



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT OCTOBER 2000

# Waltham Forest Chamber of Commerce Training Trust

## SUMMARY

Waltham Forest Chamber of Commerce Training Trust gives good off-the-job training for most of its trainees. There are, however, missed opportunities for workplace assessment. Business administration programmes have poor assessment practice. Retention and achievement rates are low on all programmes. In construction and engineering, employers' understanding of trainees' programmes is weak. Trainees in these two areas also have little understanding of equal opportunities issues. Equal opportunities procedures and management are poor. Trainees are well supported by their liaison officers with whom they meet frequently. Initial assessment of basic and key skills is poor, with no identification of individual learning needs or training programmes. While there are effective local partnerships and good links with schools and the careers service, there is poor management of training. Subcontractors, including colleges and employers, are not managed effectively and there is no link between the on- and off-the-job training. There is little use of data as a basis for management decisions and there are no effective strategies for managing staff shortages. Quality assurance is less than satisfactory. There is little quality assurance of training and no systematic action-planning.

### GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	4
Engineering	4
Business administration	4
Health, care & public services	4

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	4
Trainee support	4
Management of training	5
Quality assurance	4

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ regular, effective pastoral support

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment
- ◆ poor evaluation, review and action-planning of equal opportunities
- ◆ poor staff awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ weak initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective progress reviews and action-planning
- ◆ poor management of subcontractors
- ◆ little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ poor use of data
- ◆ little quality assurance of training
- ◆ no systematic action-planning

## INTRODUCTION

1. Waltham Forest Chamber of Commerce Training Trust is a limited company operating as a registered charity. The company was set up in 1983 to offer training for young people in Waltham Forest and the surrounding area. The Chamber is directed and monitored by its three trustees. A full-time manager was involved in the setting up of the Chamber. The trustees meet on a three-monthly basis and members are drawn from local industry. The company initially offered other work-based training programmes for young people, and began offering modern apprenticeships and national traineeships in 1995 and 1998 respectively. The company now provides training and assessment for trainees across six boroughs in London. The Chamber has programmes in construction, engineering, business administration and health, care and public services NVQs at levels 2 and 3.
2. The Chamber holds a contract with London East Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide work-based training. There are currently 271 young people and adults in training, consisting of 87 modern apprentices, 13 advanced modern apprentices, 48 national trainees and 123 trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people. One hundred and twenty trainees are on construction programmes, 70 trainees are on engineering programmes, 10 are on business administration programmes and 71 are on childcare programmes.
3. The Chamber operates from its main administrative offices in Walthamstow. It does not have any training facilities on site. Off-the-job training is given at six local colleges. The company employs nine staff. Seven, including the manager, are full time and two are part time.
4. In 1998, Waltham Forest had a population of 221,400. Unemployment rates for August 2000 show that 9.3 per cent of the local population was unemployed, which is considerably higher than the national rate of 3.5 per cent. Of those currently unemployed, 20.4 per cent are aged between 18 and 24. The labour market is most buoyant in the public administration, education, health, banking, finance and insurance sectors. In the TEC area, 4.5 per cent of employment is in the construction industry and 14.2 per cent is in manufacturing. Data produced by the London Research Centre in 1999, show that 33 per cent of the population in Waltham Forest and 28.8 per cent of the population in TEC area are from minority ethnic groups. This is much higher than the 6.4 per cent for the United Kingdom as a whole and the 24.9 per cent for Greater London.
5. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 36.6 per cent in Waltham Forest, which is lower than the national average of 47.9 per cent. Data released by the careers service in 1997, showed that 72 per cent of year-11 school leavers in the TEC area remained in full-time education, compared with an



average of 69 per cent for England as a whole. The proportion of school leavers entering work-based training is 5 per cent, which is lower than the 10 per cent figure for England.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

6. All the Chamber's staff attended three half-day workshops on self-assessment organised by the TEC. They then produced their first self-assessment report in November 1998. This self-assessment report included the views of all members of staff. Employers and trainees' views were collected through meetings and questionnaires. These have been included within the monthly reviews of the self-assessment report. Self-assessment reports are produced annually. A third self-assessment report was written in January 2000, as part of this cycle. The self-assessment report was optimistic and attributed strengths in generic areas to all occupational areas. It did not consider the work of subcontractors such as the colleges and employers and the impact these have on trainees. Inspectors agreed with few of the strengths and weaknesses and awarded lower grades than those given in the self-assessment report for all aspects of the training.

7. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 28 days in October 2000 at the Chamber. They visited 41 work placements, and interviewed 98 trainees, 27 workplace supervisors and managers, a careers service representative and all of the staff. They observed five training sessions, and no assessments or progress reviews. Inspectors examined records of assessments, trainees' portfolios, individual training plans, internal verification records, trainees and employers' agreements and files, subcontractors' records and files, feedback sheets, statistics, minutes of meetings, staff and trainees' handbooks, initial assessment tests, induction packs, policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction		2				2
Engineering		2				2
Health, care & public services		1				1
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Construction

### Grade 4

8. There are 120 trainees following construction training programmes. Forty-six are foundation modern apprentices, 10 are advanced modern apprentices, nine are national trainees and 55 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. Eighty trainees are working towards NVQs in installing electro-technical systems, 39 trainees are taking plumbing and heating NVQs and one trainee is a

modern apprentice on the refrigeration and air conditioning programme. All nine national trainees are taking the plumbing and heating qualifications. All training and assessment for the NVQ and key skills take place within six local colleges, on a day- or block-release basis. All trainees are employed, mainly in small companies, and work on sites throughout northeast London and beyond. Trainees generally work directly with workplace supervisors who are experienced craftspeople keen to pass on their knowledge and skills. The supervisors are occupationally qualified and experienced but do not hold assessors' qualifications. Trainees are moved between jobs and sites to gain a range of experiences in different situations. Trainees have a formal progress review every three months, in addition to weekly visits either on or off the job. These are carried out by the liaison officers, one of whom who holds assessors and verifiers' awards, but in the engineering occupational area. The number of trainees is increasing each year. The retention rate has improved from 56 per cent in 1997-98, to 79 per cent in 1999-2000. Only one trainee has achieved the qualification aims on his training plan since training started in 1997 and the remaining trainees are still on the programme. Inspectors were able to agree with only one of the three strengths and two of the three weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found one strength in the self-assessment report to be no more than normal practice and the other to be more appropriate to trainee support, while the weakness is recognised in management of training. An additional significant weakness, in the low achievement rate, was identified, and a lower grade was awarded.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training and resources

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no workplace assessment
- ◆ poor understanding of training programmes by employers
- ◆ low achievement rates

9. The off-the-job training, including knowledge and understanding, key skills and assessment, takes place at local colleges. They are well resourced, with appropriate materials and equipment. There are well-qualified and occupationally experienced trainers. Trainees are motivated by the good quality training sessions. Trainers regularly call on the work experiences of the trainees and relate these to the training. Trainers monitor trainees' progress effectively at college. There are robust internal verification systems.

10. All trainees are employed and there are some good work placements, which provide trainees with varied and relevant work-based experience and training. However, all assessment takes place off the job at college. There is an over-reliance on simulated activities at college rather than real work experience for training and assessment. Work-based evidence, witnessed by workplace

supervisors, is used for portfolio-building. However, these supervisors are not sufficiently familiar with the NVQ or unit requirements to make best use of this process. Many of the trainees and their employers have a poor understanding of the key skills requirements on the programmes and are missing opportunities to collect evidence for them. There are no workplace assessors and only one of the liaison officers is occupationally competent in construction. This liaison officer is not qualified as an assessor.

**POOR PRACTICE**

*A trainee who had already started at college before being recruited by the Chamber is taking an electrical installation qualification, but not an NVQ. At the time the college did not have accreditation to offer the NVQ. The trainee was kept at the college to avoid disruption to his training. The college has recently been granted accreditation, but neither the trainee nor employer is aware of the need to complete the NVQ.*

11. Employers are not involved in planning of training, and most have little involvement in the training programmes. They are poorly informed about the NVQ, its assessment requirements and the role they can play in supporting their trainees. For example, the plumbing framework allows optional units to suit the range of on-the-job activities, but these are not discussed with the employers. All trainees follow the same standard programme. The only supervisors who have knowledge of the NVQ requirements are those who have obtained similar qualifications themselves. There is little sharing of college schemes of work with employers to enable effective planning of on-the-job training. Some employers offer a narrow range of opportunities for skills acquisition. Although trainees could gain experience by temporary moves to other employers, this is still to be implemented. Most employers are unaware of the trainees' progress towards achieving the qualification.

12. There is poor achievement of the qualification aims on trainees' individual training plans. There has only been one trainee who has achieved all the qualifications on his training plan. For modern apprentices, both plumbing and electrical installation programmes generally require four years to complete. However, it is generally expected by the industry that NVQ at level 2 will be achieved in an average of two years. Of the 36 trainees who started in 1997-98, only 10 trainees (28 per cent) have achieved the NVQ at level 2. Sixteen of the trainees (44 per cent) who started in that year have left early with no qualifications. Over the past four years, only four (8 per cent) of the 50 early leavers have left with any qualifications.

**Engineering**

**Grade 4**

13. There are currently 70 young people following a range of engineering NVQ programmes. There are 40 foundation modern apprentices, three advanced modern apprentices, seven national trainees and 20 trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people. Forty trainees are taking motor vehicle mechanic NVQs, eight are on motorcycle mechanics programmes, 11 on vehicle body repair programmes, three on vehicle parts programmes, six on mechanical engineering programmes, two on electronics programmes and one on a heavy vehicle programme. All the trainees are employed within a range of automotive parts distributors and motor vehicle companies mostly within the northeast London area, but also in Southend-on-sea and Harlow. The trainees following motor vehicle courses attend college for off-the-job training for eight one-week blocks and day

release during the first year and in year two and in year three they attend on a day-release basis. These trainees aim to achieve an NVQ at level 2 in year one and an NVQ at level 3 with key skills in year two. Trainees in their third year can take an additional NVQ at level 2, for example in vehicle inspection. Trainees at one company are able to take a higher national certificate (HNC) course. All the other trainees attend college on a day-release basis for two or three years depending on the NVQ level they are working towards. Two local colleges are used for off-the-job training. Assessment is carried out in the colleges' workshops. The number of trainees joining the programme has declined steadily over the past four years. Eight (15 per cent) of the 55 trainees who started in 1997-98 have achieved their qualification aims. No other trainees have achieved their qualification aims but many programmes are scheduled to take three to four years. Fifty-three (35 per cent) of the 151 trainees who have started programmes in the past four years have left early. Thirteen of these early leavers have left with some qualifications and the remaining 40 left with no qualifications. Data on achievement given during inspection were found to contain some inaccuracies. Inspectors agreed with one of the four strengths in the self-assessment report and found the others to be no more than normal practice or more appropriate to trainee support. They agreed with all three weaknesses but felt that two of them were included within the other weaknesses relating to missed opportunities for assessment. Inspectors identified one additional, significant strength and two additional significant weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good off-the-job training and resources
- ◆ well-resourced work placements

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no workplace assessment
- ◆ poor understanding of training programmes by employers and trainees
- ◆ poorly structured final year of motor vehicle modern apprenticeship
- ◆ infrequent reports on trainees' progress from subcontractors

14. Off-the-job training facilities include large workshops, which are well presented and contain up-to-date equipment. Three of the workshops, motorcycle, light vehicle and body and paint, contain vehicles which have been donated or loaned by large vehicle manufacturers or retailers for training purposes. Trainees are taught in groups of about 12, either in dedicated groups or together with college students. Training sessions are of a good standard. The college's trainers are well qualified, enthusiastic and committed to ensuring success. Most have assessors' qualifications and one holds the internal verifiers' award and four others are close to completing this award.

15. The employers' workplace facilities are excellent with good opportunities for work-based assessment and evidence gathering. Trainees' managers and employers are strongly committed to their trainees receiving good training. They strive to ensure trainees' personal development needs are discussed and met. Links between the Chamber and the employers are good and well established. These relationships have evolved and developed over a long period of time.

16. No assessment takes place at the workplace, and college trainers have very little contact with employers. The college's staff carry out portfolio-building, practical training and assessment at college. Trainees do provide job-cards from the workplace, endorsed by the workplace supervisor as evidence of competence to ensure a range of portfolio evidence is covered. Both trainees and employers lack understanding of the NVQ and the value of key skills. Employers are not always able to assist trainees to gather a range of evidence from the workplace for portfolio-building and assessment. On-the-job learning is not planned and is not linked to what happens at college. Evidence of key skills is gained mainly through college assignment, however some key skills are identified through evidence from work, like jobcards.

17. Modern apprentices following motor vehicle courses are encouraged to achieve the NVQ at level 3 in vehicle maintenance and repair in two years. The modern apprenticeship framework is designed to be followed over three years and through three phases. Each phase allows trainees to reach the appropriate level of skill. Accelerating the NVQ does not allow for this development and is of little benefit to the trainee. Trainees do not normally have the appropriate level of skills after only two years of training to be competent. Trainees who successfully gain the NVQ at level 3 in two years are offered advanced training courses at the local college. These courses are often inappropriate. For example, trainees were advised to transfer to an HNC programme straight from the NVQ at level 3 without the required foundation studies and they often struggle to meet the standards required. Trainees who complete the level 3 NVQ in two years and decide not to take further study do not receive visits from the liaison officer in the third year. They do not have any on- or off-the-job training, do not have their progress reviewed and are not working towards any agreed target or goal. Trainees who started the programme in 2000-01 have revised plans which show this programme will be taught over three years, rather than two.

18. The colleges fail to issue the trainees, employers or liaison officers with frequent progress reports. They issue one report each year, the timing of which is inappropriate. The reports are written at the end of each academic year, after completion of the NVQ. This is too late to monitor trainees' progress and agree supportive action for trainees who need help. Despite an unsigned agreement between the Chamber and the colleges stipulating that reports are produced each term, this has not happened or been required.

## Business administration

## Grade 4

19. The Chamber has 10 national trainees taking administration programmes. All of the trainees are employed in the Walthamstow area and surrounding districts in small companies with fewer than 10 employees. The trainees attend a local college for one day each week for training and assessment of their NVQ and key skills evidence. Most trainees start their administration programmes directly from school at 16, having been referred to the Chamber by the careers service. There are two men and three trainees from minority ethnic groups. A liaison officer visits the trainees once a week at college and at their work placement once every two to three weeks. Eleven trainees started national traineeships in 1999-2000. Of these, only three trainees completed their whole programme and seven achieved an NVQ at level 2. Sixteen trainees started national traineeships in 1999-2000. Of these, six have achieved an NVQ at level 2, and are working towards achieving their key skills and the national traineeship framework. Nine trainees left the programme early without achieving a qualification. In 1997-98, three trainees started modern apprenticeships and achieved NVQ at levels 2 and 3 but did not complete their whole programme. The self-assessment report identified three strengths and three weaknesses. Two of the strengths were more appropriate to the area of trainee support. The third strength was judged to be a weakness. Inspectors agreed with two of the weaknesses. The grade awarded is lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

### POOR PRACTICE

*One trainee had completed the nine tasks required for her to achieve an NVQ unit. The tasks were cross-referenced to the NVQ standards. The assessor judged one of the tasks as not having been completed correctly. A comment was made that the trainee should go back and read the question correctly and then answer it again. This reflects a rigid approach to producing and assessing evidence, which does not focus on naturally occurring work-based activities.*

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inflexible national traineeship programme
- ◆ poor assessment practice
- ◆ low retention rates

20. All of the trainees are employed in small companies where they are trained in and experience a wide range of activities. The trainees are confident and ambitious, and appreciate the opportunities available to them. Some trainees follow a planned training programme in their company to ensure that they understand and can work in different parts of the business. Employers take an interest in their trainees' work towards achieving an NVQ. They complete check lists and write witness testimonies for them. The college has produced an NVQ guidance pack and a leaflet on key skills for employers.

21. Trainees attend a local college one day a week for training and assessment towards their NVQ at level 2 and in key skills. The national traineeship programme they follow is inflexible and based on a rigid approach to trainees

working through their NVQ and key skills. All of the trainees take the same optional unit for their NVQ and the same additional units for their national traineeship. These do not always reflect the nature of the activities which all of the trainees experience at work but are geared towards convenience of assessment. The NVQ programme is based on trainees working through tasks to achieve individual units. There are three college assessors who have responsibility for the training and assessment of specific units. There is little use made of cross-referencing evidence between units. This unit-by-unit approach, with set tasks associated with each unit, results in too much paper-based evidence being produced to demonstrate competence. The training which is provided for trainees is governed by the college's academic year. Even though some trainees start their programmes in June or July they have to wait until September before starting their training. Trainees work in their small year groups at the same pace as one another. They complete their NVQ and some parts of their key skills units by the following June and then embark on the additional units and key skills in September, with December as the final deadline. All trainees follow the same pattern of training, without consideration being given to their abilities or the nature of the work which they do and the types of evidence they can put forward for their NVQ and key skills.

22. Although the evidence for each NVQ unit in the trainees' portfolios begins with an assessment plan this covers the whole unit and does not involve the trainees in planning their assessments. The assessment plan is a statement of what the unit covers with a final date for completion, although this is sometimes inserted when the tasks for the unit have been completed. There is no negotiation between the trainee and the assessor over what form the assessment will take. The assessors dominate the process. Although the unit assessment plan states that assessment might be by observation and involve discussion or oral questioning, the assessment process relies almost entirely on trainees completing written answers to the set tasks. All of the trainees' assessments take place in the college. Trainees do use work from the workplace as evidence but there are no observations of the trainees at work. This is poor practice and means trainees' portfolios are very weighty. Trainees' portfolios are stored at the college and trainees have access to them only once a week. The over-reliance on paper-based evidence in response to set tasks also means that the naturally occurring evidence trainees could easily put forward is not taken into account for their NVQ. This is compounded by the use of simulated evidence for whole units, even where trainees could present evidence from the workplace. In the computer-based units, trainees demonstrate their competence in storing and sorting data using an artificial exercise, even though trainees use computers extensively in their work. The use of simulated evidence also applies to key skills, where all work for the application of number is undertaken using exercises, even though one trainee works in a book-keeping company. This approach results in a very narrow range of evidence being presented in trainees' portfolios, which sometimes lacks any reference to the trainees' work experience.

23. The college uses a three-part internal verification system, which is continuous and is based on a reliable sampling system. It involves internal verifiers observing

assessors undertaking assessments. However, this applies only to assessments at the college and the system has not corrected use of a narrow range of evidence or the excessive use of simulated evidence and the lack of work-based observations.

24. The rate of trainees' retention on the programme is poor. This impacts over the achievement of the NVQ and of the national traineeship framework. Sixty-three per cent of trainees who started their programmes in 1998-99, left the programme early, with only 27 per cent completing the whole framework. However, 63 per cent did complete their NVQ at level 2. Over the past year, 56 per cent of trainees left their programme without achieving a qualification, with only 37 per cent achieving an NVQ. There has been a significant reduction in the number of trainees starting a training programme in 2000-01, with only four having begun so far.

### **Health, care & public services**

### **Grade 4**

25. The Chamber has 71 childcare trainees, of whom 60 are working towards the early-years care and education NVQ at level 2 and 11 at level 3. One trainee is following a modern apprenticeship programme, 22 are national trainees and 48 are on other work-based training programmes for young people. The 24 workplace settings are all private day nurseries except for one large local authority school for children with learning difficulties or disabilities. Thirty-three of the trainees are employed. The remainder receive a training allowance. Off-the-job training for trainees at NVQ level 2 is through a local college on a one-day-a-week basis. The college arranges training, assessment, internal verification and certification of all the trainees' work. There are four full-time college staff who are assessors and eight part-time visiting assessors. There are a further four assessors who are based in the workplace. All these assessors are qualified, except two of the visiting assessors who are training for the assessors' award. All observations are at work. No modern apprentice or national trainee has achieved the qualifications on their individual training plan, mainly because they have been unable to complete the key skills components. On other work-based training programmes for young people, 15 (22 per cent) of the 69 trainees who started between 1997 and 1999 have achieved the qualification aims on their individual training plans. In 1997-98, 27 (70 per cent) of the 39 trainees who started programmes left early. Twenty of these left with no qualifications. In 1998-99, 13 (37 per cent) of the 35 trainees who started left early. Twelve of these had no qualifications. Fourteen (37 per cent) of the 38 trainees who started in 1999-2000 left early, all without any qualifications. In the current year, there has been just one early leaver. The self-assessment report identified three strengths which are more appropriate to trainee support. A further strength represents no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with one of the three weaknesses in the self-assessment report and identified two additional, significant weaknesses. The self-assessment grade was optimistic and inspectors awarded a lower grade.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good links between liaison officer and employers
- ◆ good off-the-job training sessions at NVQ level 2

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed assessment opportunities
- ◆ poor work placements for some trainees
- ◆ slow implementation of key skills
- ◆ poor retention and achievement rates

26. The liaison officer makes frequent visits to trainees at work and is in regular contact with trainees and employers by telephone. The liaison officer is aware of the various needs of different employers. This knowledge is used to make appropriate work placements. Problems are detected and dealt with at an early stage. The liaison officer makes a link between the college and the employers by visits to the college to identify trainees' concerns, monitor attendance and punctuality, and collect information helpful to employers.

27. Training sessions are well planned and at an appropriate level. Trainees participate well in class in a range of activities and at a varied pace. Learning is reinforced with relevant handouts and trainees are given tasks which relate the knowledge and understanding required for the NVQ to their experiences at work. The planning of programmes is thorough. The college does not offer knowledge and understanding for the level 3 NVQ but the Chamber has negotiated a flexible training programme to meet the needs of the level 3 trainees. This provides a more flexible programme for trainees in both timing and content.

28. Many trainees are dissatisfied by the assessment process. They have to wait too long before being allocated an assessor, losing enthusiasm, momentum and a sense of achievement. Two trainees, who started their NVQ in August 2000, have collected a significant amount of evidence in their portfolios. They are being held up from progressing further or completing units, as they have had to wait several months to be assigned an assessor. Some assessors do not assess frequently enough. Some work-based assessors state that they are too busy to assess trainees at work. The work-based assessors are not currently assessing any of the trainees towards their qualifications. The poor understanding of assessment and the occupational content of the NVQ standards, and poor monitoring of assessment through the progress-review process, results in too much time passing before problems relating to assessment are addressed.

29. All except one of the work placements are in private day nurseries. The quality of a few work placements is not satisfactory but they are used because of the pressure to find placements rather than their suitability as an environment for trainees to learn. The liaison officer visits potential work placements and meets with owners or managers. Checks are made of registration, and health and safety.

All trainees are recruited to other work-based training programmes for young people, with the level 2 NVQ as their target qualification. Where a trainee is placed in a nursery which does not offer the opportunity to progress to level 3, the liaison officer looks for new work placements to move them to. When trainees complain about their placements they are swiftly moved to another workplace. There is no investigation of the problem raised with employers or attempt to rectify it.

30. The Chamber has entered all trainees for key skills. Key skills training and assessment is entirely at college. There is no integration of off-the-job training with on-the-job evidence collection. The college is unable to deal with the large numbers of trainees requiring key skills assessment. The key skills programme is poorly organised and trainees are unsure whether they actually need to be working on key skills. Trainees are not motivated to complete their key skills evidence. Key skills assessment is poor. Assessors and employers are not sufficiently familiar with the key skills requirements.

## **GENERIC AREAS**

### **Equal opportunities**

### **Grade 4**

31. The Chamber has an equal opportunities policy, which is referred to at staff and trainees' induction sessions. Employers' files include a copy of the policy which employers sign as a record that they have seen it. Subcontractors and employers' equal opportunities policies are checked when they first start working with the Chamber. There is no system for the regular monitoring of employers' policies and the Chamber does not keep a copy. There is good access to many of the employers' sites and the colleges for those with physical disabilities. The Chamber monitors the gender and ethnicity of trainees. Five per cent of the trainees on the early-years care and education programme are men. There were no men in 1998-99 and 8 per cent in 1997-98. In engineering and construction, 3 per cent of trainees are women. In 1998-99 it was 1 per cent and 4 per cent in 1997-98. In the year to October 2000, 31 per cent of trainees who started on programmes at the Chamber were from minority ethnic groups, compared with 29 per cent in the local population and 37 per cent in the 16-23 years age group in the TEC area. Evaluation of equal opportunities information is discussed at staff meetings, which are minuted. The Chamber does not have a contract for trainees who are endorsed by the TEC as having additional training needs or for trainees with disabilities. There are written complaints, grievance and harassment procedures which are discussed at trainees' induction. Staff from the Chamber attend roadshows at local schools to publicise the training. The Chamber has links with the careers service and most trainees are referred directly through this route. Inspectors did not agree with one of the two strengths in the self-assessment report. They agreed with the three weaknesses, and incorporated these into the first weakness. Inspectors found additional, significant weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ frequent and detailed monitoring of trainees by gender and ethnicity

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor evaluation, reviews and action-planning of equal opportunities
- ◆ low staff awareness of equal opportunities
- ◆ some trainees lack awareness of equal opportunities issues

#### POOR PRACTICE

*In employers' files there are different versions of the Chamber's equal opportunities policy. One is dated November 1995 and signed by one employer in January 1999 and another in March 1999 and another version is dated March 1998, and signed in March and July 2000 respectively. These earlier, out-of-date policies were still in use after later versions had been developed.*

32. The Chamber systematically collects information on the gender and ethnicity of trainees starting and leaving as well as those on programme. This is detailed and there are statistics by week, month and year. Performance figures and the TEC's targets are discussed at staff meetings and suggestions sought for increasing participation. For example, attempts have been made to increase the number of women trainees in programme areas traditionally dominated by men, such as engineering and construction. Agendas of staff meetings include a regular item for equal opportunities. There has yet to be any positive impact on participation as a result of discussion of initiatives at these meetings.

33. The data which are available are not used to set action plans to encourage participation in training by under-represented groups. There is no recording of any initiatives which may have taken place or evaluation of their effectiveness. The Chamber recognises that the gender balance in occupational areas has retained a traditional profile over the past three years.

34. The company has a system to review the equal opportunities policy on an annual basis, or when legislation changes. Although the date has been changed each year on the policy, there has been a change to the policy on only one of these reviews. The current version was updated in November 1999, to include reference to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. Employers are required to sign that they have read and accept the Chamber's policy. Some employers' files contained versions of the policy which make no reference to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*. The Chamber has no system for the regular checking of employers' equal opportunities policies and does not keep a copy of these policies on file. One policy seen in the workplace was dated 1992. Another workplace did not have an equal opportunities policy.

35. Most trainees who come to the Chamber are referred by the careers service. The Chamber participates in roadshows held at local schools, where some initiatives have been taken to challenge gender stereotypes. For example, a woman trainee mechanic has helped at a roadshow. Staff promote these programmes to potential trainees from under-represented groups who show interest in the courses offered. Positive images are used at these events. These include photographs of childcare groups which include men and trainees from minority ethnic groups, and

a women and a trainee from a minority ethnic group in engineering. These have yet to be used for business administration and construction programmes. Course literature for potential trainees does not include positive images to address participation by minority ethnic groups. Advertisements for new staff do not state that the Chamber is committed to equality of opportunity in employment. Trainees who have disabilities or additional learning needs are diverted by the careers service to a neighbouring training company which has the contract for these groups. Trainees sent to the Chamber all take an initial test which is designed to determine their basic skills in literacy and numeracy. The test itself, and the way in which it is presented to trainees, lacks fairness. The literacy test is not occupationally related, containing, for example, a comprehension exercise about the internal combustion engine. The numeracy test is of a high and discouraging level of difficulty for most trainees. Almost all the trainees interviewed perceived the test to be one they would pass or fail and described some trainees being taken out of the room to be told that they had failed. In the month leading up to inspection, this test was changed to one which is nationally recognised.

36. There is a low staff awareness of equal opportunities issues and their wider context. Prompt action was taken by liaison officers to remove a trainee who was experiencing bullying in the workplace, but other trainees are left to continue to work in the same workplace, and no action is taken to work with employers to improve their practice. There has been no staff training or updating in equal opportunities for the past two years. Staff participate in practice interviews with leavers at local schools but they receive no training in interviewing or its equal opportunities implications. Liaison officers who carry out progress reviews with trainees at their work placements ask them if equal opportunities are being implemented at their work placements and in off-the-job-training. The questions on the review sheet are inadequate. There is no opportunity to comment on equal opportunities issues on this form.

37. In childcare and business administration, trainees are aware of the company's policies and procedures for grievances, appeals and harassment. They remember their induction and understand how to use the procedures. Trainees in construction and engineering show little understanding or recall of these issues. Apart from childcare, where equal opportunities practice is written into the NVQ standards, trainees' awareness of equal opportunities is poor and they are unable to describe its meaning and implications in anything other than the most basic terms.

## **Trainee support**

## **Grade 4**

38. Most trainees find out about the Chamber's training programmes through the careers service and open days held at colleges and schools. Prospective trainees complete an application form and are then interviewed by one of the liaison officers at either the Chamber's offices in Walthamstow or at a local college. As part of this interview trainees have an initial assessment. Successful applicants are then matched to employers from a list held by the company. The employer

interviews trainees and successful candidates are then offered a training place with the Chamber. A one-day induction is then held at the Chamber's offices or at a local college. Induction includes health and safety, equal opportunities, trainees' agreements and guidance and support. An individual training plan is completed. Trainees receive a handbook, which sets out the support arrangements from the Chamber and a list of external support agencies for careers and pastoral advice. This handbook contains general information about their programmes, equal opportunities, health and safety, key skills and the trainees' charter. Off-the-job training is discussed and an appropriate college course is identified for the trainee and their job role. Trainees receive their first visit in the workplace after one week. A skills assessment identifies trainees' current level of ability and training requirements. There is no accreditation of prior learning and experience by the company. A liaison officer visits trainees at work every four to six weeks. Trainees' progress reviews are held every three months. The liaison officer also visits the college during off-the-job training sessions to discuss issues with the trainee, their trainers and assessors. Self-assessment identified two strengths and two weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the strength relating to pastoral support but not the one relating to support from external agencies. Both weaknesses were agreed with but were found to be more appropriate to occupational areas and management of training. Inspectors found two additional strengths and four significant weaknesses not identified in the self-assessment report. A lower grade was awarded than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ regular, effective pastoral support
- ◆ good links with schools and careers service
- ◆ celebration of success

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ weak initial assessment
- ◆ some inappropriate advice and guidance
- ◆ inaccurate and incomplete training plans
- ◆ ineffective progress reviews and action plans

39. Trainees see their liaison officers on a frequent basis, often weekly. Trainees are well supported in their personal development. They comfortably discuss personal and work-related problems. Some training officers hold surgeries before the off-the-job training at college. Trainees know that there are allocated slots for them to discuss support needs with liaison officers. Liaison officers use these surgeries to discuss college counselling and support services with trainees. Liaison officers are instrumental in supporting trainees and ensuring they stay on their training programme. Issues are resolved quickly and in a sensitive manner. Every six months, each programme area has a review meeting, where trainees,

**POOR PRACTICE**

*Trainees are given negative messages about initial assessment tests before they start them. The front page contains an instruction which tells trainees they will probably be unable to answer many of the questions. Most trainees are unable to answer more than 20 per cent of the questions and some attempt to answer significantly fewer than this.*

supervisors, college tutors, representatives of the careers service and the TEC, the Chamber's managers and liaison officers meet to discuss issues relating to trainee support. Trainees benefit from peer support during these meetings. The participants are different for each meeting and the mix of trainees is carefully chosen to incorporate different employers, programmes and levels. The Chamber also fund additional courses for trainees which are not part of their qualification aims.

40. There are effective and productive links with schools and the local careers service. The Chamber's staff participate in many local initiatives such as the careers roadshow, which promotes training on 10 evenings at different schools. The company is part of a local partnership which raises awareness of industry and training programmes among schools and colleges. There are good working relationships between the careers service and the Chamber. Feedback is given to the careers service about prospective trainees, how they have performed in initial assessment and interview and where they have been placed. Applicants who would benefit from a more specialist training company are referred back to the careers service.

41. The Chamber encourages trainees to succeed by celebrating their success. Trainees receive letters congratulating them when they achieve units. Certificates are framed and presented to trainees at programme-review meetings. Liaison officers and trainees take pride in this success. When trainees achieve their qualification aim, both the trainee and the work-placement provider receive a financial award. A high profile awards ceremony is held with a trainee-of-the-year award being made. The Chamber ensures these ceremonies are reported in the local press.

42. The Chamber has recently introduced a nationally recognised initial assessment test. However, these tests have not yet been used as a basis for individual training plans or to identify trainees' support needs. Most trainees have been assessed using an internally devised initial assessment test. This was designed to identify an appropriate level and programme for trainees. Childcare and business administration trainees complete engineering comprehension tests. These are inappropriate and confusing, asking questions about engine specifications which use jargon and technical language. One of the numeracy tests contains an inaccurate question which is impossible to answer. These tests have not been used as a basis for the individual training plan or identifying additional support or learning needs. Trainees also complete a self-assessment of their key skills. This test is poorly designed and does not test trainees' level of ability in key skills. The test has no value in the initial assessment of the level of trainees' current key skills or their training needs.

43. Some trainees are given inappropriate advice or guidance. Liaison officers do not know enough about either the occupational area or the qualification to offer accurate advice. All childcare trainees are required to complete key skills, regardless of whether the framework for their qualification requires them. Some trainees are not effectively supported when they fail examinations for non-NVQ

awards. One trainee was asked to explain in 100 words why he had failed two examinations. Liaison officers are not kept up to date with the framework requirements for advanced and foundation modern apprentices or national traineeships. Trainees do not always receive appropriate advice about their units or courses. One trainee has completed a level 2 NVQ, but the college does not offer a level 3 NVQ in electrical installation. This trainee is not receiving any off-the-job training or working towards any qualification until an alternative local college is identified for him. There are no recorded arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning or experience. It is assumed that this will be identified as part of the college's assessment and training, but there is no specification for this in the agreements between colleges and the Chamber.

44. Training plans are not individualised. They are not updated as trainees' job roles or programmes change. They do not contain details of trainees' progress reviews. Some trainees do not have a copy of their individual training plan. All modern apprentices' and national trainees' training plans contain a sticker which lists the same key skills and all at the same level. Many trainees' training plans contain key skills at too low a level for the framework. All individual training plans contain the key skills of improving own learning and performance and working with others at level 3. These are required on few of the frameworks and for many trainees are unachievable in their work situation.

45. Some trainees experience long gaps between progress reviews. In the worst cases trainees have not been reviewed for 6 to 12 months. Trainees do not understand the difference between a progress review and a visit from their liaison officer. The progress-review form is poorly designed with little space to record details. It prompts the liaison officer to ask a series of questions about skills learnt at work, current and next units at college, health and safety and equal opportunities. There is no system for including feedback from the college about trainees' progress, timekeeping and attendance, even though these are included within the progress-review form questions. Supervisors are not always involved in progress reviews. There is little space or opportunity during progress reviews for target-setting. Closed questions are asked to ascertain which units trainees are working on and whether they need support. Where targets are set, they are vague and often relate to completing all of the NVQ. Some trainees are not set any targets.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 5**

46. There are three trustees who have overall managerial responsibility for the Chamber and are directors of the company. The Chamber has a manager, who has strategic responsibilities and manages the day-to-day running of the company. He line manages a scheme co-ordinator, finance officer and, jointly with the scheme co-ordinator, an administrative officer. The scheme co-ordinator manages a team of five liaison officers, of whom three are full time and two are part time. The scheme co-ordinator also acts as liaison officer for 10 trainees. Two of the liaison

officers have been in post for less than six months. The scheme co-ordinator inducts and trains new members of staff. The induction includes company procedures, systems and shadowing an experienced liaison officer on visits to trainees at work. A recruitment officer was due to start employment following the inspection. Staff are all issued with company policies and procedures, which define what they are required to do as part of their job role. All staff have clear job descriptions. Staff are appraised by the scheme co-ordinator, and in the case of the administrative officer, jointly with the manager. The manager appraises the finance officer. The board of trustees does not appraise the manager. However, there is discussion about performance trends through the three-monthly meetings. Appraisals are carried out on a yearly basis, and any training and development needs are recorded in appraisal review forms. Staff meetings are held at least once each month. All full-time and part-time staff attend staff meetings. All the training and assessment is subcontracted to six local colleges. There are currently 145 employers, most of whom are in the local and greater London area. There are four construction employers who are based outside London. The Chamber achieved the Investors in People Standard in 1997 and was successfully re-assessed in 2000. Inspectors did not agree with any of the four strengths identified in the self-assessment report, seeing them as being no more than normal practice. The Chamber identified two weaknesses in its self-assessment report, relating to poor management of subcontractors and the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training, both of which inspectors agreed with. Inspectors identified one strength and three additional, significant weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ effective local partnerships

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ poor management of subcontractors
- ◆ poor co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ little staff training and development
- ◆ poor use of data
- ◆ ineffective strategies for managing staff shortages

47. The manager of the Chamber has built effective local partnerships with businesses, colleges and employers in the local area. The manager currently chairs the local business partnership, which is also used as a forum to promote the work of the Chamber. There are close and productive links with the careers service and small business services. Potential trainees and employers are often identified through these links. The liaison officers have developed and built partnerships with employers in their occupational areas. The list of companies which have

trainees on work placement has over 140 names. Trainees benefit from this variety and choice of work placements.

48. The Chamber does not manage its subcontractors, which include the colleges, work placements and employers. It has drawn up a service level agreement with colleges, which has been adopted and signed by three of the six colleges. One has referred the contract to its solicitor and another is referring the contract to its management team. At the college which trains most of the trainees, the contract was signed by the director of finance. The business administration, construction and childcare heads of department have not seen the contract. The contract does not cover any aspects of off-the-job or key skills training or assessment. There is no mention of how the Chamber will monitor and evaluate what happens at the college. Employers sign an agreement which stipulates only that the Chamber funds the training and does health and safety checks and that the employer will allow the trainee to attend college. It does not indicate how key stages in the trainees' programme, such as trainees' interviews, induction, progress reviews, on-the-job training and monitoring, will take place. Employers are not made aware of what trainees will need to experience at work to achieve their qualification. They are often unsure of the length of training programmes and level of the NVQ trainees are working towards. Employers are not aware of the knowledge and understanding that trainees will acquire at college. There is a general poor awareness of key skills and their levels among employers, trainees and, in some cases, liaison officers.

49. The co-ordination of on- and off-the job training is poor. The liaison officers are the links between colleges, employers and work placements. Despite the regular contact between some colleges and the liaison officers, information from colleges and employers is not exchanged. This link does not include all colleges and some colleges have not received any contact from a liaison officer. Trainees do not have training plans which link on- and off-the-job training. On-the-job training is not planned effectively with employers, and who are unaware of this part of their obligation. Trainees are not always encouraged to bring evidence from work to use towards their NVQ. Many colleges assess trainees purely on what they produce in college workshops.

50. There is currently very little staff development and training. Staff training and development is identified at yearly appraisals and through the business plan. The scheme co-ordinator trains staff on how to fill in records and paperwork and the manager trains them on the use of systems and procedures. Liaison officers have little knowledge of some qualifications and the frameworks for modern apprenticeships and national traineeships. There has been no updating of the liaison officer's knowledge or skills for occupational areas. Liaison officers who have identified this as a development need have not had this met. Managers feel that they can meet all staff-development needs in house or through colleges. This is not always appropriate for work-based training or the client group. Staff are not kept up to date with changes from national training organisations. There are two members of staff trained to assess employers for health and safety, the scheme co-ordinator, who has a nationally recognised health and safety qualification and a

recently recruited liaison officer who holds an occupational health and safety qualification through his previous job. All liaison officers, regardless of whether they are appropriately qualified, carry out health and safety checks.

51. Data collected by the Chamber contain inaccuracies and the data which are available are not used effectively. Achievement and retention data are not checked with liaison officers and do not always reflect the true picture. The company is replacing its data systems and there are currently three computer systems used to store data during this process. There is no correlation between what appears on each system. The numbers of trainees starting a programme, on programmes and leaving programmes are discussed regularly by staff at programme-review team meetings. However, these data are discussed only for each occupational sector. There is no sharing of data and trends across the whole organisation by staff. Trends in occupational areas are not analysed or used effectively by management as the basis for decisions on the way forward for that particular occupation.

52. There are no effective strategies for managing staff shortages. In the year leading up to inspection, four members of staff left. Two were liaison officers and there was a gap of six months before they were replaced. During this time, many trainees received no progress reviews or support. Trainees' progress at college has been impeded by insufficient monitoring throughout the academic year. The recruitment officer left more recently and is being replaced after inspection. The duties of recruitment, interviewing and initial assessment have been distributed among remaining liaison officers. Liaison officers are put under considerable stress to cope with their existing and revised workload. Liaison officers work long hours to meet their excessive workload. A recent staff survey has identified tasks which staff find stressful and most difficult. Little has been done to address these issues raised by the staff.

## Quality assurance

## Grade 4

53. There is an overarching quality framework, which allocates overall responsibility to the trustees, manager and scheme co-ordinator. The framework was written in 1993, and has been reviewed twice since then. Responsibility for quality assurance at the Chamber on a day-to-day basis is held by the scheme co-ordinator. At an operational level, liaison officers quality assure the work placements and some of the activities which take place at college. All staff have copies of the staff handbook and the systems description. The staff handbook explains the standard procedures which staff are expected to follow for key training functions. It also contains standard paperwork and guidance on how these should be completed. The systems descriptions are a supplementary set of guidelines for new and administrative members of staff. Liaison officers have targets, which are based on numbers of visits to trainees in a week. Staff are not set individual or occupational area targets for recruitment, retention or achievement. The manager, scheme co-ordinator and finance officer are the only members of staff who have access to the TEC's targets. All internal verification is carried out

by the colleges. Internal verifiers are appropriately qualified and experienced. The Chamber identified two strengths through self-assessment. Both were found to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors agreed with one of the two weaknesses in the self-assessment report, relating to little quality assurance of training. Inspectors identified one significant, additional strength and one additional weakness. The inspection grade awarded for quality assurance is lower than that in the self-assessment report.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ positive change to programmes following trainees and employers' feedback

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ little quality assurance of training
- ◆ no systematic action-planning

54. The Chamber has made changes to its programmes as a result of feedback from trainees, employers, staff and college trainers. Feedback is collected from trainees and employers through quarterly postal questionnaires. There is a thorough analysis of these questionnaires by staff. Areas for improvement are identified and steps taken promptly to address these issues. For example, both trainees and employers feel that they are not fully aware of the key skills requirements. As a result, a basic guide to key skills has been written and circulated to trainees and employers. An initiative which the Chamber has introduced to share ideas and generate change is the programme-review team meetings. These are held for each occupational area twice a year and include representatives from the various groups of trainees, employers and work-placement providers, college staff, the Chamber's staff, the careers service and the TEC. Many trainees and employers have now participated in these meetings. Trainees reported they had little recollection of their induction programme, which has now been lengthened to a full day and had its content revised. There are opportunities for individual issues to be discussed and resolved. For example, where one trainee was not getting sufficient experience of working on new motorcycles a donation of a motorcycle was made by another company so that this trainee could gain the experience. Trainees also benefit from sharing experiences with others of different year groups and programmes. Employers view the meeting as an opportunity to network with other companies. Liaison officers from one occupational area sit in on other programme-review team meetings, enabling good practice to be shared.

55. The Chamber has well-recorded procedures, but they relate mainly to management systems and what is expected of staff. The scheme co-ordinator carries out a quality control check on files and paperwork, looking at 10 per cent of each liaison officer's records. Despite this system, inspectors found considerable errors and gaps in individual training plans and progress reviews. This process is a paper exercise and does not include any quality assurance of what

happens in the workplace or college with the trainee. Liaison officers' reviews and meetings are not observed by managers and the quality of their information and guidance are not assessed. Although the scheme co-ordinator and liaison officers have observed some training sessions there is no defined purpose for these observations. There is no plan, structure or co-ordination for the visits. Findings are not recorded or reported. No development or action have resulted from these observations. In many cases the liaison officers are not qualified in the occupational area, and so are not be able to make appropriate or accurate judgements. Internal verifiers and external verifiers' reports are not systematically reviewed. There is no mechanism to evaluate the quality of training given at work placements. Induction, on-the-job training and support are rarely discussed with trainees and employers. Liaison officers do not monitor the effectiveness of these aspects of the training programme. Some unrecorded observation has been carried out by the scheme co-ordinator of initial assessment and induction of trainees. There is no indication that any development or improvements were identified as a result of this observation.

56. Action-planning, where it takes place, is reactive. There is little correlation between the business plan and action-planning. The business plans over the past three years contain actions which are repeated in the three plans. There is no indication of who will be responsible for carrying out the action, or how the issue or concern will be addressed. There are no feedback mechanisms to monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of the approach or the success of any actions. When concerns have been raised in the TEC's quality audit report, these have not resulted in action-planning. The manager puts ticks next to the points when they have been achieved. Actions identified in programme-review team meetings are not always systematically followed up. For example, in a construction meeting held in April 1999, an employer highlighted the importance of the gas unit for those trainees working towards the NVQ at level 3. When an action is carried out, management does not reflect on its effectiveness. There is poor communication of the current status of any actions with staff.

57. Self-assessment lacks rigour and has not involved all of the key parties within the Chamber. Although trainees, staff and employers' comments are sought, the depth of the questioning has not identified areas which are strong or weak. All occupational and generic areas were graded optimistically in the self-assessment report. The Chamber is insufficiently critical of its practices and the impact which colleges and employers have on their trainees. While the report is set out in a clear way which is easy to read, many of the strengths are repeated in each occupational and generic area. Only one of the occupational areas contained a comment on achievement and retention data.