



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT AUGUST 2000

Durham County Council

SUMMARY

Durham County Council offers satisfactory training in construction, with good opportunities for trainees to gain experience in a range of disciplines. Although some training lacks planning, achievement rates are good. Business administration is satisfactory with trainees placed in good council placements. There are also training opportunities for police cadets and in architectural and civil engineering. Retention rates are high in business administration and there is good off-the-job training for key skills. Durham County Council has a sound approach to equal opportunities with good policies and processes although there is poor monitoring of equal opportunities in some areas. Trainee support is well structured and additional support is often provided by the placement staff. There is good progression into employment and trainees' successes are celebrated regularly. Management of training is less than satisfactory. Measurable targets are not established and some of the training processes are not linked together. Arrangements for sharing good practice are inadequate. Quality assurance is unsatisfactory with weaknesses in the internal verification process and in the monitoring and evaluation of training.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Construction	3
Business administration	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	2
Management of training	4
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high retention rates in business administration
- ◆ good on-the-job training opportunities in construction
- ◆ good range of detailed policies on equal opportunities issues
- ◆ thorough initial assessment
- ◆ good progression into employment

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ slow progress towards achievement of NVQs
- ◆ missed opportunities for assessment in construction
- ◆ inadequate trainee progress reviews
- ◆ lack of rigour in internal verification activities
- ◆ inadequate evaluation of training
- ◆ little integration of training processes

INTRODUCTION

1. Durham County Council (DCC) is a major employer, with a staff of 16,000 people and an overall budget of more than £500 million. The County Council has been providing training opportunities for young people for the past 11 years. The contract with the County Durham Training and Enterprise Council (County Durham TEC) is managed by the Training and Recruitment team which is part of the Personnel and Consumer Services Division within the Corporate and Legal Services Department.

2. The contract with the County Durham TEC is to provide modern apprenticeships and other work-based training programmes for young people. There is training for business administration, accounting technicians, police cadets, motor vehicle engineering, and construction. All trainees have a work placement or are employed in DCC departments. These include the fire and rescue service and the Durham constabulary. DCC is an approved assessment centre and two colleges of further education provide most of the off-the-job training. The corporate and legal services department has gained the Investors in People award. Three full-time staff are responsible for the training. There are 78 trainees in total (construction has 17, business administration has 58, and motor vehicle has three). Forty-four are modern apprentices and 34 are on other work-based training programmes.

3. County Durham has a population of almost 500,000 with 0.06 per cent of minority ethnic origin. Eighteen per cent of the total working population are between the ages of 16 and 24 with the number of women approximately equal to the number of men. In 1998 the unemployment rate in County Durham was 6.5 per cent and is now 6.9 per cent compared with the national average of 6.0 per cent. Employment in manufacturing and public services accounts for around 84,000 jobs or just fewer than 60 per cent. In 1998 the percentage of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 38 per cent compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. DCC had a number of staffing restructures in recent years. The self-assessment process is in its third year and the most recent report is detailed and provides a clear picture of the current programmes and local economic conditions. The report is generally accurate with several of the grades given by DCC matching those awarded by the inspectors. In some cases strengths and weaknesses were wrongly placed but were accurate on the whole. An action plan with target dates was produced but many of these were found to be unrealistic at the time of inspection and little progress had been made in some areas.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 15 days at DCC in August/September 2000. Inspectors visited 12 employers and 17 work placements, spoke to 28 of the 78 trainees and 12 work placement supervisors and had discussions with DCC staff. They examined trainees' files and portfolios, audit reports from TEC and awarding bodies, records of meetings, personnel documents, and policies and procedures. The number of trainees in the motor vehicle sector is low and this was not specifically inspected. No instructional sessions were observed.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

6. There are 17 construction trainees on work-based training for young people. The training programmes include highway maintenance, civil engineering and architectural technician training. They are originally recruited as non-employed trainees, but towards the later stages of their training they are encouraged to apply for full-time employment in the authority when vacancies are available. Fourteen trainees are on a training programme in highway maintenance. All are working towards NVQs at level 2. Trainees are placed in gangs working across the county for their on-the-job training. Off-the-job training and NVQ assessment takes place at the council's 'Direct Services' department depot in Durham. Staff are occupationally competent and hold the required assessment and verification awards. Of 11 trainees who started their two-year training programme in 1998, five completed their training plan, five left early and one trainee completed the training period but did not achieve the NVQ. All six who completed the training achieved employment with DCC. Five trainees started training in 1999 and nine (one of whom is a transfer from the civil engineering programme) in 2000. All these are still in training.

7. There are three trainees on a construction technician programme. One trainee is working towards a national certificate in civil engineering and two towards a national certificate in building studies. Two local colleges of further education provide off-the-job training and assessment. On-the-job training is provided through placements within the architects and civil engineers departments of DCC.

Four civil engineers started training in 1997 and four in 1998. All completed their training plans and three from each year achieved employment with DCC. Two civil engineering trainees started training in 1999. One is still training and the other has transferred to the highways maintenance training programme. One architectural technician started training in 1998 and one in 1999. Both are still in training. The self-assessment report identified three strengths, and two weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with one of the strengths and found that the others either supported other strengths identified during the inspection, or represented normal practice. The weaknesses were validated. Further strengths and weaknesses were identified and inspectors awarded a grade lower than the self-assessment grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good on-the-job training opportunities
- ◆ good achievement rates for some programmes
- ◆ wide range of additional qualifications and training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little planning of on-the-job training for highways maintenance
- ◆ lack of knowledge of NVQs by trainees and work supervisors in highway maintenance
- ◆ missed assessment opportunities in highway maintenance

8. On-the-job training placements provide good training opportunities, and give the trainees experience in a broad range of activities. Highways maintenance trainees work with experienced supervisors and gangs who are good occupational role models. Trainees are given individual on-the-job training for activities as they occur and are encouraged to transfer skills and knowledge to new situations. The technician trainees (in architectural and civil engineering) receive individual training and guidance from their workplace supervisors and follow a schedule so that they experience a good range of activities in the departments. As they gain competence, they are given increasing responsibility and encouragement to work under their own initiative.

9. Achievement of training qualifications on the technician training programmes has been high over recent years. Of nine starters since 1997 who should have completed their training, eight have successfully completed all their training and one is still in training. Seven of these nine are now in full-time employment with DCC and one has entered full-time education.

10. Trainees have good opportunities for additional training and in some cases this results in additional qualifications. The Direct Services department has adapted an area of their premises for training in street lighting. Highway maintenance trainees have the opportunity for additional training in this area and

also in estate maintenance. Technician trainees benefit from the regular 'Continuing Professional Development' training sessions organised within their departments. These sessions have demonstrations and presentations from professional industry bodies and various specialists and include training in health and safety and IT. Trainees in the architect's department complete work-based assignments which are used as evidence for their NVQs.

11. On-the-job work activities of the highway maintenance trainees are not planned. Their training and experience is dictated by the activities being done by the gang they work with. This contributes to some slow progress through the programme. Workplace supervisors are not aware of the contents or targets in the trainees' individual training plans or of the overall training programme objectives. As a result workplace trainers do not co-ordinate, influence or target the on-the-job training.

12. Trainees and workplace supervisors lack knowledge of the structure and content of the NVQs and are unable to reference training and on-site work to the NVQ. All the training plans identify the achievement date of all NVQ units as the last day of training, with no interim target dates or milestones. Trainees are not aware of their progress towards achievement of units or elements and know if they have succeeded only when they complete their programmes.

13. Many activities carried out by highways maintenance trainees on site could be used as assessment evidence for the NVQ or as direct observation of performance. The lack of a clear system for recording and witnessing work prevents this. Trainees do not keep a personal portfolio, log book or record of the work they do on site. These missed opportunities for assessment delay achievement of NVQ units and slow trainees' progress. Feedback from site supervisors to assessors about trainees' performance on site is rarely recorded.

Business administration

Grade 3

14. DCC offers modern apprenticeships and other work-based training for young people in business administration. There are a total of 58 trainees. Thirty-nine trainees are on a modern apprenticeship programme and work towards NVQs in administration at level 3. In addition four trainees are working towards NVQs in the Association of Accountancy Technicians at level 3. Fifteen trainees are on other training programmes. Ten of these are working towards NVQs in administration at level 3 and five towards NVQs in Association of Accountancy Technicians at level 2. Trainees transfer to modern apprenticeships when they are employed. All trainees are offered the chance to apply for temporary employment within the County Council at any stage during their training and have the opportunity to transfer to full employment when vacancies arise. Trainees might be placed in the treasurer's department, social services, education or in police stations.

15. Training is a combination of on- and off-the-job training. Work-based assessors provide on-the-job training for most trainees. In their first year of training, trainees working towards NVQs in administration attend off-the-job

training at a local college of further education on day release for 23 weeks and spend half a day each week in the County Hall training department. The local college gives the training for information technology and application of number, key skills and local government and DCC's training department provides training for the remaining key skills. Accountancy technician trainees attend off-the-job training one day a week throughout their training. Out of a total of 79 trainees who started training over the last three years, 27 per cent have achieved NVQs at level 3, 12 left without achieving any qualifications, 62 per cent of trainees have been on a programme for over two years and have not yet completed their NVQ. Eighty-two per cent of all the trainees who started their programme are still in training. The self-assessment report identified five strengths and two weaknesses. Many of the strengths and weaknesses were concerned with generic aspects. The inspectors identified further strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high retention rates
- ◆ good opportunities in the workplace to generate NVQ evidence
- ◆ effective off-the-job training for key skills
- ◆ well-organised and presented portfolios of evidence

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective assessment planning
- ◆ most trainees and workplace supervisors unaware of NVQ progress
- ◆ slow progress towards achievement of NVQs

16. DCC aims to recruit trainees to meet their future employment needs and most trainees gain either temporary or full-time employment in their first year of training. Retention rates on all programmes are high with an average of 85 per cent. Trainees have a good understanding of their qualifications and training programmes.

17. Most trainees are placed in council departments, which offer many opportunities to generate good evidence for NVQs, but in a few cases there is insufficient breadth of work for trainees to be able to achieve their target qualifications. These trainees are therefore given opportunities to move around departments so that they can gain experience and NVQ evidence. Trainees are allocated work-based assessors who provide good support for the development of their NVQs. The training department assessment team and a local college of further education share training and assessing of key skills. The ratio of assessors to trainees is 1:2. Although all of the 36 assessors are occupationally competent, 21 have not yet achieved their qualifications and are not qualified to assess.

18. Trainees can contact assessors and the training department on a daily basis for NVQ support. Trainees particularly value the off-the-job training given for the achievement of key skills. They are set work-based assignments that help them collect evidence of key skills in the workplace. Trainees are motivated and enthusiastic and often achieve key skills units more rapidly than NVQ units.

19. The standard of portfolio work is good. Portfolios are well presented and organised. Trainees understand the NVQ standards and the relevance of the evidence they are gathering for occupational units. Evidence is well indexed and referenced and is personalised to meet individual trainee needs. Once a unit has been submitted for assessment the assessors carry out a review and set revised targets.

20. Assessment is not always planned and targets, when set, are not always met. Most targets are overdue by two to three months. Trainees' progress is not regularly monitored. The training and assessment for key skills is done independently from the NVQ assessment so that evidence from key skills is not used to accredit competence against the NVQ units. Trainees make arrangements for assessment when they feel they have sufficient evidence to support a claim. Most assessment is portfolio-based and very little direct observation is used.

21. When a unit has been submitted for assessment assessors carry out a review and set revised targets. These are often in conflict with those given in the trainee's individual training plan. Trainees and workplace supervisors are often unaware of the progress being made by the trainee. Individual NVQ units are assessed and verified. Trainees do not work for their next NVQ unit until the last unit has been certificated and returned to the trainee. This, together with the ineffective planning of assessment, results in slow progress for the achievement of the NVQ.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

22. The recruitment and training department uses DCC's equal opportunities policy. This meets TEC contractual requirements. The policy contains reference to discrimination issues, recruitment and selection, grievance and harassment, monitoring of the composition of the workforce, and gives a commitment to positive action on equal opportunities. There is an equal opportunities statement in the trainee handbook. The personnel department holds more details which trainees, as employees of the council, can access if required. There are strict controls to ensure fair recruitment of staff and all staff have job descriptions. There are currently no trainees from minority ethnic groups. There are 29 women and 49 men. The construction trainees are all men. In business administration about half are men. There are currently three trainees with learning difficulties and disabilities. The council's offices, working areas and training locations are all

suitable for trainees with mobility problems. The self-assessment report identified three strengths which were validated. The inspectors found other weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by DCC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good commitment to equal opportunities by the trainer and employers
- ◆ good range of policies covering equal opportunities
- ◆ data used to target disadvantaged groups

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ little focus on equal opportunities during induction
- ◆ lack of monitoring of equal opportunities

23. The organisation's good commitment to equality of opportunity is reflected in recruitment and marketing literature. All advertisements refer to DCC's equal opportunities policy. Photographs used for recruitment at careers job fairs and school presentations show trainees in non-stereotypical roles. During the last three years between 40 and 50 per cent of trainees in business administration have been men. There are currently no women trainees in some traditionally male roles such as motor vehicle mechanics, but women have applied for entry to this programme and have been assessed fairly against the entry requirements. Work placements, and consequently employment opportunities, in the county council departments are selected to match individual trainee capabilities. In some cases work placements provide flexible working hours. Working conditions have been adapted for trainees with mobility problems.

24. The training and recruitment team makes good use of DCC's equal opportunities policy, which is comprehensive and provides detailed information for all employees. The policy refers to current legislation and meets the needs of the County Durham TEC. Trainees working towards NVQs are provided with clear guidance about the NVQ appeals procedures approximately one month after starting their training. DCC has recognised a need to provide trainees with additional policies relating to, for example, disability, gender and racial equality, sexual orientation, ageism, bullying and flexible working. Some of these are now available in an easy-to-read booklet form. Others are in draft form and have been sent out for wider consultation. The remainder are being researched.

25. DCC offers highway maintenance, architectural technician and civil engineering training with good employment opportunities across the county. The organisation has used data to look at the participation rates in the north and the south of the area and realised a deficiency in the south in terms of meeting the employment needs for highway maintenance. Data include sources and numbers of applications, age and qualifications, entry levels and also ethnic origin. As a result of analysing the data DCC has targeted disadvantaged groups in the south of the county through schools, careers services and job centres and has successfully

recruited approximately 50 per cent of the year 2000 intake for highway maintenance programmes in the south of the county.

26. There is little attention paid to equal opportunities issues in the otherwise good induction for trainees to DCC and the programmes. Equal opportunities is merely mentioned. The reference in the trainee handbook is brief and contains no information about current legislation and complaints procedures. Trainees who are employed either part time or full time benefit from DCC conditions of service and employment rights. There is advice and guidance for non-employed trainees. At induction trainees are given a handbook which contains a brief equal opportunities statement. This is the only reference material supplied to non-employed trainees who are not following an NVQ.

27. Equal opportunities issues are not systematically monitored. Although staff and trainee have a mutual respect for each other, many trainees show little understanding of equal opportunities and do not know how to make complaints. DCC rely on staff in council departments to reinforce equal opportunities, but this process is not monitored. The trainees' review process does not include equal opportunities. DCC does not have subcontractor agreements with local colleges of further education and relies on the organisations to monitor their own equal opportunities policies and procedures.

Trainee support

Grade 2

28. Trainees are recruited through newspaper advertisements, liaison with schools and the careers service, and by word of mouth. Applicants are interviewed and given a recognised test to determine their suitability for their chosen programmes. Those who are unsuccessful are advised to contact the careers service and County Durham TEC for further guidance. Trainees who are offered a place attend a two-day induction at DCC, followed by a workplace induction when they begin their work placement. Trainees receive personal support from workplace supervisors and from members of DCC's staff, who have contact with them during off-the-job training sessions and during workplace visits. Trainees' progress is sometimes reviewed during these visits. Trainees receive guidance in seeking employment. The self-assessment report provided brief but appropriate background information and was largely accurate in the strengths and weaknesses identified. One of the strengths claimed was not relevant to trainee support but to the occupational area of business administration. The grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

GOOD PRACTICE

Trainees are eligible for a range of benefits enjoyed by council employees. These include access to a 24-hour personal counselling service and an occupational health service. Those who are based at County Hall can use the council's on-site banking and hairdressing facilities and receive discounted rates at the local sports centre.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear and detailed information for trainees and parents
- ◆ comprehensive initial assessment
- ◆ good additional support for trainees
- ◆ trainees' success celebrated
- ◆ good progression into employment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate progress reviews
- ◆ unsystematic recording of trainee support

29. DCC provides clear and detailed information for trainees and their parents on all aspects of training. Before they apply, candidates are given written guidelines on the qualifications, aptitudes and personal attributes required for each occupational area. Potential applicants and their parents are invited to a presentation evening during which they are given information about the county council, the recruitment process, NVQ programmes, expected standards of dress and behaviour for trainees, and conditions of service. Trainees at all stages of their programme have a good recollection and value this event. Successful trainees attend a two-day induction at County Hall, during which issues such as NVQ awareness, health and safety and trade union membership are covered. Once they have been allocated a work placement they attend a further induction. They are issued with a trainee handbook containing information about their particular occupational area, complaints, appeals and disciplinary procedures. They also receive a copy of DCC's employees' handbook.

30. All trainees are initially assessed at the beginning of their programmes, using a comprehensive pack provided by the TEC. This comprises the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) test, a detailed key skills assessment checklist, and a range of questionnaires designed both to establish trainees' occupational experience and to allow them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. The results make up an initial assessment summary which is discussed with each trainee individually. Those who need support with literacy or numeracy are offered additional one-to-one training or, if necessary, referred to a local college for specialist help.

31. Trainees with particular needs are given appropriate support. For example, DCC funds a taxi to transport a trainee with mobility problems to and from his placement each day. His workstation and telephone equipment have been adapted to meet his needs. A trainee with dyslexia has been referred to a local agency for specialist help. DCC also broadens its support for trainees by involving other organisations. For example, the careers service gives guidance on job-seeking techniques and an expert from the Community Health Council gives sessions on sexual health and drugs awareness. Trainees find these enjoyable and beneficial. In addition, DCC runs 'drop-in' workshops one afternoon each week. These are open to any trainee who needs help with portfolio-building or key skills.

32. A presentation evening is held for leavers once a year. Trainees who have completed their qualifications are given their certificates and a special award is made for the 'Trainee of the Year'. The presentation has a high profile in the locality and receives considerable press coverage. This celebration of their success motivates trainees and gives them pride in their qualifications. Trainees' achievements are also featured in the council's internal newsletter and in relevant professional publications, such as the journal published by the local police force.

33. DCC's trainees are initially offered a work placement in one of the council's departments. Once in placement they are eligible to apply for temporary and, subsequently, permanent employment within the council. There is good progression to employment for many trainees. Of the trainees starting their programme in 1997, 66 per cent have obtained permanent employment, with a further 9 per cent on fixed-term contracts as police cadets. Of the 1998 intake, 24 per cent have gained permanent jobs, and 51 per cent have been in a temporary post for longer than a year. A further 17 per cent of this group have been on temporary contracts for less than 12 months. Thirty-one per cent of trainees who began their programmes in 1999 have obtained temporary employment, and a further 5 per cent are employed full-time.

34. DCC's TEC contract requires the organisation to review trainees' progress every 13 weeks. Reviews for some trainees are delayed and in some cases there is a gap of five or six months between progress reviews. When progress is reviewed there is a discussion between a member of DCC's staff, the trainee and the workplace supervisor. The information recorded from these reviews lacks detail. Short-term targets are sometimes set but they are often vague and insufficiently related to NVQ progress to be of value. Trainees are invited to make written comments on the review, but these often involve no more than a repetition of the comments written by the reviewer.

35. Trainees' individual training plans are drawn up at the beginning of their programmes by DCC training team staff. Some of the information on the plan, such as a list of the NVQ units to be achieved, is pre-printed and inserted before the trainee sees it. The plan is not negotiated with the trainee, who simply checks it. Trainees do not receive copies of their individual training plans although they do have access to them during progress reviews. Until recently trainees were given the same long-term target date for achievement of each NVQ unit, usually the same as the notional completion date for their qualification. The results of initial assessment are not used to set target dates. Recording of additional information such as trainee support needs is often sketchy. Individual training plans for business administration trainees are updated during progress reviews but trainees do not take part in this process and are unaware of it. Some training plans have not been signed or dated by trainees. Copies of trainees' progress reviews should be kept in trainees' administrative files but some are missing. Individual training plans and the information in trainees' files do not always accurately record the trainee's background, needs and progress towards a qualification.

Management of training

Grade 4

36. DCC has a clear management structure. The training and recruitment team, which is part of the personnel consumer services division, is responsible for the management of training. This division has recently merged with the corporate and legal services department. The training and recruitment team consists of three staff, with administrative support, and council department staff who act as work-

based assessors and internal verifiers in addition to their main job roles. The council uses two subcontractors to give training for part or whole qualifications. The corporate and legal services department holds the Investor in People Award (IIP). There is a staff induction programme supported by policy and procedure handbooks. There is an annual staff appraisal in line with council requirements. Inspectors agreed with one strength relating to appraisal and a weakness relating to departments. The inspectors identified one other strength. The self-assessment report failed to identify other weaknesses. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive appraisal system
- ◆ good staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of implementation of subcontractor agreements
- ◆ data not used to set measurable performance targets
- ◆ little integration of training processes
- ◆ inadequate sharing of good practice

37. A comprehensive annual appraisal system effectively reviews performance within job roles and identifies individual development needs. Specific and detailed guidelines are issued to ensure consistency of approach. All members of staff have job descriptions, but some have not been updated since 1997 and do not accurately reflect the current role. Work-based assessors are not included in this process.

38. Written procedures for staff development are linked to job roles. All work-based assessors have achieved or are working towards relevant assessor qualifications. Staff within the training department are working towards or have achieved other qualifications, such as teaching certificates or counselling and key skills practitioner's awards. Recruitment practices reflect good practice in equality of opportunity. All permanent vacancies are advertised externally and all internal applicants compete equally with external candidates. A key member of the training team has recently been made responsible for equal opportunities.

39. There are no written arrangements between DCC and external subcontractors for the management of training, assessment and quality assurance. DCC has not monitored the quality of the training provided by its subcontractors, but it does have copies of internal and external assessment reports. The training team has acknowledged this weakness and, at the time of inspection, a model subcontractor agreement had been approved but had not been implemented.

40. DCC does not routinely use data for business planning or for setting targets for key performance indicators such as achievements, improvements and retention.

There is no business plan with measurable targets specific to training. Staff members are not set specific targets to measure achievement. They are not all fully aware of contract requirements. There are no clear targets for trainee assessments. No comparisons are made between the performance of individual assessors. DCC does not adequately collect management information such as current lists of assessors and internal verifiers. There is no regular analysis of achievement data except for contractual and financial purposes.

41. There is no procedure to link training on the job, work-based assessment, training and assessment at college and the training team's assessment of key skills. Integration of the whole process is not systematically planned or structured. Information given to trainees and their workplace supervisors about their duties when they start training is not used to co-ordinate training for NVQs. DCC has increased achievement of key skills units by using a subcontractor and their own assessment team but the assessment of single key skills units results in a lack of integration of key skills and the NVQ.

42. Throughout the different departments there is much good practice, but it is not systematically shared. There is good communication within the training team but poor communication between the different departments that provide assessment and on the job training. Some work-based assessors are interested in key skills, but do not know the requirements for NVQs. One work-based assessor drives assessment forward and gathers evidence for the NVQ by having additional monthly appraisals with trainees. This practice is not, however, shared with other members of staff.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

43. The training and recruitment team has systems and procedures which cover key training activities. These meet the requirements of awarding bodies and the local TEC. Procedures for internal verification and assessment are separate from the quality assurance manual. The training manager is responsible for reviewing the quality assurance system. The training team is responsible for the quality of assessment and internal verification. The department has been involved in self-assessment since 1998 and has produced several action plans to improve training. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses and identified additional ones. The report failed to identify a strength related to quality assurance procedures and the weakness on internal verification and evaluation. Inspectors awarded a grade lower than the grade given by DCC.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive quality assurance processes and procedures
- ◆ thorough critical evaluation prior to self-assessment

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ some aspects of internal verification lack rigour
- ◆ inadequate evaluation of training
- ◆ unrealistic self-assessment action plan

44. There is a detailed quality assurance manual with procedures and policies for the key training processes. Lines of responsibility are clear. The manual covers management responsibilities, contract compliance, staff selection and development, subcontractors, and marketing training. The section on training identifies the processes of interviewing, initial assessment, action planning and reviewing, induction contents and continuous assessment. There are comprehensive policies for health and safety and equality of opportunity. The sections give guidance to staff on how to conduct an effective review and take follow-up action. There are frequent, detailed and rigorous health and safety audits in departments and for the subcontractors.

45. The training team asks trainees to evaluate training anonymously and to grade the overall effectiveness. The evaluation includes trainee support and health and safety. The results are fed back to the training staff. Major issues are identified but the evaluations are not analysed in detail for quality trends and are not used for all occupational areas. The evaluation process is not extended to others using DCC training services. Detailed and critical self-analysis of strengths and weaknesses for the most recent self-assessment report resulted from a series of 'away days' attended by the training team of three. They also compiled numerous action plans to build on strengths and tackle weaknesses. Using this approach they identified correctly many of the weaknesses of DCC's training.

46. Procedures for assessment and internal verification have been given to all relevant staff but some aspects, such as feedback of verification and the quality of recording of internal verification, are not applied consistently. Internal verification does not include observing assessments. There are no regular meetings between assessors and internal verifiers to standardise assessment. The internal verification system fails to identify inadequacies in assessment practice and this has been highlighted by external verifiers. Some new assessors are not supported to achieve their assessor's award and achievement takes longer than the 18-month target. The training team has a good manual and computerised system to keep track of trainees' achievement of NVQ units, but this is not shared with work-based assessors.

47. DCC does not monitor training for consistency and compliance with its quality assurance systems. It is tackling problems with an external subcontractor and attempting to rectify problems with subcontractors as they arise by holding regular meetings with course tutors. There is some feedback but it is not sufficiently rigorous.

48. The recent self-assessment report and action plans are reasonably accurate overall, but many strengths and weaknesses in occupational areas were placed in



generic areas. Some action has been taken and improvements can be seen, but the action plans are not reviewed regularly and unrealistic target dates have been set. Many actions are still outstanding. The report particularly failed to identify weaknesses in the management of training.