

TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT
AUGUST 2000

ADULT LEARNING INSPECTORATE REINSPECTION
JANUARY 2002

Durham County 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
- ◆ training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

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 Durham County Council was carried out by the Training Standards Council's inspectors. The inspection resulted in less than satisfactory grades being awarded for 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 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).

Durham County Council provides satisfactory training in construction and learners gain experience in a range of disciplines. Achievement rates are high on construction programmes. Some training is not planned sufficiently, however. Training in business administration is satisfactory and learners have good council work placements. The council also provides training in accountancy, motor vehicle, catering, heating and ventilation, and construction. On business administration programmes retention rates are high. Learners receive good off-the-job training in key skills. Durham County Council has some good policies and procedures for the promotion of equal opportunities but there is poor monitoring of their implementation in some areas. Trainee support is good and additional support is often provided by the work-placement staff. Many learners obtain employment and their successes are celebrated regularly. At the time of the reinspection, management of training was still less than satisfactory. Subcontractors and departments are not clear about their responsibilities and learners receive insufficient work-based assessment. Arrangements for sharing information and good practice are inadequate. Quality assurance is also still unsatisfactory. There are 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

REINSPECTION	GRADE
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 learner progress reviews
- ◆ poor internal and external communications
- ◆ poor management of training and assessment
- ◆ inadequate internal verification procedures
- ◆ inadequate quality assurance arrangements

INTRODUCTION

1. Durham County Council (DCC) employs around 16,000 people and has provided training for young people for the past 12 years. At the time of the original inspection, DCC contracted with County Durham Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) to provide modern apprenticeships and other work-based learning programmes for young people. DCC now contracts with County Durham Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to offer this training. The contract with County Durham LSC is managed by the training and recruitment team, which is part of personnel services within the corporate and legal services department.

2. DCC provides training for business administration, accountancy, motor vehicle, catering, heating and ventilation, and construction. All learners have a work placement or are employed in DCC departments. DCC is an approved assessment centre for training in administration and key skills. Two colleges of further education provide most of the off-the-job training. All DCC's departments hold the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. A principal personnel services officer manages the three full-time and one part-time staff responsible for the training. At the time of the original inspection, there were 78 learners. Of these, 58 were receiving training in business administration, 17 in construction and three in motor vehicle studies. Forty-four were modern apprentices and 34 were on other work-based learning programmes. At the time of the reinspection, there were 73 learners. Of these, 48 were receiving training in business administration, 23 in construction, one in motor vehicle studies and one in hospitality. Forty-three learners were modern apprentices and 30 were on work-based learning programmes.

3. County Durham has a population of just over 500,000. The 1991 census shows that 0.6 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups. At the original inspection, the unemployment rate in County Durham was 6.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 6 per cent. In September 2001, the unemployment rate had fallen to 4.9 per cent, but was still higher than the national rate of 2.9 per cent. In 1998, the proportion of school leavers in County Durham achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 38 per cent, compared with the national average of 46.3 per cent. In 2001, this proportion had increased to 40.9 per cent, still well below the national average of 50 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The self-assessment process is in its fourth year, and the most recent report is detailed and provides a clear picture of the current programmes and local economic conditions. Inspectors agreed with many of the judgements and several of the grades in the self-assessment report produced for the original inspection. An action plan for rectifying weaknesses identified through self-assessment was produced but many of the target dates for action proved to be unrealistic. A short report, showing how weaknesses identified at the original inspection had been rectified, was produced for the reinspection. DCC produced a new self-assessment report prior to the reinspection. Inspectors found weaknesses in both management of training and quality assurance, which were not identified in the latest self-assessment report. Inspectors awarded lower grades for the reinspected areas than those given in the self-assessment report.

5. The original inspection was carried out by a team of five inspectors, who 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 learners and 12 workplace supervisors, and had discussions with DCC staff. They examined learners' files and portfolios of evidence, audit reports from TEC and awarding bodies, records of meetings, personnel documents, and policies and procedures. The number of learners in the motor vehicle sector was low and this area of learning was not inspected. No instructional sessions were observed.

6. The reinspection was carried out by a team of two inspectors, who spent a total of eight days with DCC in January 2002. Inspectors visited six employers and work placements, spoke to 20 learners and six workplace supervisors, and had 14 discussions with DCC staff. They examined 14 learners' files and portfolios of evidence, 17 individual learning plans, reports from awarding bodies, records of meetings, personnel documents, and policies and procedures. Inspectors observed one learner's progress review and two training sessions. One training session was awarded a grade 2, the other a grade 3.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Construction

Grade 3

7. 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.

8. 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

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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

15. 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.

16. 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

17. 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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. 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

23. 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

24. 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.

25. 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.

26. 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.

27. 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.

28. 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.

GOOD PRACTICE

Learners 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.

Trainee support

Grade 2

29. 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.

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

30. 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.

31. 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.

32. 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.

33. 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.

34. 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.

35. 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.

36. 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

37. The training and recruitment team, which is part of personnel services, is responsible for the management of training. This is part of the corporate and legal services department. The training and recruitment team is led by a new principal personnel services officer. The training team consists of four members of staff, of whom three are full time and one is part time, administrative support staff, and council staff, who in addition to their main jobs, carry out work-based assessment and internal verification. The council uses two local colleges of further education to provide training leading to components of, or whole qualifications. The corporate and legal services department holds the Investor in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. There is a staff induction programme. Staff are given handbooks explaining policies and procedures. There is an annual staff appraisal system in line with council requirements. The team meets weekly and a team member usually meets subcontractors each term.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

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

38. In the past three months, much work has been carried out by DCC to deal with the weaknesses identified at the original inspection, but it has not yet remedied them. Subcontractor agreements have recently been signed by the two subcontractors. Subcontractors' responsibilities, however, are not sufficiently clear in the agreements. One subcontractor, responsible for 90 per cent of DCC's learners, is not carrying out any assessment in the workplace. DCC has recently begun to monitor the quality of the training provided by subcontractors and has copies of internal and external assessment reports. Data are still not being used effectively in target-setting. Staff make insufficient use of data to monitor learners' progress. During their progress reviews, learners now discuss links between their on- and off-the-job training. The management of training and assessment are poor,

however, and there is still insufficient overall co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training and assessment. Insufficient action has been taken to facilitate the sharing of good practice among staff. Internal and external communications are poor. The grade awarded by inspectors was the same as the original inspection grade and lower than the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive staff appraisal system
- ◆ good arrangements for staff development

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor internal and external communications
- ◆ poor management of training and assessment
- ◆ insufficient use of data to monitor learners' progress

39. There is a comprehensive staff appraisal system. During appraisals, the training needs of staff are identified. Staff who carry out appraisals are given training and clear guidelines on the appraisal process. Training is also available for staff who are appraised and this aims to help them gain maximum benefit from their appraisals. A useful booklet is provided to staff to help them prepare for appraisal. Most learners also receive appraisals.

40. Staff development activities relate to the job roles of staff. All work-based assessors have achieved, or are working towards, relevant assessor qualifications. The number of work-based assessors has increased since the original inspection. The training and recruitment team runs a series of training events and support workshops for work-based assessors. Staff in the training team are working towards, or have achieved, other qualifications, such as teaching certificates or counselling and key skills practitioner qualifications. Since the original inspection, they have attended several workshops including those on key skills, self-assessment, progress reviews and equality of opportunity. Recruitment practices reflect good practice in upholding equality of opportunity. A key member of the training team is responsible for the promotion of equal opportunities.

41. Throughout the different departments there is much good practice, but it is not systematically shared among staff. It was not until recently that the findings of the original inspection were shared with senior managers. There has been no systematic sharing of the inspection findings, or resulting action plan with other departments or subcontractors who provide training. There is poor communication between the different departments which provide assessment and on-the-job training. Communication between the training team and learners is not always effective, and learners sometimes have to wait a long time for answers to their queries. Minutes of internal and external meetings are not always recorded and staff are sometimes uncertain of the agreed actions which have to be carried out. A useful booklet has been introduced to help supervisors understand their roles and responsibilities, but it has not yet been distributed. Most supervisors are unaware

of the content of their learners' training programmes.

42. There is insufficient work-based assessment for administration, accountancy, motor vehicle, construction and catering learners. Subcontractors' agreements do not specify that work-based assessment must be carried out. Some learners working towards an NVQ in administration at level 3 have inappropriate work placements where they are unable to develop all the competences they need in order to obtain their qualification. In some instances, learners have to move to another work placement in order to acquire requisite competences. No specific action is taken to ensure the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training and assessment, including key skills assessment. Inadequate arrangements are made for learners during the college holidays. There is insufficient monitoring of the regularity and frequency of learners' progress reviews. More learners now achieve key skills units. Learners do not, however, gather evidence of their acquisition of key skills through their occupational tasks, and the teaching and assessment of key skills are not integral to the training programme.

43. Since the original inspection, a new monitoring system has been introduced to show when administration learners have achieved NVQ and key skills units. The proportions of learners who complete key skills units are compared with averages published by the awarding body. Recently, DCC has begun to compare the achievement rates of learners on administration programmes with those of learners on programmes offered by other providers of comparable size and scope. DCC, however, does not have sufficient data on learners' performance on other programmes to enable it to make similar comparisons in respect of all learners' achievement rates. There is no system for checking that processes such as progress reviews and internal verification have been carried out and are being carried out. DCC does not use data on learners' performance in business planning or for setting targets linked to key performance indicators, such as retention and achievement rates. The business plan has no targets relating to training. Staff are not all fully aware of contractual requirements. There are no clear targets relating to assessment. Many learners are making slow progress.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

44. The training team has quality assurance systems and procedures which cover key training activities. Some of these systems and procedures have been updated since the original inspection. These continue to meet the requirements of awarding bodies and the local LSC. Procedures for internal verification and assessment, are now included in the quality assurance manual. The training manager is responsible for reviewing the quality assurance system. The training team is responsible for the quality assurance of assessment and internal verification. Several DCC departmental teams and both subcontractors carry out assessment and internal verification. The department has been involved in self-assessment since 1998 and has produced several action plans to improve training. Action-planning has continued since the original inspection.

At the original inspection, the main weaknesses identified were:

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

45. Since the original inspection, insufficient progress has been made in remedying identified weaknesses. In the past three months, however, the training team has begun to deal with key weaknesses. All aspects of internal verification remain inadequate. Insufficient action has been taken to ensure that training is evaluated properly.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ careful action-planning to improve training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate quality assurance arrangements
- ◆ insufficient internal verification procedures
- ◆ poor evaluation of training

46. The self-assessment report prepared before the original inspection provided a detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses. The self-assessment report was the product of a series of 'away days' attended by the training team. The training team also compiled numerous action plans to build on strengths and tackle weaknesses. Using this approach they identified many of the weaknesses of DCC's training. The new principal personnel services officer led a thorough and critical evaluation before the most recent self-assessment. The implementation of action plans was reviewed at weekly team meetings. New action plans have been produced. Work has begun to rectify the weaknesses identified during the original inspection. The team now has a comprehensive development plan. Inspectors did not, however, agree with some of the strengths in the revised self-assessment report and they found weaknesses DCC had not identified.

47. Recent work has resulted in some improvements. The assessor file has been reviewed and updated, and contains new information on NVQ background knowledge and guidance on evidence collection. A handbook for supervisors has been produced but has yet to be issued. Meetings were arranged at which supervisors stated what information they needed to know. Monitoring of training provided by one of the subcontractors has started and the new principal personnel services officer has observed an off-the-job training session at one of the colleges.

48. Quality assurance arrangements do not cover training adequately. Until three months ago, the implementation of action plans to improve training was not reviewed regularly. The plans contained some unrealistic target dates for the completion of action. Much action has still to be carried out. In general, the quality assurance of training by internal departments and subcontractors is poor.

Arrangements for the quality assurance of training provided by internal departments and subcontractors is inadequate. Monitoring of the quantity and quality of assessment and the evidence in learners' portfolios is poor.

49. Since the original inspection, the internal verification procedures have been updated but do not give clear guidance on all aspects of the verification process. The recording of internal verification is not consistently thorough and some internal verifiers do not give assessors clear and helpful feedback on their assessment decisions. Internal verification does not include observation of assessors carrying out assessment. There are no regular meetings between assessors and internal verifiers to standardise assessment. The failure of the internal verification system to identify inadequacies in assessment practice has been highlighted by external verifiers. A series of useful workshops on assessment have helped work-based assessors become familiar with their role. However, some of the new assessors who began training up to 26 months ago, have yet to achieve their assessor qualification. The volume of NVQ evidence in administration learners' portfolios is excessively high. One health and safety learner submitted 121 pieces of evidence for assessment. One learner has a full ring binder of evidence for each NVQ unit. The majority of learners' evidence is paper based. Few assessments take place in the workplace. Learners are seldom assessed through observation of their performance in the workplace. Some evidence in learners' portfolios is irrelevant and does not meet the requirements of the NVQ at level 3.

50. Methods for evaluating the quality of training are still poor although they have improved a little since the original inspection. The training team asks learners to make an evaluation of training and grade its overall effectiveness. The evaluation now covers support for learners and health and safety. Additionally, learners' views are now sought on their experience in college and they are fed back to the training staff. Feedback is now sought from workplace supervisors at group meetings, but is usually unrecorded. There is insufficient monitoring of on-the-job training.