



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MAY 1999

REINSPECTION JUNE 2000

## Reading Borough Council

## SUMMARY

Reading Borough Council runs a small youth training scheme for potential employees, and substantial community projects funded through European Social Fund and regeneration budgets. The training provided through the community projects is exceptionally good. Training in business administration, childcare and playwork is good. The council has highly effective equal opportunity practices. It offers good trainee support. At the time of the first inspection, some aspects of the management of training were unsatisfactory. Quality assurance arrangements were not yet fully established. By the time of reinspection 13 months later, there had been substantial improvements in both the management of training and in the arrangements for quality assurance.

**As a result of the reinspection of Reading Borough Council, the original published report text for management of training and quality assurance has been replaced by new text which makes reference to the original inspection findings.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
Business administration	2
Health, care & public services	2
Foundation for work	1

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

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Management of training	2
Quality assurance	2

### KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong commitment to equality of opportunity
- ◆ individual and flexibly arranged ESF and SRB programmes
- ◆ exceptionally well-qualified, experienced and committed staff
- ◆ excellent resources
- ◆ strong organisational commitment to staff development
- ◆ good relationships with other organisations
- ◆ effective action to attract trainees from minority groups
- ◆ successful and effective induction programmes
- ◆ provision of additional training courses
- ◆ availability of good help, counselling and advice for trainees



### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ failure to individualise initial training plans on youth training programmes
- ◆ little structured assessment of youth trainees' learning needs

## INTRODUCTION

1. Reading Borough Council is a new unitary authority, established in 1998. The youth training scheme was started in 1985 by the previous district authority, and has been transferred to the new authority. The council uses the scheme to recruit its own employees, and at the time of the first inspection, employed nearly two-thirds of the trainees at the end of their training. By the time of reinspection, this figure had risen to around 90 per cent. The council was offering training in business administration (administration, information technology and accountancy), childcare and playwork, sports and leisure, agriculture, construction, and engineering. At the time of the first inspection, the number of trainees in construction and engineering were three and one respectively, and there were no trainees in agriculture or sport and leisure. None of these vocational areas was inspected. At reinspection, provision in construction and engineering was no longer being offered. The council was using subcontractors for all its training programmes, but following the first inspection, made a decision to bring training in-house wherever possible. At the time of reinspection, a pilot programme in childcare, run in house, was nearing completion. At the first inspection, there were 26 youth trainees overall, of whom 22 were interviewed. The numbers were lower at reinspection, 19 trainees, because many of the current year's trainees had already completed, and the new intake had not yet started. Three members of staff (one part-time) run the training scheme, and are accountable to the council's personnel manager (training, development and equality). Overall, the council employs 5,900 people, and provides services to 141,000 residents. The council contracts with Thames Valley Enterprise, the local training and enterprise council (TEC) for work-based training for young people. None of its trainees has employed status at the start of the programmes.

2. The council also provides training in partnership with other organisations, supported by the European Social Fund and the Single Regeneration Budget. Many of these projects are run through the council's Training, Employment and Advice centre (the TEA shop). They are designed to offer training in English language, social skills and employment skills, to people disadvantaged in the local community because of circumstances such as homelessness, single parenthood or long-term unemployment. New Deal Gateway provision is also offered through the TEA shop. All these programmes were inspected as 'Foundation for work' training. At the time of the first inspection, there were six ESF project beneficiaries, 55 SRB project beneficiaries, and three New Deal clients, making a total of 64 trainees inspected. Other ESF and SRB projects, part-funded through the Further Education Funding Council, were not inspected. Seven members of council staff manage these projects. At the time of reinspection, there were no ESF projects. There were 17 New Deal clients in the Gateway, and 28 SRB clients, although these figures change from day to day.

3. Originally a town based on trading and manufacturing, Reading has developed into a centre for high technology and services. It is one of the largest insurance and



business service centres in the country. Several major international companies have their headquarters in the town. The service sector provides 86 per cent of all jobs, compared with 70 per cent nationally. The proportion of people in Reading from minority ethnic groups is 9.6 per cent, compared with 4.9 per cent in the population of the United Kingdom. The unemployment rate locally is very low, at 1.7 per cent, compared with 3.5 per cent nationally in June 2000. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 42.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

## INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The council produced its self-assessment report before its first inspection, with three days' consultancy support from the TEC. This was the council's second self-assessment report. The first one was produced using the Training Standard Council's draft guidelines, and the council benefited from the experience of doing an earlier version. All the staff involved in running the youth training scheme participated in self-assessment. The ESF and SRB projects were not included in the original self-assessment process, so the grades identified by the provider for the generic areas did not include any ESF or SRB activity. The next self-assessment report, produced after the first inspection and before the reinspection, was produced by the training manager, but validated by other staff. It built on the experience of the previous self-assessments.

5. For the first inspection, four inspectors spent a total of 13 days at the provider's sites in Reading. They observed training sessions, assessments and reviews and part of the initial assessment process. They spoke to 39 trainees, 16 trainers or assessors, and 10 workplace supervisors. They interviewed 13 members of the council's staff. They also examined paperwork associated with the youth training scheme and the ESF and SRB projects. For the reinspection, two inspectors spent a total of six days at the provider's sites. They observed off-the-job training sessions, and interviewed 13 trainees, five workplace supervisors, three members of the council's human resources and training staff, four members of the external affairs department, as well as three of the contractors providing training and assessment, and a member of the Employment Service.

Grades awarded to instruction sessions at the first inspection

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Business administration		1				1
Foundation for work	2	1	3			6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Business administration

### Grade 2

6. The Reading Borough Council's youth training scheme in business administration has three strands: administration, accounting and information technology. Over the last three years, the proportion of trainees gaining NVQs has been 35 per cent and this is below the local average. There were no information technology trainees as the programme for the previous intake had just finished. The training leading to the NVQ in administration is provided on the council's premises. All trainees are on a youth training programme which offers them a chance to work alongside full-time council staff and gain skills in a wide range of

administrative, financial and information technology roles. There are eight trainees working towards an NVQ in administration at level 2, and four at level 3. Training and assessment for the Association of Accountancy Technicians (AAT) accountancy NVQ are subcontracted to local colleges. There are two trainees training for accountancy, one at level 3 and the other at level 4. The AAT course covers major accountancy procedures connected with financial and cost accounting and taxation. The administration NVQ allows for trainees to receive one-to-one tuition by a qualified trainer/assessor in a study room and adjacent information technology suite. Trainees are assessed during their work experience through observation of their performance in naturally occurring tasks. A training co-ordinator carries out regular three-monthly reviews of trainees' progress and supervisors carry out monthly appraisals and forward copies of their reports to the training co-ordinator. Most of the trainees joined the programme directly from school following advice from the Careers Service, and all have opportunities to apply for full-time employment in council posts. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found other strengths and weaknesses, however, which the council had not identified.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ imaginative training and assessment programme
- ◆ well-equipped facilities
- ◆ full-time staff facilities and activities open to trainees
- ◆ opportunities for full-time employment
- ◆ good provision of additional training courses
- ◆ rich variety of evidence in administration trainees' NVQ portfolios

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ missed opportunities for involvement of workplace supervisors in training
- ◆ incomplete job roles for NVQ level 3 administration trainees
- ◆ no work-based training for accountancy trainees

7. The training leading to an NVQ in administration at level 2 is a model of good practice. The trainees receive extensive opportunities for training in their working environment in the council departmental offices and, in addition, receive formal tuition every two weeks. They receive training in small groups and on a one-to-one basis. They have a well-resourced training room next to an equally well-equipped information technology suite. Knowledge and understanding are tested through written and oral questions. The trainer/assessor visits the trainees in their various workplaces in the council departments across Reading to observe their performance in naturally occurring circumstances at work. Witness testimony is gathered from supervisors and work products are shown to the assessor during observations on any training day. The trainees' progress is continuous. Action plans and lesson plans are well prepared and agreed between the assessor and the trainees. Care is taken to dovetail the work done in the departments with that done in the training areas. The administration trainer/assessor is subcontracted to the

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*A trainee who initially became interested in taking an NVQ in retailing was allocated a placement in a specialist sausage-making shop. Here he learned how to use a computer to keep records. This led to his decision to work for an information technology NVQ instead, and he transferred to the Borough Council. With the training department's encouragement, he attained an NVQ in use and support of information technology at level 3. He is now the lecturer/demonstrator at the council's "cyberskills" Internet provision at Reading library, where he trains local people to use the Internet using state-of-the-art equipment including IT-driven overhead projectors and a wide-scope touch screen. His NVQ work has gained him the Silver Award for Excellence from the awarding body.*

scheme, is occupationally qualified and has teaching, training and assessment qualifications. The trainer is also thoughtful and perceptive and has a friendly, common-sense approach which is appreciated by trainees. Training sessions are very well prepared, resourced and planned. The trainees work in the departments, are given considerable responsibility, and provide work of high quality. They receive the same induction and additional training opportunities as the full-time staff, use the same canteen facilities and are included in meetings and discussions. They are encouraged to apply for full-time posts with the council. More than half the trainees gain these. They usually have to compete against other candidates in open competition, but in some cases a special preference scheme operates in their favour. In addition to the normal training provision leading to the administration and accountancy qualifications, trainees are able to receive a very wide range of additional training. This includes Microsoft Access database, Word 97 word processor and Excel spreadsheet training, as well as short courses on first aid, lifting and handling, health and safety, dealing with aggression, assertiveness training and other topics. On- and off-the-job training and assessment are well integrated and administration trainees' NVQ portfolios contain a very wide range of evidence, including witness testimony, product evidence, observation reports and valid simulation of workplace contingencies. Portfolios are well arranged, and contain clear documents detailing assessment outcomes, action plans, progress appraisals and trainees' achievements.

8. Although department supervisors are very supportive of the training programme, they are not deeply involved in it and opportunities for them to help to improve the quality of youth training provision are often missed. Supervisors do not fully understand the NVQ standards. In some cases they ask trainees to explain how they can be of help rather than taking the initiative in offering appropriate support and guidance. They are not qualified to assess, and although some have been offered the opportunity of training to gain the assessor award qualification, few have taken it up. The training co-ordinator's role is relatively new and involves carrying out interviews with trainees on a one-to-one basis. Supervisors, however, are not involved in the interviews. The subcontractor's progress reports on trainees working towards accountancy qualifications are not copied to workplace supervisors and they have to rely on conversations with trainees to identify those areas of coursework where trainees need further practice or advice. Trainees working towards NVQ level 3 are given particular responsibilities in the workplace. The trainees' scope, however, for experiencing a wide variety of job roles and for shadowing other departmental staff is limited and they encounter problems in covering the requisite range of skills for the purposes of NVQ assessment. Some of the evidence in their portfolios has to be gathered through simulated, rather than real, work situations. The AAT qualification is assessed using special assignments and exam work at a local college with work marked centrally by the AAT. No evidence from the workplace is used, and there is no contact between course staff and workplace supervisors.



## Health, care & public services (childcare and playwork)

**Grade 2**

### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*The mentoring system used in the playwork award is particularly helpful to trainees. As successful candidates complete their level 3 awards they start to mentor other trainees undertaking level 2 or about to start level 3. This is a stage of professional development for newly qualified playworkers who want to go on to train as assessors. Trainees feel particularly well supported and can receive relevant advice about proven methods of collecting evidence for their portfolios.*

9. Reading Borough Council has eight TEC funded trainees currently on the programme, five registered for NVQ awards at levels 2 or 3 in childcare, and three trainees in playwork working towards NVQs at levels 2 or 3. All trainees are on work-based training for young people programmes. A trainee who was a modern apprentice has recently finished her training programme, although she has not yet completed the framework. Over the last three years, 55 per cent of leavers have achieved an NVQ, compared with the local rate of 31 per cent. Six trainees are of employed status, working in the council's day nursery or crèche, or in one of ten after-school clubs. Each trainee is assigned a work-based supervisor who can provide them with support. Off-the-job training for childcare trainees is delivered by another training provider using a local childcare college, and training in additional skills like food hygiene, manual handling, and paediatric first aid are provided in-house. There are eight childcare work-based assessors employed by the provider, and three playwork assessors who carry out assessment of candidates' competence in the workplace. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They considered that some of the strengths were no more than normal practice, however, and they found both strengths and weaknesses which the council had not identified. Nevertheless, they awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

### **STRENGTHS**

- ◆ well-resourced and well-used day nursery and crèche facility
- ◆ varied training opportunities for trainees to experience different age ranges in the nursery
- ◆ large number of work-based assessors
- ◆ good quality in-house theory instruction for playworkers
- ◆ good practice in the assessment of portfolios
- ◆ mentoring system in playwork
- ◆ close working relationship between assessors and supervisors

### **WEAKNESSES**

- ◆ no systematic assessment in child care
- ◆ poor teamwork and communication between assessors and college
- ◆ delay in providing trainees with workbooks
- ◆ inadequate recording of vocational aptitude appraisal process

### **GOOD PRACTICE**

*At the subcontracted college, the internal verification system is computerised using an Excel spreadsheet. This allows instant checks on units completed, assessments observed by the internal verifier, the sampling frame required and the specific stage candidates are at in relation to the award being undertaken.*

10. The day nursery provides a service to council employees, taking 52 children from just after birth to five years old. This is a good and well-equipped resource which enables childcare trainees to cover the full range of requisite competencies for their NVQ award. Trainees are also able to use the council's own crèche. Staff

in the day nursery supervise children up to six years of age for two-hour periods. Working with children whose behaviour, likes and dislikes are initially unknown provides excellent experience for trainees, who work under the supervision of a qualified and experienced member of staff. There are a large number of NVQ assessors in the nursery, more, in fact, than there are trainees, and some trainees are assessed by more than one assessor in the course of their programme. Well-qualified and experienced staff from a local college come to the council's premises to provide trainees with regular theory sessions following a planned programme covering the requirements of specific NVQ units. There is regular and open communication between playwork tutors, assessors, mentors and supervisors, and problems are dealt with promptly. For example, trainees were unhappy with one particular workshop and although they enjoyed it, they felt it was not relevant to the NVQ unit. The playwork manager was able to speak directly with the tutor within minutes and resolve the issue. The portfolios of the playwork trainees and the one childcare trainee contained work of a high standard, and were properly assessed and well maintained.

**GOOD PRACTICE**

*The Council has developed playwork to provide a safe but stimulating environment for children after school and during school holidays. The criteria for promotion for playworkers from one scale to the next fully reflect the NVQ levels. Some specific NVQ skills are referred to in job descriptions.*

11. Communication between child-care tutors and assessors is not as effective and well developed as it is on the playwork programme. Although there are regular meetings between assessors and the internal verifier, the links between theory and practical skills are not made as clearly. The college assesses trainees' background knowledge through a variety of written assignments, projects and case studies, but, in some instances, delay in returning assessed work has an adverse effect on the rate of trainees' progress towards achievement of the NVQ. Several trainees have not yet been assessed on any units, although they have been on the programme for ten months. There have also been delays in the issuing of workbooks from the awarding body. There is no systematic monitoring to check that all requisite assessments are carried out and that all units are completed. Although trainees are well supervised, there are no procedures for checking that they have the appropriate aptitude and attributes to work effectively in the vocational areas of child care and playwork.

**Foundation for work****Grade 1**

12. Reading Borough Council is responsible for several ESF and SRB funded projects which include training elements. All the foundation for work projects inspected provide training programmes. The main centre for these projects is the Training and Employment Advice Shop, known as the TEA Shop, based in the Oxford Road Regeneration Area. A team of seven council staff is supported by staff from the Employment Service, the careers service and part-time self-employed tutors. The main aims of the programmes are to help individuals to find employment, to provide them with careers guidance, to offer job vacancy databases, and to help in preparing curricula vitae. There are three initiatives to enable local workers to find employment through a skills register. Two of these are linked to construction and one to retail. The TEA Shop also runs other projects including an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) programme for Asian women, and the ALIVE ESF objective 3 project for single parents in temporary

housing. This project offers information technology training, the vocational access certificate, literacy and numeracy support, and help in confidence building. The TEA Shop is subcontracted to provide jobsearch, information technology and literacy and numeracy training for New Deal Gateway. A local college runs a family learning project funded by SRB for parents and under fives which takes place over two days a week and includes a crèche, instruction on lunch preparation, and other training to meet individual trainees' needs. The foundation for work area was not included in the self-assessment report although a series of statements on strengths, weaknesses and actions had been drawn up by the time of the inspection.

### STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-structured and flexibly arranged training programmes
- ◆ extremely well-qualified, experienced and committed staff
- ◆ high quality resources
- ◆ trainees' excellent achievement and progression record
- ◆ success in exceeding all project targets

### WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses were identified

#### GOOD PRACTICE

*Where appropriate, trainees have a training and employment record which includes a personal training plan and assessment record plus details of any certificates they achieve. The format is similar to the National Record of Achievement. Many trainees have never had any achievements recognised and recorded before. Trainees are encouraged to use the record when they apply for jobs or want to progress on to further training.*

13. The varied and diverse provision at the TEA shop is effectively planned, flexibly arranged and well co-ordinated to meet individual trainees' needs. Staff spend time with each trainee to determine his or her specific needs and how best to meet them. Provision varies from structured courses leading to certification, to informal learning opportunities identified by individuals or a group. The staff are highly competent and they make these diverse and flexible arrangements work well. They draw on their varied experience to make the training relevant and interesting for the trainees. The excellent relationships between staff and trainees ensure that training takes place in a trusting and supportive atmosphere.

14. The TEA Shop premises are welcoming and friendly. Trainees can use up-to-date vacancy databases and book appointments with employment service and careers advisors on-site. There are newspapers and trade magazines available as well as a small resource library. Trainees have free use of the telephone and fax machine and can use the computers. The information technology training room is spacious and has up-to-date equipment. There is also a separate training room where small group work takes place. It is not always easy for staff to identify the extent of trainees' achievements and progress in this type of provision, but a team of staff is exploring ways of doing this. Trainees work towards awards which include unit accreditation so that they obtain a certificate even if they do not achieve the whole award. Trainees who are unable to meet all the criteria for an external award still have their achievements recognised in a certificate from the council. Recognition of achievement is important for this client group, and there are award ceremonies with a presentation by the mayor. Each project has identified

small milestones for achievement, such as enabling lone parents to leave their child in a crèche for the first time or have the confidence to write a note to school about a sick child. All the targets identified within the SRB contract have been exceeded. These include targets for gaining employment, attaining certificates and for the number of weeks worked by clients on the skills register.

## GENERIC AREAS

### Equal opportunities

### Grade 2

15. Reading Borough Council has a clear commitment to equal opportunities. The youth training scheme recruits from the 16 to 18 age group in a variety of ways. Some trainees are referred by the local careers service, some respond to local advertising and some apply following recommendations from colleagues or friends. The training department targets school careers fairs and local community centres used as meeting places by minority ethnic groups. The council has a clear equal opportunities policy which is promoted to all staff and trainees during induction. The council supports a range of community-based projects funded by ESF and SRB for minority groups with specific and multiple problems. Periodic reminders are sent through the e-mail system within the council and the message is promoted in many other ways. The proportion of persons from minority ethnic groups who are employed by the council is 7 per cent, compared with 10 per cent in the local population as a whole. Seventeen per cent of all youth trainees are from minority ethnic groups, however. The council, of which the training department is a part, promotes good practice in the promotion of equal opportunities through the images and text of its printed materials. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. They found other strengths and weaknesses, however, which the council had not identified.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ active equal opportunities committee
- ◆ strong commitment of staff to the promotion of equal opportunities
- ◆ careful analysis of equal opportunities data to inform the planning of improvements
- ◆ specific action to attract trainees from minority groups
- ◆ help and resources for those with disabilities and special needs

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ failure to promote the equal opportunities policy to some subcontractors
- ◆ too few males on some training programmes and too few females on others

16. The Performance Review and Equalities Committee and the Personnel and Equal Opportunities Committee both do good work in raising awareness of equal

opportunities issues. Equality of opportunity is vigorously promoted through a wide range of community initiatives and well-written publications. There is an annual report on equal opportunities, and two separate action plans for improvements to provision for trainees with disabilities, special training needs, and personal needs related to ethnicity and culture. A range of multi-language leaflets has been produced and widely distributed. Multi-language telephone help lines are provided, and specialist speakers are available to help council departments. The council is in the middle of a programme to improve the safety of its premises and make them more accessible to those with disabilities. The main civic building has fireproof elevators and the training administration building has installed special fire chairs. Department managers, training staff and trainees are all aware of critical safety procedures. As a result of the formal work by the relevant committees, and the implementation and promotion of equal opportunities policy to all staff, there is a clear and firmly established understanding of equal opportunities throughout the organisation. The youth training scheme equal opportunity statistics, required by contract, are kept and analysed. In addition, data are collected and comprehensively analysed so that staff can identify ways in which the recruitment, training and quality processes can be improved. Staff involved with the ESF/SRB provision keep comprehensive records and are keen to ensure that profiles and targets for recruitment and support are achieved. Wide-ranging plans are made for the continuous improvement of services on the basis of these statistics. Training staff go to community centres run by local minority ethnic groups to explain about opportunities for training. The training department is supported by the access and disabilities working group who ensure that staff are aware of their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act. Wheelchair access, hearing loops, help for those with visual impairment, dyslexia and dyspraxia evaluation, and literacy and numeracy support are available to staff and trainees.

17. The equal opportunities policy is reviewed every two years. It is not promoted to some of the training subcontractors who offer college training and assessment, however. Some trainees are unable to remember the information on equal opportunities and harassment given verbally and in writing at their initial induction. This information is not repeated on the induction programme they receive when they progress from level 2 to level 3 training. On some programmes, such as business administration, most of the trainees are of the same sex. Staff have taken little or no specific action to recruit males to programmes mainly followed by female trainees, and vice versa. Articles have appeared in the local press praising trainees' achievements, but these have not led to any redress of the gender imbalance on programmes.

### **Trainee support**

### **Grade 2**

18. The provider has specific policies to ensure that trainees' rights and responsibilities are known and upheld. A Trainees' Handbook has been produced to explain the structure of the council to youth trainees. It includes a description of trainees' rights and responsibilities and the services available, and is introduced at

induction. Training in key skills for the one modern apprentice is provided through off-the-job training. Modern apprentices and national trainees have not been recruited. Youth trainees are generally recruited to a training programme which begins in July. Trainees in New Deal, SRB and ESF programmes receive support to meet their individual needs. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report, but not with others. They found both strengths and weaknesses which the council had not identified. They awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ treatment of trainees as employees from the start
- ◆ good induction programme
- ◆ structured one-to-one supervision in the workplace
- ◆ positive help, counselling and advice for trainees
- ◆ structured support for trainees with disabilities
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to receive extra training and take additional qualifications
- ◆ good information about jobs through internal bulletins
- ◆ sensitive approach to initial assessment for ESF/SRB trainees
- ◆ excellent support for progression for ESF/SRB trainees

### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some slippage in the regularity of progress reviews
- ◆ little structured assessment of youth trainees' learning support needs
- ◆ poor use of individual training plans on youth programmes
- ◆ no systematic monitoring of trainee support
- ◆ no staff with a qualification in the accreditation of prior learning

19. The council has a positive commitment to training for the wider community. This is reflected in the way it treats its youth trainees, who are viewed as employees right from the start, with personnel records, pay arrangements, and access to all the council's resources and facilities. This is explained to the trainees during induction, which falls into two sections. The first involves induction into the organisation as a whole and covers policy on health and safety and equality of opportunity and what is expected of, and provided for, trainees. A very comprehensive but clearly written booklet describing the council and domestic arrangements is issued to all trainees during this period. The induction is then further reinforced in the department to which the trainee is assigned. Support and supervision are provided by the trainee's supervisor in his or her department. Trainees are provided with regular one-to-one sessions in which they are asked to reflect on their attitudes, development, behaviour, time-keeping and reliability, and their perceptions are then compared with those of their supervisor and discussed. Any problems which trainees may have are identified during these sessions and, if



necessary, trainees are referred to specific help and assistance. Goals are set for the next four weeks and the trainee has clear targets to aim for. Trainees with disabilities are provided with additional support and resources to enable them to work effectively. Trainees have unrestricted access to a large number of additional training events offered to all council employees. They can work towards a significant number of additional qualifications, such as those in first aid, food hygiene, and manual handling. They also learn about job vacancies through an internal jobs bulletin issued regularly by the council. Aiming to bring training and personal development to a number of disadvantaged groups in the community, the council has introduced several innovative projects. Their premises are easily accessible to people from inner urban areas and are well equipped and welcoming. Great care is taken to ensure that the initial assessment of trainees does not demotivate them. The trainees' results in the initial assessment are carefully recorded and used in the planning of their future training.

20. The council has failed to maintain the formal three-monthly progress reviews for some trainees, and, in some instances, these are already two months late. Initial assessments of the learning support needs of trainees on the youth programme and the findings of progress reviews are not taken into account in the trainees' individual training plans. These plans are not used well and they are seldom modified in the light of the trainees' emerging needs. There is no systematic monitoring of the extent to which the provision of additional support improves the performance of the trainee. Some trainees have acquired skills before joining the programme, but there is no member of staff who is qualified to accredit trainees' prior learning and experience.

## **Management of training**

## **Grade 2**

21. The youth training programme comes within the personnel function of the council, and fits into the council's corporate training policy. Its aim is to develop young people through a work-based training programme, to become members of the council's workforce. All council staff have their own training needs analysed through appraisals and one-to-one discussions with their managers. Trainees expect to continue their development and learning through this route, once they have completed their NVQ programme, if they achieve employment with the council. These individual training needs are built into an annual training plan, which is also derived from the council's priorities and objectives. Trainees have access to corporate training activities, alongside council employees. Training interventions are evaluated in discussion with the employee's manager, to assess the impact on the way the employee carries out their job afterwards. There is a formal mentoring scheme, although this does not yet extend to cover trainees. The council is emphasising the values of staff learning rather than undergoing formal training, and this is consistent with the increasing move to provide individual tuition in the workplace for trainees, rather than taking them away from their desks for formal training sessions. Supervisors are trained, and have the requisite supervisory and coaching skills. Since the first inspection, there has been greater emphasis on selecting supervisors who are likely to be able to offer trainees an

appropriate degree of support. The training scheme co-ordinator holds review meetings with the trainees and their supervisors every quarter. She also monitors feedback from the externally contracted tutor/assessors. The SRB programmes are run from the department of external affairs. An experienced manager has day-to-day responsibility for the premises where most of the SRB and the New Deal Gateway provision takes place. This is separate from the TEC funded provision. SRB and New Deal clients are not expected to become part of the council's workforce.

At the first inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ little control of some subcontracted off-the-job training provision
- ◆ some supervisors lack clear understanding of NVQ requirements
- ◆ ineffective arrangements for monitoring the progress of youth trainees

22. By the time of reinspection, these had all been addressed. An action plan had identified what needed to be done, and who would be responsible. There was clear evidence of detailed and effective arrangements for monitoring all the off-the-job training which the council was providing. Considerable work has been carried out with supervisors to involve them more closely with the training programmes. The review arrangements are now enabling the scheme co-ordinator to monitor trainees' progress much more closely. The council has made the decision not to continue to provide training in areas where satisfactory provision cannot be reliably ensured. The self-assessment report was detailed, self-critical, and accurate, although inspectors emphasised different strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment grade was the same as that awarded by inspectors.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ rapid achievement of qualifications
- ◆ flexible programme to suit individual trainees' needs
- ◆ well-developed and integrated key skills training

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ no current access to modern apprenticeship status

23. The work which has been taking place over the year to increase supervisors' awareness of trainees' NVQ programmes, has meant trainees' on- and off-the-job training programmes are closely matched. Trainees' portfolios now contain interesting and individualised work-based evidence. Supervisors are routinely involved in trainees' quarterly reviews, and are aware of their trainees' progress and evidence-gathering requirements. Trainees in the largest programme, business administration, already have some of their sessions with their tutor at their individual workplaces. At present, there are no work-based assessors except in childcare, but some of the business administration and information technology supervisors have expressed an interest in training as assessors. Trainees take



responsibility for informing their supervisors of activities they will need to undertake to provide evidence for their portfolios. Where supervisors have been unable to provide these opportunities because of work pressures, the training co-ordinator has intervened and, in extreme cases, trainees have been moved to a different part of the organisation. Occasionally, trainees have remained in an unsuitable learning environment for longer than they would like, because the size and structure of the council make it difficult for the training department to exert sufficient influence within individual departments for rapid change to take place. However, no trainee has been delayed in their progression through their learning programme.

24. Trainees achieve their qualifications quickly. Administration and information technology national trainees all achieve their level 2 qualifications, along with their key skills and their extra units to make up their full frameworks, comfortably within a year. Several achieve in considerably less time. Childcare trainees on the pilot in-house programme are also achieving their qualifications quickly. Trainees whose off-the-job training is provided by a college are subject to the speed of the group they join, but one trainee at the end of his first year, had achieved five units instead of the minimum of two required by his tutor.

25. The main programme, business administration, offers training in administration, information technology, or accounting. Trainees are able to start as national trainees, and then progress to do a level 3 qualification after completing their national traineeship. They are able to continue with their qualification even when they are no longer trainees, and have become permanent employees. Trainees who plan to move from an administration national traineeship to, for example, accounting or information technology, are able to work for their key skills at a higher level, to prepare them for the potential of becoming modern apprentices. Although most trainees start at the same time, soon after the end of the school year, they are encouraged to complete their programme at their own pace, provided they are ready to start the next level at the start of the next academic year.

26. Trainees in all the programme areas, except the childcare pilot programmes, work towards their key skills qualification at the same time as their NVQ. Key skills are integrated wherever possible, although some supplementary activities are provided for areas where evidence for key skills does not naturally occur. The new intake of trainees (including childcare) will all be national trainees, and will all do key skills alongside their level 2 qualification. This year, some trainees have not been national trainees, but they have still been working towards their key skills qualifications at the appropriate level for their own ability and potential, and to provide them with the potential of transferring to a national traineeship or modern apprenticeship framework if possible. Service level agreements with the subcontractors stipulate that key skills should be provided for the council trainees, and integrated with their main qualification.

27. There are currently no modern apprentices on the programme, although there are plans for converting current administration national trainees at the start of the

next training year, or when they are offered employment, whichever is later. Most trainees are taken on as national trainees, and the new intake will all be national trainees. However, on completing their national traineeships, trainees have not so far been offered the chance to progress to a modern apprenticeship. Trainees are encouraged to follow the modern apprenticeship framework, but they have to keep their trainee status until they are employed. They can only become modern apprentices properly when they are employed. Because of their trainee status, they expect to work in a supportive learning environment, and to be additional to staff requirements within their departments. Their supervisors do not all have the same expectations of the trainee's status, and there can be conflicts of interest and misunderstandings when work pressures within departments make it difficult for trainees to be offered the sort of stimulating learning opportunities they feel they have a right to expect.

### Quality assurance

### Grade 2

28. The council has a comprehensive and well-recorded quality assurance policy which includes procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of its youth training scheme. Arrangements for monitoring ESF and SRB projects are rigorous and well designed. Quantitative information is collected routinely and reported on regularly. Information about the quality of provision is included in each project's final report. External consultants are used to design and produce each project's final evaluation. The new self-assessment report described quality assurance arrangements accurately. It identified the actions which have been taken since the first inspection to improve provision across the board.

At the first inspection, the following main weaknesses were identified:

- ◆ performance improvements not yet applied to all occupational areas
- ◆ little systematic gathering of feedback from supervisors
- ◆ failure to share quality assurance arrangements with all subcontractors

29. Significant improvements have since been made to quality assurance procedures and on re-inspection, the following strengths and weaknesses were identified.

#### *STRENGTHS*

- ◆ action taken to implement continuous improvement
- ◆ clear targets for all aspects of training
- ◆ good use of data for continuous development of programmes

#### *WEAKNESSES*

- ◆ some qualitative trainee feedback not collected

30. All staff demonstrate a commitment to providing good-quality training programmes in a range of occupational areas and have a positive approach to continuous improvement. All aspects of the quality assurance policy for the council as a whole are adapted to meet the needs of trainees and subcontracted staff. Managers have terminated training which was considered unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, and only programmes which can be fully supported within the organisation are now offered. Some off-the-job training, which was previously subcontracted, is now provided in-house by employed staff or staff employed specifically for this purpose.

31. Both trainers and managers regularly evaluate off-the-job training sessions. Feedback by workplace supervisors, following monthly reviews of trainees' progress, informs managers of trainees' progress and enables supervisors to influence the training programmes. Special training sessions were organised recently for nursery supervisors who had expressed concerns about the difficulty of assessing a particular unit of the NVQ. Assessment, internal and external verification processes are well managed and recorded and meet the requirements of awarding and funding bodies. There are contracts with all subcontractors. They are comprehensive and specify levels of service and performance required, and the monitoring processes which will take place.

32. There are clear targets for all aspects of training. Staff performance is measured against them. Quality assurance arrangements to ensure the quality of training include regular observation of training sessions and monitoring of progress towards the achievement of the trainees' NVQ. In business administration, which is the largest programme, retention rates for the cohort 1999-2000 are 91 per cent. At the time of the reinspection, half the trainees had already achieved their level 2 NVQ and the other elements of the national traineeship framework, and the remainder were expected to achieve within the next three weeks. Action planning is thorough and comprehensive and forms a major feature within the management of all programmes. Weaknesses, identified through the self-assessment process, as well as the original inspection, formed part of an action plan produced in September 1999. The action plan covered all aspects of the provision including subcontracted work. The plan identified action that would be required to address the weakness, a named person responsible for the action, a timescale and indicators that could be used to measure the success of the action. By this process, the self-assessment report produced in February 2000, shows that previously identified weaknesses have been addressed and new strengths identified.

33. Management information systems produce statistics which are used by staff to continuously improve the existing training programmes. Statistical information identified a gender imbalance in a particular occupational area. The training department reviewed and modified marketing leaflets and the recruitment process to attract candidates from the non-traditional gender group. Statistical information is also used to identify the success of the marketing strategy. Managers use applicant response numbers to identify the level of resources required for particular programmes. Comprehensive research of the local employment situation

has led to the appointment of a member of staff to encourage Afro-Caribbeans to participate in training for employment. There are also excellent and effective working links with other agencies. Local industry and commerce give both employment opportunities and financial support through partnership projects.

34. Trainees' feedback from reviews, occasional 'away-days' and exit interviews are used to improve the training experience. However, while managers are able to use this feedback to make change and improve the training experience for trainees, this feedback and action tends to be on an individual basis. Group discussions for managers to elicit trainees' qualitative views through a supportive, non-threatening process, take place only every six months. Some trainees' constructive criticism of the programme has not been captured so far. Some of the forms which have been used for trainees to give their views on the programme are unhelpful once trainees are established, and have more detail to offer about the programmes' strengths and weaknesses.