receive in their work placements. They are given suitably demanding tasks. For example, one administration trainee in a large company is responsible for the administration of the training section and has been trained to use sophisticated computer software to monitor budgets. Workplace supervisors are well informed about NVQs and the programmes their trainees are following. The supervisors are also keen to ensure that both the company and the trainee derive maximum benefit from the training. Trainees are enterprising in deriving good evidence of their competencies for their portfolios from naturally occurring situations in the workplace. OTC's staff provide trainees with effective guidance on how to help them to make the best use of their work-based evidence. Most assessment takes place in the workplace. Many of the trainees are encouraged to work towards an NVQ in addition to their NVQ in administration. Training for this is given at OTC's training centre on one half day a week. Trainees are assessed in the centre and workplace through observation and witness testimony of their performance. Most employers give trainees the additional time off work to complete work for this qualification. Several large companies also fund their employed trainees to pursue career-related qualifications such as a certificate in personnel practice. The information technology equipment at the training centre is up to industry standards in terms of both hardware and software. The work area is light and airy and the member of staff in charge of it is well qualified and suitably experienced.

16. The majority of the trainees are with employers who provide them with good opportunities to gather evidence of their competencies. Training staff, however, do not communicate a sense of urgency to the trainees. During progress reviews with trainees, staff do not emphasize the importance of completing the set targets before the next meeting. The targets themselves are not sufficiently demanding. Some trainees who work determinedly achieve the qualification in good time but are driven by their own exertions rather than OTC's staff. Key skills training is introduced at the end of the training programme, rather than throughout it. Trainees miss opportunities to collect evidence of their attainment of competence in key skills through opportunities that occur naturally in the workplace. Trainees do not appreciate the benefits of key skills. Key skills training is being integrated into the training programme for all trainees who start after September 1999.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

17. OTC has an equal opportunities policy and procedures. These are regularly reviewed and updated. A member of staff has responsibility for, and has attended training courses on, equal opportunities. Trainees are introduced to equal opportunities during their induction. The induction also covers the company's grievance and disciplinary procedures. OTC requires all employers and work placements to have an equal opportunities policy. This is checked as part of the pre-placement audit. One member of the administrative staff and one of the subcontracted trainers are from minority ethnic groups. The training centre is accessible to people with mobility problems. There are no toilet facilities for the physically disabled. There are washing and toilet facilities for both genders in the workshop areas. There are two women on the engineering programmes. Eighteen per cent of business administration trainees are men. People from an ethnic minority background represent 7.1 per cent of the local population and 4.3 per cent of trainees are from a minority ethnic group. Inspectors agreed with many of the weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report. They considered, however, that some of the strengths represented no more than normal practice. They awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive policy and procedures
- ◆ high level of awareness among staff of the importance of equal opportunities
- ◆ staff training to assist communication with minority groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ under-representation of some groups on training programmes
- ◆ some employers' lack of awareness of equal opportunities issues

18. OTC's equal opportunity policy and procedures are reviewed annually and updated as necessary. The most recent review resulted in a complete revision of the policies and procedures. The procedures describe how equality of opportunity is to be promoted, monitored and enforced in all aspects of OTC's activities including recruitment, selection, appointments, training and staff development. Issues such as harassment and discrimination are clearly defined. The new policy and procedures are a significant improvement over those they replace although they have not been established long enough for their effectiveness to be judged. Staff demonstrate a high level of awareness of equal opportunities issues, which are regularly considered at staff meetings. For example, the results of trainee recruitment and selection programmes are analysed and discussed. Procedures are modified where there is evidence that they adversely affect certain groups in any way. Recruitment literature has been revised recently to give a positive image of

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of a good procedure on harassment. Briefing on the procedure clearly specifies the various types of harassment. It identifies the responsibilities of trainees, staff and managers for reporting and acting on instances of harassment and describes the steps to take in reporting harassment. The steps the provider should take in response to a complaint are also described. Details are given of how the complaint, and action taken upon it, should be recorded.

under-represented groups. Management displays considerable sensitivity in providing trainees from minority groups with work placements where work practices are not incompatible with their culture. Staff review trainees' achievement by group and category. In engineering, the NVQ achievement rate of trainees from minority ethnic groups is 48 per cent, compared with 31 per cent for trainees who are not from a minority ethnic group. Staff also review achievement by ethnic group. In engineering, 48 per cent of trainees from minority ethnic groups leave with an NVQ, compared with 31 per cent for white trainees. A member of staff is learning the language of the predominant ethnic minority group in the area and is also being trained in the use of sign language.

19. There are few women trainees in engineering and few male trainees in business administration. The number of trainees from ethnic minority groups and with disabilities falls well below the local averages. OTC identifies these issues as weaknesses in their self-assessment report and has prepared an action plan to recruit more trainees from under-represented groups. Some employers are unaware of equal opportunities issues. Those who recruit their own trainees do not always monitor their recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that equality of opportunity is upheld. Some employers do not monitor the implementation of their own equal opportunities policies. Some trainees work on sites belonging to their employer's customers. When they do so, employers carry out little monitoring of the promotion of equal opportunities on these sites.

Trainee support**Grade 2**

20. Trainees are recruited through the careers service, careers conventions, open days and visits to schools. Training officers and trainees attend these events. Trainees receive an initial assessment before their first interview and two subsequent interviews. Trainees are given an induction to OTC and an induction to their work placement. Trainees entering modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes complete a key skills assessment after their induction programme. Training officers visit trainees in the workplace at least monthly. Many trainees also frequently attend the training centre, often weekly, where they have access to training staff to discuss their progress. Many trainees are employed and those who are not usually have a conditional offer of employment from their work placement provider when they complete their training. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report but they considered that others were no more than normal practice. They found weaknesses that OTC had failed to identify. Inspectors agreed with the grade in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good pastoral support for trainees
- ◆ frequent opportunities for trainees to discuss progress
- ◆ effective recruitment and selection procedure

- ◆ thorough, comprehensive induction programme
- ◆ trainees' success in obtaining jobs

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate use of individual training and development plans
- ◆ no arrangements for the accreditation of trainees' prior experience

21. Trainees have confidence in the staff of OTC who make themselves available to be contacted at any time about work or personal problems. Trainees confirm that when they need personal advice they are given it or are referred to an appropriate agency. Designated members of staff are responsible for helping trainees with drug awareness, housing and alcohol problems. A list of staff responsibilities in these areas is given to trainees during their induction. This allows them to contact the appropriate member of staff directly, should they have a problem, rather than have to go through their training officer. OTC staff frequently provide additional support for trainees who are disadvantaged by disability, learning difficulties or by home problems. There is an annual prize-giving ceremony when trainees' achievements are celebrated by the awarding of prizes donated by member companies. A regular newsletter informs trainees, employers and potential trainees of success and news about training issues. Trainees have frequent opportunities to discuss their progress. Engineering trainees are visited at least monthly at their work placement as well as attending the training centre at frequent, regular intervals. Administration trainees attend the centre at least once a fortnight for NVQ portfolio building and assessment. Trainees also feel confident that they can call upon their trainer or assessor at any time to resolve any problem over their NVQ portfolio or work placement. Many trainees apply to the company for a place on a training programme based on the recommendation of a former trainee. OTC has a selection of tests and interview procedures. These are designed to ensure that trainees are placed on a training programme and given a work placement, appropriate to their abilities and aspirations. Trainees are assessed in basic skills and complete a psychometric test before their initial interview. There is then a second interview and a final interview. Trainees who completed the final interview successfully are made an offer, in writing, of a training place. Trainees on modern apprenticeship and national traineeship programmes complete an initial assessment test in key skills. Their performance in this determines the level at which they start their key skills training.

22. Trainees' induction covers a wide range of topics including health and safety, equal opportunities, the structure and requirements of NVQs, grievance and disciplinary procedures and attendance requirements. The work placement induction also covers health and safety. Six of OTC's staff have qualifications in health and safety. A further six have first aid certificates. The induction is informative and raises issues that trainees recall and understand. Most trainees are employed. OTC's staff make every effort to provide trainees with marketable skills and they have built up a trusted relationship with the group's member companies.

Employers value OTC's participation in the preliminary selection of candidates presented to them to fill training vacancies. Employers are full of praise for OTC and support its activities.

23. The individual training and development plan is completed at the start of training and the trainee retains a copy. The document is not up-dated and does not reflect the progressive achievements of the trainee during the training programme. Although each trainee's progress is recorded in the trainee's file and in the tracking system in the centre, there is no record of any changes made to the training programme. Some trainees come to OTC's work-based training programmes from other study or training where the courses offered have not suited them. Insufficient account is taken of trainees' prior achievements. There are no systematic arrangements for the accreditation of trainees' prior learning and experience. All trainees start at the same level and are expected to progress at the same rate, irrespective of their previous attainments.

Management of training

Grade 3

24. OTC has a clear management structure. There is a board of directors who are elected by the member companies. Most of the directors are directors of member companies. The senior management team consists of the chief executive and four departmental heads. This team meets weekly to discuss business and training issues. There are monthly departmental meetings, chaired by the head of each department and attended by all departmental staff. There is also a quarterly staff meeting attended by all members of staff. There are regular meetings with employers. Minutes of all meetings are kept. There is also daily informal contact between the chief executive, senior managers and staff. OTC has a business plan. This is agreed with members of staff and approved by the directors. Staff receive an annual appraisal, which is used as a basis for their own development and training plan. Staff recruitment and selection procedures are clearly specified in writing. OTC has recently invested in new computers and software to upgrade its management information system. The new computers are not networked. OTC employs a number of health and safety specialists. Their role is to provide health and safety training for member companies and to oversee the health and safety of training both in the training centre and in work placements. Inspectors agreed with the strengths stated in the self-assessment report. They found two key weaknesses, however, that OTC had not identified. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good arrangements for staff development and staff appraisal
- ◆ effective relationships with employers
- ◆ strong emphasis on management of health and safety

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ underdeveloped information systems
- ◆ some failure to agree or follow actions through
- ◆ ineffective management of some subcontractors

25. Staff development is given a high priority. Staff training and development plans are constructed to meet the needs of the business and individuals. All the individual development plans are integrated into the overall business plan. The chief executive and a number of senior managers are studying for a diploma in business excellence. The staff appraisal system is thorough. Before being appraised, staff are given guidance notes to help them to prepare for the appraisal interview. Team working skills form part of the staff development programme. Staff motivation is high. Staff regularly give their own time to specific projects. For example, staff recently helped to upgrade and paint the training areas. OTC manages its relationship with trainees' employers very effectively. When training officers make their monthly visits to the workplace, they meet with employers. There is good communication between employers and OTC. Many employers involve OTC in their recruitment and selection of trainees. The required profiles of candidates for training vacancies are discussed and agreed with OTC's staff who then find a number of suitable candidates. OTC manages the recruitment and selection process effectively, and ensures that all applicants have an interview with employers. Employers often ask OTC to provide additional training courses such as those on the use of abrasive wheels or good practice in manual handling, on a commercial basis. Trainees are often able to attend these at their employers' expense.

26. There is a strong commitment to health and safety throughout the company. A large number of staff hold relevant qualifications and most staff have had first aid training. There is a well-established consultative health and safety committee with representatives from staff and trainees. Meetings are held every other month. Minutes of those meetings are kept. They record agreed action and state who has responsibility for carrying it out. Copies of the minutes are displayed on the notice boards throughout the training centre. Trainees are encouraged to play an active role in health and safety decision-making. Comprehensive risk assessments are carried out in the training centre and at employers' premises and the records of these are available to staff and trainees. There is a strong management commitment to cleanliness and tidiness. The training centre provides an excellent example to trainees and visitors of good environmental management.

27. OTC has made considerable efforts to improve its management information systems. New equipment has been purchased that has the potential to meet the business requirements. However, management information is not yet readily available. Information on trainees' achievement and other statistics takes some time to produce, often involving a number of staff. Information on trainees is not always reliable. For example, details of trainees' off-the-job training which included the trainees' work placements is not consistent with the list of trainees and their work placements. Few staff can access the company's data on trainees

and have to rely on others to provide much of the information they require. There is no historical information in the new system and managers are unable to monitor trends in trainees' performance. Some staff training plans are incomplete. Dates by which staff must reach their individual targets are not always recorded. There is no record of training that has been completed. Action points from management meetings are not always agreed. Responsibilities for actions are not always recorded. There are few target dates for the implementation of actions. A record of completed action is not maintained. There is inadequate communication with the subcontracted further education colleges. Most of the contact between OTC's managers and colleges is by telephone. There is no regular flow of information on trainees' performance from the colleges to OTC even though there is a contractual requirement for this.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

28. OTC has a quality assurance policy and written quality assurance procedures. The procedures are available to all staff and they are aware of their requirements. The company's policies on health and safety and equal opportunities are also included in the quality assurance system. There is a procedure for the internal audit of the quality assurance system. The company collects written feedback from trainees and employers at regular intervals through the use of questionnaires. The views of staff are gathered from monthly departmental and quarterly staff meetings. Qualified members of OTC's staff carry out internal verification. Training at OTC's training centre and at subcontractors is regularly monitored by OTC's staff. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process. Most staff have had training in self-assessment and in ways of implementing continuous improvement.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ insufficiently well-established quality assurance procedures
- ◆ insufficiently rigorous internal verification process
- ◆ insufficient target-setting

29. The quality assurance system is now well established and providing a satisfactory basis for quality assurance. Internal verification is now rigorous and has been developed to the point at which it is a strength. There has been little improvement in target-setting, which remains a weakness. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths in the self-assessment report and identified different weaknesses. They awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective internal auditing of quality assurance system
- ◆ regular monitoring of training
- ◆ good internal verification process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient target-setting
- ◆ little sharing of good practice

GOOD PRACTICE

Just before an external verifier is scheduled to visit OTC, staff are given a form on which to put questions for the external verifier or points they would like clarifying. Staff use this form if they are not going to be at the training centre during the external verifier's visit or in case they are unable to speak to the external verifier during the day. The external verifier responds to each individual on the points they have raised either in writing or during the visit as appropriate. Staff make full use of this opportunity.

30. There is an effective internal auditing system. Audits are planned. Each procedure is audited at least once each year and in some cases three times each year. New procedures and those which have been modified are audited more frequently than others. Internal auditing identifies non-compliance with existing procedures. There is an outstanding actions file and this is monitored frequently. Non-compliance is addressed and corrected. Evidence has to be supplied to the quality assurance co-ordinator to demonstrate that they have been corrected. The senior management committee has to approve any proposed changes to the system. As well as maintaining adherence to current procedures, the internal auditing process seeks recommendations from staff as to how procedures can be improved. As a result of auditing, there have been many improvements. Four improvements were made to procedures for staff recruitment and improved procedures relating to the monitoring of subcontractors have been introduced as a result of recommendations made during internal auditing. Eight members of staff take part in auditing and they have all received training in auditing procedures.

31. OTC regularly monitors the quality of its training. This is by direct observation and by regular monitoring of trainees' performance. The monitoring of training has led to two subcontracted trainers being replaced. OTC also monitors the performance of its trainees in the examination-based occupational qualifications which form part of their qualification framework by comparing their results with national statistics obtained from the awarding body. Monitoring is supplemented by a questionnaire sent to trainees every six months and a questionnaire sent to trainees when they leave. Trainees' responses to the questionnaires are recorded, summarised and discussed at staff and management meetings. Training officers make monthly visits to all work placements to monitor trainees' progress in the workplace. Questionnaires are sent to employers yearly, and responses to these are recorded and summarised. Actions are taken as a result of responses from questionnaires. For example, many of the hand tools in OTC's workshop have been replaced as a result of trainees' response to one questionnaire.

32. Internal verification is good. There are 12 staff qualified as internal verifiers out of a staff of 26. More are being trained. Internal verification in each of the two occupational areas is managed by the centre co-ordinators in each of the areas. In each area there is centralised sampling and monitoring. The centre co-ordinator chooses the samples. Each internal verifier has a plan which looks forward six months. The centre co-ordinator monitors internal verifiers' completion of their

plans every two months. Reports on non-compliance, together with revised plans, have to be supplied to the centre co-ordinator if the plan for the preceding two months has not been completed. Internal verifiers in each occupational area meet twice yearly to standardise assessment practice. All internal verifiers meet as a single group at least once each year. Internal verifiers provide good guidance to assessors on improvements in assessment practice. Since the first inspection, assessments by direct observation in the workplace have substantially increased in engineering.

33. There is insufficient target-setting. Targets for the number of trainees starting training, retention rates and achievement rates are set to meet contractual requirements. Performance information is not disseminated to individuals. Staff do not have personal performance targets. There is no analysis of trends, and few targets are set for improvement. There are missed opportunities for using targets and analysis of trends for continuous improvement of the training and assessment process. There are many lost opportunities for the sharing of good practice. There is some duplication of effort. There are different procedures in use in the two occupational areas. Good practice in one area has not been adopted in the other. There is no standardisation across the training programmes. There are many examples of these differences having a direct impact upon trainees. In one area issues relating to a trainee were identified at an early stage, but not addressed for many months. In another issues raised at progress reviews have not been followed up. There is no quality assurance procedure to address this problem.