

9 TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
MARCH 2001

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION APRIL
2002

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- ◆ work-based training for all people over 16
- ◆ provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- ◆ the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- ◆ adult and community learning
- ◆ learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- ◆ education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Grading

In summarising their judgements about the quality of provision in curriculum or occupational areas and about the quality of leadership and management, including quality assurance and equality of opportunity, inspectors use a five-point scale. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- ◆ grade 1 – outstanding
- ◆ grade 2 – good
- ◆ grade 3 – satisfactory
- ◆ grade 4 – unsatisfactory
- ◆ grade 5 – very weak.

SUMMARY

The original inspection of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for trainee support, management of training and quality assurance. These areas have been reinspected against the requirements of the *Common Inspection Framework* by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, which replaced the Training Standards Council on 1 April 2001. The sections of the original report dealing with trainee support, management of training and quality assurance have been replaced with the findings of the reinspection. Also, the report summary, report introduction and introduction to the inspection findings have been updated and reflect the findings of the reinspection. Sections of the report, dealing with areas which have not been reinspected, have been left in their original form. The amended inspection report is published on the Adult Learning Inspectorate's website (www.ali.gov.uk).

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council provides satisfactory training in construction. Work placements are used effectively to provide learners with good on-the-job training. Work-based assessment is being introduced but some learners make slow progress towards their qualifications. Learners, training advisers and workplace supervisors attend effective training sessions on equal opportunities. However, there is insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities in work placements and subcontractors. At the original inspection, learner support was not managed well, but is now satisfactory. Learners have access to a wide range of qualifications and support. Learners' training needs are now properly assessed at the start of their training, but this information is not always shared with Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and the subcontractors. Meaningful targets are not always agreed with learners. At reinspection, the management of training is still less than satisfactory. The management of subcontractors is inadequate. Insufficient progress has been made to deal with the weaknesses identified at the original inspection. Quality assurance arrangements are also still inadequate. There is insufficient evaluation of training. Inadequate use is made of feedback on training from learners, workplace supervisors and subcontractors.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3

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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
Trainee support	3
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ effective training in equal opportunities
- ◆ good range of additional qualifications available

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient evaluation of equal opportunities policy
- ◆ unsystematic initial assessment
- ◆ insufficient management and monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ weak operational management
- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training
- ◆ inadequate implementation of internal auditing

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. At the time of the original inspection, there were 28 learners. Of these, 12 were advanced modern apprentices in construction, five in business administration and three in health, social care and public services. There were also eight learners on foundation for work programmes. At the time of the reinspection, there was one advanced modern apprentice on engineering training, one in information and communications technology (ICT), three in business administration, one in health, social care and public services, and 12 advanced modern apprentices and one foundation modern apprentice on construction training. There were also 11 learners on foundation for work programmes. At the time of the original inspection all training was funded through Tees Valley Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). RCBC now contracts with Tees Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to offer the training. Owing to low numbers of learners at the time of the original inspection, business administration, health, social care and public services and foundation for work, were not reported on separately.

2. The local LSC 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 work-based learners. The training unit manager reports to the assistant director of personnel. One full-time and one part-time learning and development officer, supported by a full-time training co-ordinator and a part-time administrator are responsible for modern apprenticeships, in addition to their other duties. They contribute to recruitment, selection, initial assessment and induction and carry out progress reviews for advanced modern apprentices. All the 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 four colleges and three training providers. Three full-time and one part-time member of staff from the council's education department, overseen by a line manager and the deputy head of services, provide foundation for work training at premises in Redcar. They carry out recruitment, initial assessment, induction, training and progress reviews. Learners follow a 19-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. 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. At the time of original inspection, 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. By the time of reinspection, the unemployment rate for Redcar and Cleveland has fallen to 6.9 per cent, but is still higher than the average for the Northeast of 5.1 per cent and considerably higher than the national average of 2.9 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 2001, the proportion decreased to 43 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. RCBC produced its first self-assessment report in December 1999. It updated its action plan in August 2000. The self-assessment report was not updated for inspection. The report contained useful information on the local economy, but lacked depth in the occupational and generic areas. The self-assessment report was updated in February 2002 for the reinspection, using the *Common Inspection Framework* guidelines. At reinspection, inspectors' grades for learner support and quality assurance were the same as those given in the self-assessment report. Inspectors gave a lower grade for management of training.

5. The original inspection was carried out by a team of four inspectors who spent a total of 16 days at RCBC in March 2001. They interviewed 28 learners, 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 from the six subcontractors. They observed two learning sessions and three progress reviews. The team reviewed a wide range of documents, including learners' files, portfolios of evidence, 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.

6. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors, who spent a total of eight days at RCBC in April 2002. Inspectors interviewed 15 learners, six of the training unit's staff and four staff in the education department. They visited three work placements and interviewed five workplace supervisors. They also interviewed 14 subcontractor staff from six subcontractors. They observed three progress reviews. Inspectors observed a range of documents, including learners' files, portfolios of evidence, records of initial assessment and individual learning plans. Documents were examined which included contracts, training materials, records of staff meetings and subcontractors' meetings, internal and external verifiers' reports, action plans and personnel records.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	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

7. 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 advisers monitor trainees in the workplace and with subcontractors. Progress reviews take place involving employers, trainees and training advisers in the workplace, and between trainers, trainees and training advisers 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

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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

13. 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

14. 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 advisers 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. 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 3

18. RCBC recruits its modern apprentices through job advertisements within the council organisation. Interviews are carried out by the department which has the vacancy, usually with a training adviser present. Recruitment is based on information on potential learners' application forms and interviews, and from the results of ability tests. Learners are employed on temporary contracts while on the training programme. Most are given permanent positions with the council when

their temporary contracts expire. Construction learners attend a group induction to their programme. All other learners receive an individual induction in their workplace. Learners have an induction to their NVQ and key skills training when they first attend off-the-job training. The learning and development officers conduct three-monthly progress reviews in the workplace with learners and their supervisors. Most learners also receive three-monthly progress reviews with their trainer and learning and development officers, at the subcontractors' premises. Learners who are not offered permanent jobs at the end of their training are given help with jobsearch and updating their curriculum vitae. Foundation for work learners are referred to the programme by their careers adviser. Induction for these learners takes place at the training centre and includes an initial assessment. Trainers conduct weekly progress reviews with learners in their work placements. Foundation for work learners are also given an interview at the end of their training. Fifty-seven per cent of foundation for work learners have progressed to further education or training or have found jobs. In the past four years, of the 93 modern apprentices who started training across all occupational areas, 34 per cent left their programmes early.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

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

19. Although RCBC has worked on all the weaknesses identified in the original inspection, it has only remedied the second weakness. Modern apprentices' individual learning plans now record learners' NVQ and key skills units and detail their previous experience. Individual learning plans also include a personal development section for learners to complete during their training programme. RCBC are beginning to use individual learning plans at learners' progress reviews. Foundation for work learners use their individual learning plans well as development plans, which are updated during progress reviews. The first weakness remains. Initial assessment is still not systematic, although all modern apprentices now take ability tests. The third weakness also remains, target-setting at modern apprentices' progress reviews is still poor.

20. Some subcontractors contributed to the self-assessment report. The foundation for work team were involved in producing their section of the report and also contributed to the generic areas. The occupational areas of the report contain mostly generic strengths and weaknesses. The action plan has been updated regularly, but insufficient progress has been made. Inspectors' grades matched the grades in the self-assessment report for learner support, management of training and quality assurance.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good range of additional qualifications

- ◆ good access to specialist support for learners

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unsystematic initial assessment
- ◆ poor target-setting at modern apprentices' progress reviews

21. Modern apprentices have frequent opportunities to gain a range of additional qualifications. These include useful and relevant training in supervisory management, health and safety, elevated platform training, street lighting, driving, customer care, technician training, sign language, first aid, abrasive wheel training for plumbers, and various software programmes. Learners' workplace supervisors and the learning and development officers encourage them to take up these courses, which are funded by RCBC. This enhances learners' job prospects, and improves their chances of career progression within the council. A good range of qualifications is also available to foundation for work learners and work placements are tailored to their needs.

22. RCBC offers a range of support networks to its employees, modern apprentices and foundation for work learners. Trained staff support anyone experiencing harassment or bullying. Trained counsellors offer professional and confidential help. Learners have access to an occupational health department. Foundation for work learners have access to the educational psychology department, learning support staff and medical support. All learners know about these services, through memoranda, leaflets and posters, and through discussions with learning and development officers. In addition, learning and development officers have a range of contacts from housing organisations which support young people who have problems with the misuse of drugs and alcohol.

23. Some modern apprentices' needs are not properly assessed at the start of their training programmes. Not all subcontractors' initial assessments are sufficiently thorough. Modern apprentices are not always initially assessed for key skills. Subcontractors and RCBC do not always share the results of initial assessment. Some subcontractors accredit learners' previous experience, but RCBC does not monitor it. Learning Gateway learners are always assessed for literacy, but not always for numeracy.

24. Learning and development officers meet modern apprentices and their workplace supervisors once every three months to review learners' progress. Learning and development officers do not always collect up-to-date information from subcontractors about learners' progress before the meeting. Meaningful targets are not agreed with learners. Learners receive good personal support from learning and development officers and value the chance to discuss any problems they have. However, issues raised during progress reviews often take a long time to resolve and are frequently not resolved by the time of the next review. Important information about learners' progress towards their NVQ or key skills training is sometimes overlooked or not recorded. Foundation for work learners are given good progress reviews while in work placements and now have monthly recorded

progress reviews when they are attending full time at the training centre.

Management of training

Grade 4

25. The training unit of the personnel department at RCBC is responsible for training all staff in 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. One full-time and one part-time learning and development officer, plus one full-time training co-ordinator and one part-time administrator, are responsible for modern apprenticeships in addition to their other duties. Training and assessment are subcontracted to four colleges and three training providers. A deputy head of services in the education department has strategic responsibility for the foundation for work programme. A line manager is responsible for operational management of the foundation for work programme and has one part-time and three 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 have six-monthly training and development interviews at which their developmental needs are identified and agreed. RCBC is accredited as an Investor in People, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ 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

26. Since the original inspection, two weaknesses have been remedied, but three weaknesses remain. The management and monitoring of subcontractors is still inadequate, but communications between RCBC and subcontractors have improved considerably since the original inspection. Insufficient action has been taken to raise the profile and achievement of key skills. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is now satisfactory. Learners have the opportunity to rotate their work placements to help them develop skills and confidence and collect evidence for their NVQ. A work-based diary has recently been introduced to co-ordinate on- and off-the-job training. Use of management information is still inadequate and was identified by inspectors as part of a larger weakness of weak operational management. Lines of responsibility in foundation for work training are now clear. The deputy head of service in the education department now has overall responsibility for the programme and staff are well supported by managers.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good use of partnerships to create opportunities for training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient management and monitoring of subcontractors
- ◆ low priority given to key skills training
- ◆ weak operational management

27. The training unit makes every attempt to secure training opportunities for potential modern apprentices. When a learner is recruited to an occupational area which is not currently covered by the training unit, the manager looks for new partnerships to provide this training. For example, one learner is following an individually designed training programme with several subcontractors, to gain his qualifications as a quantity surveyor. This includes a higher national diploma course funded by RCBC, in addition to his advanced modern apprenticeship. RCBC promotes its modern apprenticeship programmes for young people and Life Skills training for foundation for work learners as part of its strategic aim to develop the local skills base. Any skills shortages identified, such as in construction, are specifically targeted to increase employment opportunities for learners. Learners are employed on the same salary, terms and conditions as other council employees in comparable jobs.

28. The training unit relies heavily on subcontractors to provide off-the-job training and assessment and, at the original inspection, it recognised the need to monitor this training provision. The manager has issued contracts for each subcontractor, but subcontractors are frequently unaware of the service specifications referred to in the contract. Some contracts have not been signed by subcontractors, although they were issued several months ago. The learning and development officers now meet subcontractors termly, to review learners' progress. However, the council does not have adequate systems to ensure that subcontractors meet their contractual obligations and the training unit does not have a clear picture of each subcontractor's training. It has not recognised, for example, that some learners are making slow progress towards their key skills awards.

29. Key skills are discussed at subcontractors' meetings and current modern apprentices have a good understanding of key skills requirements. However, RCBC and some of its subcontractors do not give key skills sufficient priority. In business administration, training in key skills is not an integral part of training leading to the NVQ, and is often introduced when learners have completed their NVQ training. Learning and development officers ask subcontractors for information about learners' progress towards their NVQ. They do not collect the same information about learners' progress towards key skills, and so cannot help learners to achieve them. When learners are offered a place on the programme, they are given an initial fixed-term employment contract. At the end of this, most learners are offered permanent employment and are taken off the modern

apprenticeship programme. Learners who have not completed their training are encouraged to continue with their NVQ, but not their key skills training. Since the original inspection, of the eight modern apprentices who left, only one achieved the key skills qualification and all the other qualifications on their learning plan. Five learners only achieved the NVQ and two left with no qualifications. Of 20 learners who left the training programme in the three years before the original inspection, only five gained key skills qualifications and achieved their advanced modern apprenticeship.

30. Operational management is weak. Although there have been regular meetings to discuss the action plan from the original inspection, insufficient progress has been made. Staff have not yet introduced an effective improvement strategy. RCBC does not collect and analyse data to use as a basis for its management decisions. For example, it is unable to provide accurate data on achievement and retention rates for foundation programmes. RCBC does not collect data in a format which can be analysed. Achievement rates across subcontractors are not compared and RCBC is unable to evaluate its performance across all occupational areas. Computer resources to use data effectively have recently been introduced, but are not yet being used. There is no system to monitor learners' progress. Documents are often not filled in accurately.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

31. RCBC has a quality assurance policy, a structure and procedures for its advanced modern apprenticeships and foundation for work training. The assistant chief personnel officer has overall responsibility for introducing and reviewing the quality assurance policy and structure. The structure details how the arrangements for quality assurance 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. The training unit manager has day-to-day responsibility for quality assurance in the unit and for self-assessment issues. Learners are registered with awarding bodies for their NVQs and with subcontractors for key skills training. Subcontractors provide training, assessment and internal verification.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

- ◆ no systematic evaluation of training
- ◆ no systematic collection and evaluation of feedback
- ◆ inadequate arrangements for internal auditing
- ◆ poor self-assessment process

32. Since the original inspection, RCBC has rectified only one weakness. Insufficient action has been taken to ensure that training is evaluated systematically. Feedback from learners is not always collected and evaluated. RCBC has started to modify its quality assurance procedures, but no internal audit

has been introduced. The self-assessment process is now satisfactory and involves some subcontractors. The current self-assessment report is honest and self-critical.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective sharing of good practice

WEAKNESSES

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

33. RCBC's staff communicate openly and exchange good practice. For example, if staff attend training, they share what they have learned with the whole team. Staff are receptive to advice from subcontractors, other training providers and the local LSC. When problems are identified, RCBC takes effective action to deal with them. RCBC has established well-attended, termly subcontractors' meetings to share good practice. RCBC networks with other councils and training providers to compare its training programmes. RCBC benchmarks all its services against those of other councils.

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

35. At the original inspection, RCBC had a new contract with subcontractors which allowed RCBC's staff to observe subcontractors' training sessions. These observations have not yet been introduced. Key training processes carried out by RCBC's staff, such as induction and progress reviews, are not monitored. Since the original inspection, there have been two observations of staff's work by colleagues. This process is ineffective as there are no identified criteria. Foundation for work sessions are not observed currently, although there is a planned schedule of observations for the summer term. On-the-job training is not always evaluated.

36. The training manager requests and reads subcontractors' external verifiers' reports. Questionnaires are given to learners after induction, health and safety and equal opportunities training. Foundation for work learners are asked to fill in questionnaires after some learning sessions. Staff look at the questionnaires, but they do not analyse them to establish trends, or evaluate them to improve the training. A questionnaire has been devised asking learners about their modern apprenticeship, but so far it has only been given to five learners and the findings have not been evaluated. Feedback from learners and workplace supervisors is sought and recorded during progress reviews. Subcontractors are not asked for

their views on RCBC's training.

37. At the original inspection, an internal audit was scheduled to start later in the year. This has still not taken place. 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 training unit manager has been trained to operate the internal auditing system. There is no system to ensure that learners receive all the necessary training at the right time.