



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 1998

South West Durham Training Limited

SUMMARY

South West Durham Training Limited offers training and assessment in engineering trades and business administration. Both subjects are well taught, and success rates in the achievement of qualifications and employment are high. Resources for training are good, with much industry-standard equipment providing trainees with valuable practical experience. Trainees achieve a range of appropriate qualifications in addition to their national vocational qualifications (NVQs), improving their employability. Employment rates on completion of training are good. Trainee support is thorough. Management information systems and communication among staff are good. Quality control measures are effective, but the systems do not focus the quality of training or foster its continuous improvement.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	2
Business administration	1

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective entry procedures used to plan training for each trainee
- ◆ accommodation and training resources are of a high standard
- ◆ good achievement rates
- ◆ good-quality, well-planned and fully documented training
- ◆ thorough trainee support throughout programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor integration of key skills within NVQs
- ◆ no systematic monitoring procedures for equal opportunities
- ◆ quality assurance procedures not focused on training quality
- ◆ identified weaknesses not successfully rectified

INTRODUCTION

1. South West Durham Training Limited is a group company limited by guarantee. It is a registered charity, with over 200 member companies across the northeast region which are mainly engineering production and machining employers. South West Durham Training is based on the Newton Aycliffe Industrial Park, about five miles north of Darlington. South West Durham Training began in 1967 as a small training company for engineering apprentices. It now employs 35 full-time staff and provides training for about 480 trainees in engineering and business administration. The company also offers a variety of full-cost courses for commercial clients. Currently, South West Durham Training has contracts with County Durham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and the Tees Valley TEC. Most trainees are working towards NVQs at levels 1 to 3 through 'next step', a local name for youth training, modern apprenticeships and adult training programmes. At the time of inspection, there were 365 modern apprentices, 67 next-step trainees and 22 people on adult training programmes.

2. Unemployment in the northeast region is currently high, at 8.4 per cent, compared with the national average of just over 5 per cent. People aged 25 to 49 account for a significant share of the unemployed. Ethnic minority groups make up just 0.39 per cent of the population of those over the age of 16, much lower than the average rate in England.

3. The educational qualifications of local school leavers are below the national average. The proportion of 16-year-old school leavers achieving five or more general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) grades A* to C is only 38.1 per cent in 1997, compared with the average of the rest of England of 45.1 per cent in June 1997. South West Durham Training competes for trainees with local further education colleges, sixth form colleges and other training providers in the area.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. South West Durham Training produced its first self-assessment report a month before inspection. The process of self-assessment provided the company with good evidence to evaluate the quality of training across awards and programmes. The process was thorough and largely accurate. It also highlighted a need to improve systems and documentation for quality assurance purposes. Development work has subsequently been concentrated on these areas, and the inspection team saw evidence of the resulting improvements.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at South West Durham Training during June 1998. All of the occupational areas offered by the company were inspected. Inspectors examined company and awarding body documents. They interviewed staff from the company, employers and trainees. Inspectors visited 15 employers and three subcontractors, interviewed 25 staff and 54 trainees, observed six training sessions and three NVQ assessments. They examined assessment records, trainees' work and portfolios.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 2

6. South West Durham Training has 417 engineering trainees, in total, working towards Engineering and Marine Training Authority (EMTA) NVQ qualifications. All trainees undergo a period of off-the-job training at the start of their programme. Modern apprentices complete NVQ level 2 and develop skills in a range of different engineering areas, such as electrical, mechanical, fabrication and machining in addition to their chosen specialisms. This training lasts for about one year and includes one day each week at a local college studying for a further education qualification in engineering. Following this foundation training, trainees on modern apprenticeships join their employer and start working towards their NVQ level 3, while attending the second year of their day-release college course. Many trainees also go on to complete higher qualifications, for example, some take a degree in engineering under the sponsorship of their employer.

7. There are 72 trainees on the youth training engineering programme who complete a 12-week course at South West Durham Training and achieve NVQ level 2. During this period, South West Durham Training tries to match them to an employer for further training and employment. The vast majority of those completing this course finds employment and many are moved onto a modern apprenticeship programme. There are 18 adults on adult training engineering NVQ level 2 programmes. Some of these trainees are training in South West Durham Training's workshops and some are developing their skills with employers. The self-

assessment report was thorough and accurate. Inspectors were able to validate the grade and judgements given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training is well planned, fully documented and delivered to high standards
- ◆ off-the-job assessment is good
- ◆ trainees' work often exceeds the required level of occupational competence
- ◆ good accommodation and resources
- ◆ comprehensive testing and selection informs appropriate work placement
- ◆ qualifications and job outcomes exceed contract requirements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ late introduction of key skills into modern apprenticeship programmes
- ◆ key skills are not integrated into occupational programmes

GOOD PRACTICE

Each year, local schools are invited to bring pupils into the training workshops for a day's practical work. Transport is provided, and engineering modern apprentices give practical tuition to the pupils (50 per cent have to be female) to enable them to complete a team project. The pupils are put into small team groups and set a practical task to complete using their newly acquired skills. At the end of the day, all participants receive a certificate recognising their achievements. The process is repeated daily for five days. School pupils gain new skills and first-hand experience of engineering work; females gain an insight into engineering trades and are encouraged to consider it as a career; schools expand their curriculum; apprentices gain experience and confidence; the company enhances its potential recruitment intake.

8. South West Durham Training has excellent training workshops with a blend of both equipment for developing basic skills and modern equipment found in industry. The premises are clean and well maintained. Additional accommodation is currently being built to enhance the current provision. All trainees applying to South West Durham Training undergo comprehensive testing to assess their current ability and prior experience. This information, together with school reports and interview data, is used well to match trainees to potential employers.

9. The training is well planned and co-ordinated. The on- and off-the-job elements are designed to complement one another to maximise learning. Trainers use a range of teaching methods and styles to enhance learning and retain trainees' interest. Assessment is also well planned, taking place in the workplace and at the company's premises. Training and supervisory staff are well qualified in their subjects, as assessors, and most have qualifications in training.

10. The introduction of key skills have been delayed for most modern apprentices, creating additional workloads for trainees when they are busy with both college and NVQ assessment work. Opportunities are being missed to collect work evidence which may be suitable for both the NVQ and key skills.

Business administration

Grade 1

11. The administration programme at South West Durham Training was introduced 12 years ago in response to requests from local companies. There is a total of 59 trainees. All the administration trainees follow NVQ at least to level 2, with all modern apprentices proceeding to level 3. All the trainees are working in local companies, 50 of them for four days a week, with the fifth day spent in college gaining additional skills and knowledge for their NVQs. Inspectors interviewed 16 trainees, three training staff and four employers. The self-assessment report underestimated the strengths of provision in this area; for this reason, inspectors awarded a higher grade than that proposed by the company.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ training is effectively designed and planned
- ◆ trainees acquire a wide range of additional skills which complement NVQs
- ◆ trainees' progress is effectively and frequently reviewed
- ◆ success rates are high
- ◆ training staff are well qualified
- ◆ high-quality accommodation and training resources

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inspectors identified no weaknesses

12. The trainees have clearly defined learning programmes which have been designed to increase employment prospects. Trainees who attend college gain a range of additional qualifications which includes the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT), City and Guilds 726 information technology, RSA integrated business technology (IBT) and Pitmans bookkeeping. These additional qualifications help trainees to both develop their skills and improve their employability. The staff visit trainees every four to five weeks to assess progress and set new targets.

13. Trainees benefit from well-planned and well-delivered training programmes. Assessment is thorough and takes place both on and off the job. Trainees receive helpful and regular feedback on their progress. Equipment and accommodation are both good and well managed. Trainees are punctual, with low absenteeism. Almost all trainees achieve employment on completion of their programmes.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

14. South West Durham Training takes its commitment to equality of opportunity seriously – there is much sound practice. Trainee recruitment is monitored for gender, age, ethnicity and disability. At the present time, there are five trainees from minority ethnic groups on the programme, this being above the percentage in the local community. Some of the company's promotional literature has been redeveloped to eliminate occupational stereotyping, with some staff undertaking training in equal opportunities awareness. The company's view of its performance was accurate, the inspectors agreeing with the self-assessment report grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ trainees have an above-average understanding of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ employers and staff demonstrate positive attitudes to equality of opportunity
- ◆ comprehensive selection procedures

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor follow-up of equal opportunities issues discussed at meetings
- ◆ no systematic monitoring procedures
- ◆ equal opportunities issues are not sufficiently understood by employers
- ◆ action to improve gender balance in recruitment has not been effective

15. Trainees have a good understanding of most aspects of equal opportunities, in both training and workplace situations. Employers are concerned to provide trainees with a wide range of experience and training, consistent with the trainees' abilities and aspirations, but their understanding of equal opportunities issues is narrow. Most focus on single issues, particularly gender or ethnicity, to the exclusion of other concerns such as disability and harassment. Few consider basic matters, such as fair treatment in the allocation of work, as an issue.

16. South West Durham Training's managers are well aware of the gender imbalance on the various programmes, and some action has been taken to improve promotional materials. This is partly in response to an engineering employer's request to increase the number of female trainees. Programme review meetings include trainees, company staff, employers, TEC staff and careers professionals. These meetings include discussion of equal opportunities issues, and ideas are put forward to improve, for example, gender representation. Little action follows from this, and minutes of these meetings do not identify the actions required, by whom or by when they should take place. Data on gender recruitment imbalance on programmes are frequently monitored. This process has not resulted in target-setting or achievement. Monitoring information shows a declining trend. In 1996, there was

a significantly greater number of women in engineering and men on administration programmes. Since then, numbers have dropped significantly and there has been no analysis of why this situation has occurred.

17. South West Durham Training and all employers interviewed relied on informal supervisory systems to identify equal opportunities problems encountered by trainees. The lack of a formal and systematic approach means that they are unable to confidently ensure the absence of problems in the workplace.

Trainee support

Grade 2

18. South West Durham Training's support for trainees starts with potential trainees two years before training begins, right through to qualification completion. Training officers provide support and frequent feedback on trainees' progress. The self-assessment report identifies the strengths and weaknesses accurately, the inspectors agreeing with the grade awarded.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high level of support for trainees throughout training programmes
- ◆ frequent support and feedback are provided by training officers
- ◆ member company arrangements foster consistent high-quality support

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective key skills integration hinders individual progress
- ◆ some trainees and employers unaware of key skill requirements

19. South West Durham Training has a sophisticated and comprehensive selection of tests and procedures, ensuring that trainees are well matched by ability to appropriate courses. The tests have been developed by the National Foundation for Educational Research and help to identify particular skills and abilities which relate directly to the programmes offered by South West Durham Training. Interviews and detailed information from schools supplement the tests.

20. Trainee support is good across both occupational areas. Business administration trainees are given effective and regular support every four or five weeks throughout the programme. Trainees receive help and guidance from training officers and college staff. Engineering trainees have good support for the off-the-job training at South West Durham Training and in the workplace from its training officers. The member-company status for employers encourages them to take an active interest in all aspects of the training programmes. In particular, the consistently high quality of trainee support is a feature of this additional commitment. Employers encourage trainees to develop and progress to higher-level

qualifications. They give considerable amounts of paid time for their trainees to learn and progress their skills.

Management of training

Grade 3

21. South West Durham Training is well managed with clear structures which are understood by staff. The company is managed by a general manager/company secretary who reports to a board of directors elected each year from local industry. The judgements in the self-assessment report were largely the same as those of the inspectors and the grade was confirmed.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-developed and maintained external relationships
- ◆ effective planning, evaluation and monitoring of trainees' progress
- ◆ good management data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ staff appraisal system is applied inconsistently
- ◆ management meetings do not identify clear action points

22. South West Durham Training has clear and effective lines of communication. Those among the company, employers and colleges are equally good, enabling all staff to monitor trainees' progress thoroughly and promptly. Co-operation among all parties to this process is good. Specifically designed information technology software provides the company with accurate and timely trainee data. This information is used to help managers and staff with planning.

23. There is a staff appraisal system which is inconsistently applied. Some departments have conducted few appraisals, while others are almost complete. This system is not sufficiently managed to ensure consistency. Management meetings, at which improvements are discussed, do not result in actions being allocated within agreed timescales. The management of the introduction of key skills as a requirement of modern apprenticeship programmes has been slow.

Quality assurance**Grade 3**

24. South West Durham Training is introducing the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9000 series system which will replace the current system called QUEST, which is the quality assurance system required by County Durham TEC. This process began in October 1997. The ISO system will contain all required references to the QUEST standard, which the TEC will still use as its benchmark to evaluate quality in the company. The company is implementing ISO in response to suggestions from the employers with which they deal and to improve quality control in the organisation. The company's view of its quality assurance capability was accurate; the inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ quality assurance procedures are well defined, documented and audited
- ◆ achievement of many performance targets exceeds TEC requirements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no quality assurance procedure for the formal evaluation of training quality
- ◆ data are not used to assess the quality of training

25. The company is in a transitional phase with its quality assurance systems. The ISO system is being introduced progressively, to enhance the current quality assurance systems. The absence of procedures for evaluating the quality of training is a serious omission from an otherwise comprehensive system. Training programmes are not systematically reviewed. The company collects accurate data, but they are not used to inform improvements to the programmes. Trainees and employers' views are not formally collected and analysed to inform improvements. Although the organisation does not set specific targets, it has established a policy to exceed performance targets agreed on with the TEC at the start of each programme year. The statistics show that it consistently and significantly exceeds the set targets.