



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT MARCH 2001

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

SUMMARY

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council provides satisfactory training in construction. Work placements are used effectively to provide trainees with good on-the-job training. However, there is no assessment in the workplace and some trainees make slow progress towards their qualifications. Trainees, training advisors and workplace supervisors attend effective training sessions on equal opportunities together. However, there is insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in work placements and subcontractors. Trainee support is not managed well. Some trainees do not have their training needs properly assessed at the start of their training. Individual learning plans are not used to support and guide trainees through their programme. Meaningful targets are not always agreed with trainees. Management of subcontractors is inadequate. Key skills are given a low priority, and the progress of trainees is hindered. Quality assurance arrangements are inadequate. There is insufficient evaluation of training. Inadequate use is made of feedback from trainees, workplace supervisors and subcontractors on the quality of training. In its self-assessment process, the council failed to identify and address the key weaknesses in training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ effective training in equal opportunities

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no work-based assessment in construction
- ◆ insufficient evaluation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ unsystematic initial assessment
- ◆ inadequate use of individual learning plans
- ◆ insufficient management and monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ low priority given to key skills
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training
- ◆ poor self-assessment process

INTRODUCTION

1. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council (RCBC) is a unitary authority. Formed in 1996, it began offering government-funded training in the same year. The programme has grown from involving two modern apprentices following national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in heating and ventilation to involving 28 trainees. There are 12 advanced modern apprentices in construction, five in business administration and three in health, care and public services. There are also eight trainees on foundation for work programmes. All training is funded through Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). Owing to the low numbers of trainees in business administration, health, care and public services and foundation for work, these areas were not reported on separately.

2. The TEC contract is managed by RCBC's training unit manager. The training unit, based at Eston's town hall, provides advice and develops training for all council employees, including trainees. The training unit manager reports to the assistant director of personnel. One part-time and one full-time assistant training officer and one full-time training officer, supported by a part-time administrative assistant, devote half of their time to advanced modern apprenticeships. They contribute to recruitment, selection, initial assessment and induction and carry out progress reviews for advanced modern apprentices. All the advanced modern apprentices work in council departments and schools. They receive on-the-job training from a workplace supervisor. Off-the-job training and assessment are subcontracted to three colleges, one university and two training providers. Two full-time and two part-time staff from the council's education department, overseen by a project manager, provide foundation for work training at premises in Redcar. They carry out recruitment, initial assessment, induction, training and progress reviews. Trainees follow a 12-week programme of life skills which can include a work placement, as part of the Learning Gateway.

3. Redcar and Cleveland Borough covers an area of 95 square miles and is bordered by the North Sea, the Tees estuary and the North York Moors National Park. It has a population of 138,000 and contains 60,000 homes, of which 13,200 are council properties. The main residential areas are in the west and the north of the borough. The main industrial area is located on the south bank of the River Tees. The eastern part of the borough is mostly rural. With 7,000 employees, RCBC is the largest employer in the borough. The manufacturing sector is declining but still accounts for 34 per cent of local employment, compared with less than 20 per cent nationally. Local employers report skills shortages in engineering and construction. The unemployment rate for Redcar and Cleveland of 9.8 per cent was considerably higher than the average for the Northeast of 6.6 per cent and the national average of 3.5 per cent. Less than 1 per cent of the borough's population is from minority ethnic groups. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in Redcar and Cleveland was 46 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent. In the same year, 59 per cent of school



leavers continued in full-time education, compared to 69 per cent nationally.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. RCBC produced its first self-assessment report in December 1999. Its action plan was updated in August 2000. The self-assessment report itself was not updated in preparation for inspection. The report contained useful information on the local economy but lacked depth in the occupational and generic areas.

5. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at RCBC in March 2001. They interviewed 28 trainees, six of the training unit's staff and four staff in the education department. They visited 12 work placements and interviewed 10 workplace supervisors. Inspectors also interviewed nine staff at the six subcontractors. They observed two learning sessions and three progress reviews. The team reviewed a wide range of documents, including trainees' files, portfolios, records of assessment and individual learning plans. Documents, including contracts, training materials, records of staff meetings, internal and external verifiers' reports, and personnel records, were also examined.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Construction	1		1			2
Total	1	0	1	0	0	2

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

6. There are 12 trainees in construction. All the trainees are advanced modern apprentices and are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Three are training in bricklaying, two in wood occupations, two in mechanical engineering (plumbing) and four in mechanical engineering (heating and ventilation). One trainee is training in construction contracting and is also working towards a national certificate in building studies. All off-the-job training and NVQ assessment are subcontracted to local colleges on either a block-release or a weekly day-release basis. Trainees spend their remaining time in the workplace, being trained by workplace supervisors. All the trainees are employed by the council's housing department. The training unit's three training advisors monitor trainees in the workplace and with subcontractors. Progress reviews take place involving employers, trainees and training advisors in the workplace, and between trainers, trainees and training advisors at subcontractors' premises. These are done at three-monthly intervals. Of the 16 trainees who have started training since 1997, 12 are still in training. In 1997-98, the two trainees who started training both achieved NVQs at level 2. One progressed to level 3 and is still in training, and the other left the programme. In 1998-99, six trainees started training, three at level 2 and three

at level 3. Two of those who started at level 2 left early with no qualifications and one is still in training. One of the trainees who started at level 3 has completed all the qualifications on his individual learning plan, while the other two have completed NVQs at level 3 and are still working towards key skills. In 1999-2000, five trainees started training at level 2, and are still in training. In 2000-01, three trainees started training at level 2 and are still in training. All the subcontractors' training staff are adequately qualified and experienced, and have NVQs at level 3 or above or equivalent industrial qualifications. Most have training qualifications. All the assessors have assessors' qualifications, with the exception of one who is working towards them. All the internal verifiers are appropriately qualified. Internal verification is planned and regular sampling of assessors' work takes place. The self-assessment report identified two strengths. Inspectors agreed with one strength but the other, continued employment after completion of training, was considered to be no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified two additional strengths and two weaknesses. The grade awarded by inspectors is the same as that given by RCBC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good off-the-job training
- ◆ good-quality portfolios

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no work-based assessment
- ◆ restricted progress for some trainees

7. There are good workplace facilities which are used imaginatively for training. Training is carried out to industrial standards. All trainees work for short periods of time in other departments to gain experience and an understanding of the council. Trainees are allocated to workplace supervisors, who oversee their on-the-job training. They are also allocated appropriate construction work on site to enable them to cover the full range of requirements for their NVQ. The council provides additional training designed to raise their awareness of health and safety in the workplace and of customer relations and to improve their knowledge of the council.

8. The off-the-job training given by the subcontractors is well structured and takes place in good-quality workshops and well-resourced training rooms. One subcontractor has a new purpose-built centre for training and assessment in heating and ventilation, sponsored by a major manufacturer. All the subcontracted colleges have computers which trainees can access easily and use to complete written evidence for their portfolios, assignments and course work. Training programmes and session plans are well recorded and comprehensive. Training is provided to a good standard in most areas and trainees' progress is monitored regularly. Most

trainees understand the advanced modern apprenticeship framework and are aware of their progress and what they need to do to achieve their qualification.

9. Trainees' portfolios are of a good standard. They are all indexed and well structured and contain a good mix of written and photographic evidence. Witness testimonies from the workplace are regularly sought and copies are placed in portfolios. Training staff pay particular attention to ensuring that portfolios are maintained to a high standard and encourage trainees to use them if they apply for jobs.

10. Assessors do not observe trainees in their workplaces. There are ample opportunities for assessing real work activities, but they are not used. Assessments are simulated in the subcontractors' workshops. There is an over-reliance on witness testimonies for evidence. For those trainees who started after September 2000, the revised NVQ standards require some assessment in the workplace.

11. At one subcontracted college, a training programme in heating and ventilation is not flexible enough to allow trainees to progress at their own pace. Trainees follow the course, working as a group rather than as individuals. Some trainees who have completed their training and achieved NVQs at level 3 have not yet completed key skills. Key skills training is given after, rather than integrated with, the NVQ training. This adds to the time taken for trainees to achieve all the targets on their individual learning plans.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

12. The training unit and education department are integral parts of the council. RCBC recognises its responsibility for promoting equal opportunities, both as an employer and as a provider of services. Job advertisements contain a reference to RCBC being an equal opportunities employer. RCBC has several plans and frameworks which set out its priorities for equal opportunities, including its social justice strategy. It has an equal opportunities policy which meets the TEC's contractual requirements and is issued to trainees, workplace supervisors and subcontractors. Subcontractors sign an agreement which includes a reference to the policy. Trainees' induction includes a presentation on equal opportunities legislation and a video on equal opportunities, designed for youth trainees. Trainees are also given information on RCBC's harassment policy and complaints procedure. Some of the sites used by trainees are not accessible to wheelchair users, but RCBC is addressing this. Currently, there are no trainees with disabilities and no trainees from minority ethnic groups. Forty per cent of trainees are women and 60 per cent are men. All the trainees in construction are men and all the trainees in administration and in childcare are women. The self-assessment report identified five strengths and one weakness, all referring to council-wide issues, rather than being specific to work-based training. The council's reference

to equal opportunities in job advertisements was considered to be no more than normal practice by inspectors. Two of the strengths, one to do with training for managers and one referring to the use of standards, were agreed with by inspectors. The one weakness identified in the self-assessment report referred to a delay in setting up a system for monitoring employees. This was considered to be part of the wider weaknesses identified by inspectors. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by the council.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective training in equal opportunities
- ◆ good initiatives to enhance equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient evaluation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ insufficient monitoring of employers and subcontractors' equal opportunities practices

13. RCBC provides good training in equal opportunities. All managers involved in appointing advanced modern apprentices attend a well-established training course which promotes good practice in recruitment, selection and induction. The course is run by staff from the training unit. Specialist trainers are brought in to provide a one-day course on equal opportunities. Trainees, training advisors and workplace supervisors attend the course together. The course is relevant to participants and has been well received. A follow-up session is planned to discuss the implications of recent changes to legislation. Foundation for work trainees are given equal opportunities training which is tailored to their needs. It is provided by trainers in a relaxed setting and involves a video and discussion. This is reinforced by ongoing discussions and intervention by trainers if trainees make discriminatory comments.

14. The training unit's staff have a high level of interest in equal opportunities and are keen to improve practice in this area. They identified that, although council-wide policies provide a framework, an equal opportunities policy specifically for training was required. They produced one in January 2001 and this has been distributed to workplace supervisors and subcontractors. RCBC has also adapted standards developed by a national organisation to promote racial equality and is using them in an innovative way to assess its work on equal opportunities throughout the council. Staff have attended a three-day training event on a national equal opportunities award and are receiving specialist mentoring to help them to work towards the award. This develops their understanding of important issues. Staff are aware of the need to target under-represented groups. There have been initiatives to encourage young people from disadvantaged areas to apply for advanced modern apprenticeships. Women are encouraged to apply for training in construction through special wording of job advertisements.

15. The tasks involved in evaluating the policy have not been delegated to specific members of staff. A senior council officer is specified as being responsible for monitoring the policy, but there is no system to enable the officer to do this. This officer is not directly involved in the training process and so cannot evaluate the policy. In addition, staff are not clear which data to collect. The policy requires that all training and development is planned, provided and monitored on the basis of equality of access, but there are no arrangements for evaluating this. The action plan for equal opportunities focuses on corporate initiatives, rather than on actions planned as a result of evaluating the policy.

16. The training unit's staff rigorously monitor arrangements for health and safety, but there is no comparable monitoring of equal opportunities. Subcontractors and employers are required to have an equal opportunities policy and are given a copy of RCBC's policy, but the implementation of their policies is not monitored. It is also assumed that the equal opportunities policy is applied consistently throughout the council. However, there is evidence that it is not. For example, potentially offensive material is on display in one of the council's workshops.

Trainee support

Grade 4

17. RCBC recruits its advanced modern apprentices through advertisements for job vacancies within the council. Interviews are conducted by the department which has the vacancy, usually with a training advisor present. Selection of trainees is based on information collected from application forms and interviews and, in the case of construction trainees, from ability tests. Trainees are employed on temporary contracts while on the training programme. Most are given permanent positions with the council when their temporary contracts expire. Construction trainees attend a group induction to their programme. All other trainees receive an individual induction at their workplace. Trainees have an induction to their NVQ and key skills when they first attend off-the-job training. The training advisors conduct three-monthly progress reviews in the workplace with trainees and their supervisors. Construction trainees also receive three-monthly progress reviews with their trainer and training advisor at the subcontractors' premises. Trainees who are not given permanent jobs at the end of their training are given help with job search and updating their curricula vitae. Foundation for work trainees are referred to the programme by their careers advisor. Induction for these trainees takes place at the training centre and includes an initial assessment. Trainers conduct weekly progress reviews with trainees in work placements. Foundation for work trainees are given an interview at the end of their training. Fifty-seven per cent of foundation for work trainees have progressed to further education or training or have found jobs. In the past three years, out of 83 trainees who started training across all occupational areas, 25 have left early. The self-assessment report identified four strengths, relating to induction, support and initial assessment, which inspectors considered to be no more than normal practice. Two strengths, about specialist sources of advice and access to occupational health services, were considered to be part of larger strengths. The

one weakness identified in the report related to quality assurance rather than trainee support. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of additional qualifications available
- ◆ good access to specialist support for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsystematic initial assessment
- ◆ inadequate use of individual learning plans
- ◆ poor target-setting at progress reviews

18. Advanced modern apprentices have frequent opportunities to gain a range of qualifications in addition to those on their individual learning plans. These include useful and relevant certificates, such as in supervisory management, customer care, technician training, sign language, first aid, abrasive wheel training for plumbers, and the use of various computer software. Trainees' workplace supervisors and the training advisors encourage them to take up these courses, which are paid for by RCBC. This enhances trainees' future job prospects, and improves their chances of progressing with their career within the council.

POOR PRACTICE

Foundation for work trainees are given the council's employees' induction pack. The presentation of the pack is inappropriate and most of the information is not relevant to these trainees. They are required to sign an induction check list designed for employees, who have a fuller induction.

19. RCBC has a range of support networks available to all employees, advanced modern apprentices and foundation for work trainees. For example, named staff members are trained to respond to and support anyone experiencing harassment or bullying. Trained counsellors offer professional and confidential help to all employees, trainees and volunteers linked to the council. Trainees have access to an occupational health department and foundation for work trainees have a nurse available to provide health education and individual advice. Trainees are informed of these through memoranda, leaflets and posters, and through discussions with training advisors. In addition, training advisors have useful contacts which they access for trainees, ranging from organisations giving housing advice to organisations which support young people misusing drugs and alcohol.

20. Some trainees do not have their training needs properly assessed at the start of their programmes. The thoroughness of initial assessments differs according to which subcontractor is providing the training. For example, some trainees on advanced modern apprenticeships have an initial assessment of their key skills, but others do not. Trainees applying for construction programmes undergo psychometric tests but, while similar appropriate tests exist for other trainees, they are not used. Trainees attending one further education college have their numeracy and literacy needs assessed and learning support is offered to them when needed. No member of staff involved in the foundation for work programme is trained to provide numeracy and literacy support, and some trainees are disadvantaged. At

one subcontracted college, the trainees assume that RCBC will undertake initial assessment, and so do not carry this out. RCBC assumes that the college will carry out the assessment and trainees at this college have no initial assessment. Another college conducts initial assessment, but does not inform RCBC of the results, and so additional learning support needs are not recorded and the training advisors are unaware of them. Some subcontractors take account of prior learning and have qualified staff to accredit this, but this is not systematically monitored by RCBC.

21. RCBC does not use trainees' individual learning plans to support and guide trainees through their programme. Individual learning plans are often poorly recorded, for example with gaps where records of previous achievements should be. Additional learning support needs are rarely recorded. Training advisors complete the plan at the start of training with little or no contribution from trainers or assessors. They have little knowledge of the occupational areas. Important parts of the programme are not always recorded on the plans. Training advisors do not set interim targets with trainees at the time their plan is agreed. Trainees are given a copy of their individual learning plan at the beginning of training, but these are seldom referred to afterwards. Trainees often forget that they have them, cannot recall what the component parts of their programme are and therefore cannot manage their own learning schedules. Workplace supervisors and subcontractors are not given copies of the plans as a matter of course, and so are not clear about all the requirements of each trainee's individual programme.

22. Training advisors meet with trainees and their workplace supervisors once every three months to review trainees' progress towards completion of their programme. Little use is made of the individual learning plan at this review. Although some information is now collected periodically, training advisors do not always collect up-to-date information from assessors about trainees' progress before the meeting. As a result, meaningful targets are not agreed with trainees. Trainees receive good personal support from training advisors and value the chance to discuss any problems they have. However, important information about trainees' progress towards their NVQ or key skills is sometimes overlooked or not recorded. Useful information, such as information about trainees' progress in the workplace, is not systematically passed to subcontractors after the progress review. Challenging targets are not set. The review is not used to help trainees to progress steadily through their learning programme. Foundation for work trainees are given good progress reviews while in work placements. However, for trainees who are not on work experience and are attending full-time at the training centre, no progress reviews are recorded. This means that trainees do not have the opportunity to focus on their own progress at critical points during their programme.

Management of training

Grade 4

23. The training unit of the personnel department at RCBC is responsible for training all staff within the council and manages the council's contracts for

government-funded training. A training manager, reporting to the assistant director of personnel, heads the unit. Two full-time and one part-time training advisors and one part-time administrator are responsible for advanced modern apprenticeships, in addition to their other duties. Training and assessment are subcontracted to three colleges, one university and two training providers. A member of staff from the education department has responsibility for operational management of the foundation for work programme. She oversees two part-time and two full-time staff. RCBC has a range of written staffing procedures, policies and practices, which cover the work of the training unit and the foundation for work team. All staff members have six-monthly training and development interviews at which their developmental needs are identified and agreed. RCBC is accredited as an Investor in People. RCBC's self-assessment of this area was inaccurate. The four strengths identified in the self-assessment report related to management of the council as a whole, and did not have an impact on training. RCBC accurately identified subcontracting arrangements as a weakness, but failed to identify four other weaknesses identified by inspectors, who awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of partnerships to maximise opportunities for training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient management and monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ low priority given to key skills
- ◆ no co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- ◆ inadequate use of management information
- ◆ unclear lines of responsibility in foundation for work training

24. The training unit makes every attempt to secure training opportunities for potential advanced modern apprentices. Where a trainee is recruited to an occupational area which is not currently covered by the training unit, the manager seeks new partnerships in order to provide this training. For example, one trainee is following a tailored programme involving several subcontractors, enabling him to gain good qualifications as a quantity surveyor. This includes a further education course in addition to his advanced modern apprenticeship. Great care has been taken to find a subcontractor to offer training for an advanced modern apprentice in childcare in order to make use of her existing knowledge and skills while developing them further. RCBC promotes its advanced modern apprenticeship programmes for young people and life skills training for foundation for work trainees as part of its strategic aim of developing the skills base of the local area. Any skills shortages identified from information about the local labour market, such as in construction, are specifically targeted to maximise employment opportunities for trainees. Trainees are employed on the same salary, terms and

conditions as other employees in comparable jobs.

25. The training unit relies heavily on subcontractors to provide off-the-job training and assessment and has recently recognised the need to monitor this. The manager devised and issued contracts for each subcontractor in January this year. The contracts are carefully drawn up and comprehensive, but as yet are untested. The manager meets with most subcontractors on an unplanned and irregular basis. The council has no systems to ensure that subcontractors meet their contractual obligations and the training unit does not have a clear picture of the quality of each subcontractor's training. In the past it has not recognised, for example, that some trainees are making slow progress toward their NVQ, or that some trainees do not have good opportunities for assessment.

26. RCBC and its subcontractors do not give sufficient priority to key skills. Trainees in all occupational areas are making slow progress towards their key skills. In business administration, key skills are not well integrated and are often taught after the NVQ has been achieved. Training advisors have recently begun to ask for information from subcontractors about trainees' progress towards their NVQ. They do not collect the same information about trainees' progress towards key skills, and so cannot help trainees to achieve them. When trainees are offered a place on the programme, they are given an initial fixed-term employment contract for the average length of the programme, as determined by the training unit. This is usually two years for trainees in administration and care and three years for trainees in construction. At the end of this time, most trainees are offered permanent employment and are taken off the advanced modern apprenticeship programme. Trainees who have not completed their training are encouraged to continue with their NVQ, but not their key skills. Of 20 trainees who have left training in the past three years, only five have gained key skills qualifications and completed their advanced modern apprenticeship.

27. On- and off-the-job training are not well co-ordinated and trainees are not always able to put their learning into context in the workplace. Trainers and assessors have little contact with workplace supervisors and so do not know what training is taking place in the workplace. Although training advisors now pass on some information, most workplace supervisors are not informed of trainees' progress towards their qualifications. Workplace supervisors have a poor understanding of the requirements of trainees' programmes, and so cannot plan on-the-job training to meet these requirements. They also have little knowledge of assessment requirements.

28. RCBC does not collect and analyse data to use as a basis for its management decisions. For example, it is unable promptly to provide accurate data on achievement and retention. The council does not collect data in a format which can be readily analysed. Achievement rates across subcontractors are not compared and RCBC is unable to evaluate its performance across all occupational areas. It does not have adequate computer resources to use data effectively.

29. In foundation for work training, the lines of responsibility are unclear. The

project manager for this training is employed in the education department and reports directly to a line manager who is not connected to the training unit, which is responsible for the contract. Two foundation for work training staff work only for that project and report to the project manager, while two others work on a part-time basis for the project and report to line managers outside it. The training unit has no clear authority over staff providing foundation for work training and problems can arise. One part-time, unqualified Learning Gateway trainer has unclear and inadequate lines of support and supervision. The training unit has intervened appropriately when problems have been reported concerning its other programmes, but it has little knowledge of the content of the foundation for work programme or how it is provided. The training unit manager is not allocated sufficient time to manage the government-funded training.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

30. RCBC has a quality assurance policy and a framework and procedures for its advanced modern apprenticeships and foundation for work training. The director of personnel has overall responsibility for implementing and reviewing the quality assurance policy and framework. The framework explains how the arrangements for assuring quality will be managed. The procedures cover corporate staff and training matters and have been developed by the training unit's staff involved in government-funded training. Quality within the unit is the day-to-day responsibility of the training unit manager. Self-assessment is also her responsibility. Trainees are registered with awarding bodies for their NVQs and key skills by subcontractors. Subcontractors provide training, assessment and internal verification. The self-assessment report included four strengths and one weakness. Some of the strengths did not apply to the government-funded training. Sharing of information from relevant courses attended was considered to be part of another strength. Commitment to making continuous improvement was identified as necessary in the self-assessment report as a strength and agreed with by inspectors. The review of quality assurance procedures identified in the self-assessment report had been carried out satisfactorily by the time of inspection and this area was no longer a weakness. Inspectors identified four additional weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective sharing of good practice

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training
- ◆ no systematic collection and evaluation of feedback
- ◆ inadequate arrangements for internal auditing

◆ poor self-assessment process

31. RCBC's staff communicate openly and exchange good practice. For example, if a member of staff attends a training event, they share what they have learned with all the team. Staff are receptive to advice offered by subcontractors, other training providers and the TEC. When problems are identified, RCBC takes effective action to address them. For example, a subcontractor identified that trainees in business administration were not allocated sufficient time for portfolio-building. RCBC responded to their concerns and trainees now attend college for half a day every two weeks for guidance on collecting evidence and portfolio-building. RCBC networks with other councils and training providers in order to compare its training programmes. RCBC bench marks against other councils for all services including training. New contracts have been produced and new individual learning plans, progress-review sheets and a database for monitoring trainees' progress are being developed. Training procedures have recently been updated by staff examining how successful the previous procedures were and adjusting them accordingly. Staff in the training unit and education department involved in government-funded training hold regular meetings to monitor and review the implementation of the action plan produced during the self-assessment process. The most important action points for each month and progress made are clearly displayed in the training unit's office.

32. All the subcontractors have satisfactory arrangements for internal verification. These include sufficient qualified and occupationally experienced internal verifiers, planned sampling of trainees' portfolios and observations of assessments. Internal verification is recorded and monitored by the subcontractors. The subcontractors have adequate arrangements for monitoring feedback from external verifiers.

33. RCBC's new contract with subcontractors provides for RCBC's staff to observe subcontractors' training sessions. This has not yet been implemented. The quality of key training processes conducted by RCBC's staff such as induction and progress reviews, is not monitored. There is no observation of staff's work by colleagues or line managers. Some foundation for work sessions are observed. However, observation is not used as a means of supporting new trainers and poor practice is not addressed. On-the-job training is not evaluated.

34. The training manager requests and reads subcontractors' external verifiers' reports. Questionnaires are issued to trainees after induction, health and safety and equal opportunities training run by the council. Foundation for work trainees are asked to fill in questionnaires after some learning sessions. The questionnaires are looked at by staff, but are not analysed to establish trends, or evaluated to improve the training. A questionnaire is being devised which will be sent to all advanced modern apprentices once a year. Feedback from trainees and workplace supervisors is sought and recorded during progress reviews. Subcontractors are not asked for their views on training.

35. RCBC has devised an internal auditing procedure covering all the main training processes, including workplace monitoring, initial assessments, progress reviews, monitoring of subcontractors and evaluation of training. The audit is scheduled to begin later this year. The training unit manager has recently been trained to operate the internal auditing system. However, there is no system to ensure that trainees receive all of the necessary training at the right time. For example, one subcontractor gives a week-long induction to construction trainees who begin training in September. Three construction trainees, who began their training later in the year, have not received the subcontractor's induction. RCBC had not identified this.

36. Subcontractors did not contribute to the self-assessment report, which was written wholly by the training unit. The training unit's staff do not have sufficient occupational experience critically to self-assess the occupational areas. The occupational areas of the report lack depth and analysis. The foundation for work team was not involved in producing the foundation for work section of the report and did not contribute to the generic areas. All the strengths identified in the occupational areas of the self-assessment report were more relevant to the generic areas. No weaknesses were identified in the occupational areas. No strengths or weaknesses were identified in the foundation for work area. Many of the strengths related to corporate matters and were not relevant to government-funded trainees. The self-assessment report has not been updated since it was produced in December 1999. The accompanying action plan was updated in August 2000 and did not include actions for each occupational area.