



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 1999

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council Training

SUMMARY

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council Training offers good training in construction, where trainees' achievements are high. Engineering provision is satisfactory. Training provided by colleges is good and it is well resourced. Almost half of the motor-vehicle candidates leave the programme early. Business administration programmes are satisfactory. There are good computer facilities. Training sessions in the centres are well managed. Assessment procedures are not flexible enough, and some records of assessment are not well kept. The company ensures that trainees are treated fairly, and there are excellent facilities and support for those with disabilities. The management of training and the quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory, and there are plans for the improvement of these generic areas.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	2
Engineering	3
Business administration	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement rates in construction and for young people in business administration
- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ enthusiastic and well-motivated trainees
- ◆ good facilities for those with disabilities
- ◆ flexible approaches to trainee support
- ◆ regular staff development
- ◆ well-documented new quality assurance procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient use of workplace tasks as a source of assessment evidence
- ◆ high drop-out rate in motor-vehicle training
- ◆ lack of systematic initial assessment of occupational and key skills
- ◆ insufficient formal management of colleges
- ◆ failure of quality assurance arrangements to cover workplace training and college provision

INTRODUCTION

1. Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council Training (GMBCT) has delivered government-funded training programmes since 1978. It currently contracts with Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to deliver modern apprenticeship training and work-based training for both young people and adults. In addition, it offers training under the New Deal programme, but this was not included in the scope of inspection. GMBCT offers training in nine occupational sectors and subcontracts off-the-job training and assessment for the construction and engineering sectors to local further education colleges and several specialist training providers for gas-fitting and electrical installation. There are 273 trainees and 22 staff members. GMBCT works with 75 companies in the region which provide employment and work experience for trainees. There are two training centres in Gateshead. The Dryden centre is the main centre, which accommodates central administration and provides the base for 90 per cent of trainees. A second centre, in nearby Birtley, specialises in business administration provision and caters particularly well for the needs of those with disabilities.

2. The metropolitan borough of Gateshead is the largest area of all the Tyne and Wear districts, extending 12.6 miles along the south bank of the river Tyne and covering a total of 55 square miles. The area has recently become well known for its landmark sculpture 'The Angel of the North' by Antony Gormley. The borough is diverse in nature. It encompasses small rural communities in the west, older urban areas in the centre and east and more recently developed urban communities on the fringes of central Gateshead. In September 1998, the unemployment rate was slightly higher than the national average, at 5.8 per cent. In 1997, 15.4 per cent of school leavers entered training/modern apprenticeships, representing a fall of almost 2 per cent from the previous year. The proportion of Gateshead school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 39.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent, for 1998.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

3. The self-assessment process was co-ordinated by the training manager, who attended training and information events on self-assessment run by the TEC. He also attended a nominee training day held by the Council. All staff were then asked to judge their own training area against the relevant quality statements in *Raising the Standard*. Judgement of the generic aspects was co-ordinated by the training manager, using feedback from staff, trainees and employers. A new system for obtaining feedback from trainees and employers, using a questionnaire, was introduced. The self-assessment report was systematic and included strengths, weaknesses and supporting evidence for judgements on each aspect of provision. There was also an action plan to remedy weaknesses and build on the strengths identified.

4. A team of five inspectors (including one trainee) spent a total of 20 days at GMBCT in January 1999. Three of the nine occupational sectors were inspected. The remaining six were excluded as each had fewer than 10 trainees. Inspectors visited the three local colleges to which most of the off-the-job training in construction and engineering is subcontracted. They interviewed 48 trainees, 21 staff (of both GMBCT and college) and 15 workplace supervisors. Six learning sessions and one progress review were observed. Five learning sessions were awarded a grade 3, and one a grade 2. Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including trainees' files and portfolios of assessment evidence, awarding body reports and management-information records.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 2

5. There are 49 trainees in various stages of training towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) at levels one to three in the following trades: trowel and bricklaying, painting and decorating, installing electrical systems, heating and ventilating, gas service and installation, plumbing wood occupation and highway maintenance. Thirty-four of the candidates are modern apprentices and 15 are on the work-based training programme. GMBCT offers construction programmes for young people through work-based training and modern apprenticeship programmes. All trainees undergo selection interviews before being offered a place with GMBCT. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to a variety of local training providers. Trainees attend on either day or block release, depending on which trade is being followed. On-the-job training is carried out on various domestic, commercial and industrial sites in the locality. With one exception, these are in the public works department of the council. A well-qualified and experienced training officer is employed by GMBCT to co-ordinate the construction programmes. On-site safety is monitored by the council's specialist health and safety officer. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by GMBCT. They found

additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ excellent retention rates
- ◆ trainees' good NVQ achievement rates
- ◆ opportunities for trainees to gain experience on a wide range of building sites
- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ enthusiastic and well-motivated trainees
- ◆ ability of trainees to work without supervision, where appropriate

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for workplace tasks to be used as evidence of competence
- ◆ some instances of infrequent progress reviews

6. Retention rates are excellent and no trainees have left the programme early in the past two contract years. In the current contract year, there has been only one early leaver out of 12 trainees. Achievement rates are high and in the past three years, all leavers have achieved both level 2 and 3 awards. Off-the-job training, which takes place at local colleges, is good. There is a wide range of both practical and classroom-based resources, used effectively to stimulate trainees' interest and promote learning. Trainees value their college provision highly, attend regularly and are punctual. There is effective teamwork among GMBCT staff, college staff and trainees. Those trainees not employed at the beginning of their programme are motivated by the incentive of becoming employed if they work hard and achieve good results in their first year. GMBCT ensures that each trainee has a wide range of work experience by securing a variety of high-quality building sites for them to work on. Trainees rotate between these sites, as necessary, in order that they may all gain appropriate experience.

7. Staff responsible for the daily supervision of trainees do not fully understand the NVQ process or the overall learning programme. Opportunities are missed to use tasks carried out at work as a source of evidence of trainees' attainments for the purposes of NVQ assessment. All assessment is done at college, where trainees sometimes have to repeat tasks which they have already completed competently at work. There is a system of regular visits to the workplace by GMBCT's staff to carry out interviews with trainees, during which their progress is reviewed and further action planned. GMBCT's contract with the TEC requires that such progress reviews take place every 13 weeks. However, in the last few months, reviews for some trainees have been carried out less frequently.

Engineering

Grade 3

8. There are 71 trainees in this section, of whom 21 work towards NVQs in engineering. There are 15 modern apprentices and six young people on the work-based training programme. A major heavy-plant manufacturing company in Gateshead employs 12 of the modern apprentices, all working towards NVQs at level 3. The remaining nine trainees work in a range of general engineering companies towards NVQs at level 2 in engineering foundation. There are 50 trainees undertaking NVQs in motor vehicle, at both level 2 (body-fitting or vehicle mechanics) and level 3 (body repair, vehicle-finishing, vehicle mechanics & electrical systems). For those motor-vehicle candidates not employed, work experience is arranged with a good range of local employers. All off-the-job training and assessment for this sector is subcontracted to a local college of further education, which trainees attend for one day a week during college term time. There are two members of GMBCT staff co-ordinating the training programmes in this sector: one for engineering and one for motor vehicle work. Achievement rates for the last year show that there are 84 NVQs per 100 leavers, an improvement on the previous two years. However, most of those who achieve NVQs gain both level 2 and 3 awards. The strengths and weaknesses identified by inspectors do not closely match those in the self-assessment report. Inspectors agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high-quality off-the-job training
- ◆ well-qualified and experienced staff
- ◆ enthusiastic trainees
- ◆ good range of learning resources at college

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some poorly planned on-the-job training
- ◆ low awareness of NVQs among motor-vehicle work-based supervisors
- ◆ insufficient work-based assessment for motor-vehicle NVQs
- ◆ high drop-out rate on motor-vehicle programmes

9. Training at the college is well organised, carefully planned and delivered competently. There are good facilities and resources, and training is provided by enthusiastic, well-qualified and experienced tutors. The college has developed assignment- and project-based learning methods which work well for trainees. There is effective teamwork among GMBCT's staff, college tutors and workplace supervisors. The engineering modern apprenticeships programme is well established, and one local company, employing 12 apprentices, has qualified NVQ assessors.

GOOD PRACTICE

The vehicle-refinishing, vehicle-repair and fitting programmes are at NVQ level 3. Trainees following these programmes are frequently discouraged, having to wait for three years before gaining a qualification, while friends receive awards annually. The college has set up a system of unit accreditation to motivate and encourage trainees and to celebrate achievement of interim goals.

Assessment is carried out in the workplace, and there is good integration of workplace tasks with the content of the learning programme.

10. In motor-vehicle training, there is little co-ordination between college work and workplace tasks. While GMBCT's staff attempt to create links between the two, trainees are covering topics at college and frequently have to wait weeks or months before they have the opportunity to apply their learning at work. Workplace supervisors have little knowledge of the NVQ programme and do not structure workplace learning. On occasions, trainees plan their own workplace learning, by asking to work on certain jobs. Assessment for the motor-vehicle programme is carried out at college, using a combination of workplace evidence, witness testimony from supervisors and assessments which have taken place in the college workshop. Insufficient evidence of trainees' competence in the workplace is used for assessment purposes. There is a high drop-out rate from the motor-vehicle programme, and in 1997-98, over half the trainees failed to complete it.

Business administration

Grade 3

11. There are 115 trainees in this sector, of whom 72 are modern apprentices. There are also 24 adults and 19 young people on work-based training programmes. Eighty trainees are undertaking NVQs in administration, 33 in information technology and two in accounts. Training takes place at both centres in Gateshead. Modern apprentices and trainees on the work-based training for young people programme attend one day's training and assessment at the centre each week, spending the remaining time at work or on work placement. Most adults attend the training centre mainly full time, until they get a job or complete their award. There are 10 trainers for this sector: six at the Dryden centre and four at Birtley. All are appropriately qualified and experienced. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements recorded in the self-assessment report and with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective delivery of in-house training sessions
- ◆ well-motivated trainees
- ◆ good range of information technology resources
- ◆ high NVQ achievement rates by young trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of flexibility in assessment methods
- ◆ underdeveloped key skills provision
- ◆ some recording of assessment

12. There are effective working relationships among GMBCT's staff and trainees. Instruction sessions are well planned and competently managed. Trainees' interest is

maintained through good use of questioning and by being fully involved in practical activities during training sessions. There is a good range of computers and software, providing access to industry-standard resources in training centres. During learning sessions on keyboard and information technology skills, trainees work on text which covers the GMBCT's procedures and other relevant information. This gives details of such matters as the appeals procedure, computer-misuse act, and health and safety. Good use is made of opportunities to strengthen the trainees' understanding of this important information. Achievement rates for young people are good, with most programme leavers achieving two NVQ awards.

13. Arrangements for evidence-gathering are not flexible enough to meet individuals' needs. Assessors visit youth trainees in their workplace every eight weeks. Trainees are observed only twice for assessment purposes. On each occasion, trainees are assessed for a large proportion of their NVQ. Similarly, trainees are given prescriptive guidelines on what to present as evidence for each part of the award and are not encouraged to take an individual approach. Key skills delivery and assessment are currently being developed, and the GMBCT is involved in a local TEC initiative to develop supporting materials for key skills. However, some staff are not clear about how to use the key skills material currently available in the sector. They are uncertain whether the materials should be used to assist trainees' development in key skills or to assess trainees' key skills performance. Throughout the sector, there is significant variation in systems for recording assessment and some systems are less effective than others. Some assessment records are incomplete and undated and there is a lack of rigour in the checking of the authenticity of evidence presented by trainees.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 2

14. GMBCT has an annually reviewed, comprehensive equal opportunities policy, which applies to the whole of the local authority. It was last reviewed in December 1998. The proportion of those from minority ethnic groups in the general local population is less than one per cent. There are few trainees from ethnic minority groups. GMBCT is committed to providing training for those with disabilities. One of the training centres is specially equipped to meet this type of need. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed by the company in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good provision for those with disabilities
- ◆ high level of staff commitment to equality of opportunity
- ◆ monitoring of trainee and staff recruitment procedures in relation to equality of opportunity

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to measure the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy

15. The equal opportunities policy is comprehensive and updated regularly to reflect new legislation and other developments. The process for updating the policy and staff guidelines on implementing the policy is included in the quality assurance procedures. One of the training centres caters particularly well for those with disabilities. Approximately 80 per cent of trainees at this site have a disability of some kind. Physical access and facilities are good. Specialist equipment, such as seating and armrests, is available for those with back and upper-limb disorders. There is good provision for those with visual impairments, including a Kurtswell text reader, a large-font screen and software designed to help visually impaired people to learn keyboard skills. There is also specially developed learning material to help people with dyslexia and other literacy difficulties. One member of staff has extensive experience in supporting learners with special training needs and included them in his degree studies. The second training centre also has basic facilities for those with disabilities. All staff have an open and supportive attitude to equal opportunities and fully subscribe to the formal policy. Trainees all receive a copy of the policy at induction. Steps are being taken to ensure that training materials promote equality of opportunity. For example, staff check that names and genders in exercises, hand-outs and case studies represent all sections of the community and that gender stereotypes are challenged. Where applicants are not accepted on a programme, the reasons for non-acceptance are scrutinised to ensure that they are objective and that no discrimination has taken place. The training provider does little direct recruitment, receiving most trainees through the council's recruitment, by referral from employment and careers services or by personal referral. It does, however, periodically remind referral agencies of the need to challenge gender stereotypes and highlights its policy of countering discrimination, wherever necessary.

16. GMBCT collects data about gender, ethnicity and disability. There is, however, no formal evaluation of the equal opportunities policy. The success of the policy is not measured and there are no action plans for the further improvement of GMBCT's promotion of equal opportunities. GMBCT highlights this weakness in its self-assessment report, and is currently considering how best it can be remedied.

Trainee support

Grade 2

17. Trainees are largely recruited through local employment and careers services, with a high proportion entering local authority employment before referral for training. All receive a standard induction programme, the content of which is reinforced through the issue of an induction manual. Support for trainees is good and includes development of their job-search and employment skills. There are staff, with have qualifications in counselling skills, readily available to provide help for individual trainees. Trainees' basic skills are initially assessed. Where necessary,

trainees receive help with their basic skills. Inspectors broadly agree with the strengths and weaknesses highlighted in the self-assessment report. They found additional strengths and awarded a higher grade than that proposed by GMBCT in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good selection and recruitment processes
- ◆ effective approaches to help trainees to develop confidence
- ◆ high degree of flexibility in working practices to accommodate individuals' needs
- ◆ good careers guidance and employment information
- ◆ comprehensive induction programmes

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient accreditation of trainees' prior learning
- ◆ no systematic initial assessment of occupational and key skills

18. GMBCT has a range of recruitment and selection processes which aim to ensure that trainees are carefully matched to training programmes, in terms of attitude, aptitude and ability. Most sectors have high retention rates. Trainees are well supported, and staff are successful in helping trainees to develop confidence. There is a high degree of flexibility in working practices to ensure that trainees' individual needs are met. Examples include a willingness to move trainees from one placement to another and the provision of intensive coaching and support to individuals who have failed examinations or are under threat of redundancy. GMBCT is successful in helping candidates to get jobs and further their careers. Trainees are given regular updates on job vacancies at both training centres. There is a comprehensive induction programme at the training centres for all new GMBCT trainees. A further induction is provided by colleges and employers.

19. In each sector, there is some assessment of occupational skills at the beginning of the training programme. However, this is not done systematically and in some cases, it is not rigorous. Similarly, key skills are not initially assessed in a structured way. Opportunities for accreditation of prior learning are available to trainees, and reference is made to this during induction. In practice, however, little accreditation of prior learning takes place and it is not specifically promoted.

Management of training

Grade 3

20. GMBCT is in the process of reorganising its business. Before April 1998, the council managed three individual TEC contracts through three separate training organisations. Each organisation had its own management, operating procedures, documents and awarding bodies. In April 1998, the three organisations merged to

manage a single TEC contract. During the last nine months, progress has been made in amalgamating the three organisations, but further work remains to be done. There are 21 staff, headed by a principal officer, training for employment. The new organisational structure and staff responsibilities are not yet determined. There is no formal staff appraisal system. All staff receive interviews, however, during which their performance is discussed and they are set targets for their professional development. Some of the strengths identified by the company related more closely to quality assurance than management of training. Inspectors agreed with the remaining judgements, found additional strengths and weaknesses and agreed with the grade awarded by GMBCT in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ robust staffing policies
- ◆ excellent links with local employers and other agencies
- ◆ effective staff development policy

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unclear rôles and responsibilities
- ◆ insufficient formal management of training provided by colleges

21. There is a good range of sound procedures for staff selection and recruitment, training, grievances and disciplinary matters which are produced by the Council. These are fully understood by all staff and well implemented. GMBCT has a high reputation and effective working relationships with local employers. The GMBCT employs monitoring officers who carry out the liaison rôle effectively to ensure that such relationships are developed and maintained. While there is no formal staff appraisal system, staff have access to the council's in-house staff development training programme and externally offered courses. All staff are appropriately qualified and undergo regular training to develop and update their skills. In addition to their occupational qualifications and mandatory assessor awards, staff hold training and teaching qualifications.

22. The current job rôles of managers are unclear, and some staff are carrying out rôles which are broader in scope than those listed in their job description. Staff are not entirely clear about line management arrangements and where responsibility for some key tasks lies. The amalgamation of the three centres is progressing, but is not yet complete. Formal arrangements for managing college provision are weak. GMBCT does not issue a written contract to the colleges containing performance targets. Although GMBCT maintains regular contact with the colleges, it does not carry out sufficient monitoring of college provision.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

23. GMBCT has well-documented quality assurance arrangements. Gateshead ITEC, which is now part of GMBCT, achieved external ISO 9001 accreditation for its quality system in 1994. Since its amalgamation with GMBCT in April 1998, the scope of the system has been extended to the whole of the new organisation. The quality assurance manual, containing work instructions, has recently been rewritten. GMBCT is regularly audited by the TEC and has drawn up action plans to address issues identified. The GMBCT produces monthly and weekly performance statistics. A system for obtaining feedback from trainees and employers through questionnaires has recently been introduced. The feedback has not yet been analysed to determine plans for action. The self-assessment report identified one weakness and one strength. Inspectors found additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-documented quality assurance procedures
- ◆ effective self-assessment process
- ◆ good use of trainees' feedback

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ failure to implement quality assurance procedures throughout the organisation
- ◆ no quality assurance of workplace training and subcontracted provision

24. The new quality assurance procedures are clearly written and they are being implemented throughout the organisation. There are regular, continual briefing sessions for each occupational sector to discuss, and feed back on, the effectiveness of the procedures. The self-assessment process is rigorous, and inspectors agreed with the grades for all three occupational sectors and three of the generic aspects. The fourth generic aspect was awarded a higher grade than that given by GMBCT. The self-assessment process is consultative, involving staff, employers and trainees. An action plan resulting from the process is being implemented. GMBCT holds regular programme review meetings, involving GMBCT and college staff, a TEC and careers service representative, trainees and employers. Feedback from trainees is valued highly and taken into account in the planning of improvements.

25. The new quality assurance policy and procedures are not yet fully understood or followed by all staff. There are still clear differences in practice among the staff from the three original training companies which now comprise GMBCT. There is a new internal verification and assessment procedure but this is not always followed; as a result, action required by an awarding body has not been taken promptly. There are some serious gaps in the quality assurance coverage. For example, there are



comprehensive procedures for the quality assurance of activities in training centres but no quality assurance arrangements for training in the workplace. Similarly, quality assurance arrangements do not extend to the subcontracted college provision, and there is no process whereby this part of the programme is formally evaluated.