



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JANUARY 2000

County Training Gloucestershire

SUMMARY

County Training offers outstanding foundation for work training, with flexible and realistic programmes which help many disadvantaged trainees to progress to full-time employment or national traineeships. Business administration training is satisfactory with good progression into employment and high achievement rates. There are innovative projects for key skills but a lack of long-term target setting. In care, training on the early years care and education programme is good with high-quality work placements and high retention and achievement rates. There are excellent links between the training centre, workplaces and trainees. Equal opportunities is well promoted in all aspects of training and minority ethnic groups are well represented among the trainees. Trainee support is good. After a comprehensive and effective initial assessment, trainees are given systematic and flexible support backed up by mentors. Management of training and quality assurance are satisfactory. There are clear policies, well-developed communication and a rigorous staff development system. The provider has a thorough self-assessment process followed by rigorous action planning. Internal verification processes are poor.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Business administration	3
Health, care & public services	2
Foundation for work	1

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement and progression of trainees
- ◆ mentoring given to all trainees
- ◆ supportive and varied work placements
- ◆ good networks with local community
- ◆ excellent staff development and training
- ◆ ongoing action planning
- ◆ collection of data used to drive strategy

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor internal verification
- ◆ no monitoring of equal opportunities in private work placements
- ◆ rigid NVQ timetable

INTRODUCTION

1. County Training manages and delivers Gloucestershire County Council's scheme for providing work experience and training/development for 16 to 19 year olds, in partnership with Gloucestershire Link Group, the local training and enterprise council (TEC). The other main role of the organisation is to recruit young employees for the County Council. There are 12 full- and part-time staff. County Training, based in a separate building from the council offices, in Gloucester city centre, has 119 trainees in three occupational areas. Forty-three are undertaking national traineeships in business administration and there are 27 trainees in health, care and public services. In both areas, trainees are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2. A foundation for work course has been developed over the last two years, which is designed to support trainees with complex individual needs. Another local provider refers entrants to this course, and currently 49 young people are involved in the programme.

2. County Training is funded through contracts with the Link Group. Other funding comes from the County Council. All the national trainees' work placements are within Gloucestershire County Council's departments and district councils.

3. In January 2000, unemployment in Gloucestershire stands at 2.8 per cent of the population, compared with 3.4 per cent for the Southwest and 5.2 per cent nationally. Gloucester has an unemployment rate of 5 per cent, Cheltenham has a rate of 3.7 per cent and the Forest of Dean, 5.4 per cent. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 56.1 per cent compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Trends over the last three years indicate that 16-18 year olds are increasingly being encouraged to continue their education at school. The number of school leavers choosing to enter employment and training in Gloucestershire fell from 17.9 per cent in 1997 to 13.5 per cent in 1998. The Gloucestershire 1991 census recorded that 1.8 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. All members of staff attended the self-assessment training offered by the TEC and were involved in the self-assessment process. The staff were all provided with copies of *Raising the Standard* and time was spent away from the provider's premises in order to focus on the self-assessment process. Analysed data were used from evaluations carried out with employers, trainees and staff. The results of this information were measured against the quality statements in the Training Standards Council's (TSC) guidelines. A self-assessment report, together with an action plan, was produced in May 1999. Systematic reviewing of the performance indicators led to a further self-assessment taking place. A report was drafted to highlight both strengths and weaknesses. This current self-assessment report was produced in December 1999 alongside an action plan designed to address areas identified as strengths and weaknesses. Some of these areas have also been addressed prior to the identified dates for achievement. Many of the action plan targets had been addressed prior to inspection and new targets had been set to ensure further improvement.

5. Four inspectors spent a total of 12 days with County Training in January 2000. They conducted 26 staff interviews, with workplace supervisors, managers and trainers, and interviewed 39 trainees. They observed instruction in the classroom, visited 19 work placements and reviewed trainees' files, management information and promotional material. Inspectors observed two instructional sessions and graded these as outstanding and good.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Business administration

Grade 3

6. There are currently 43 national trainees undertaking courses in business administration at NVQ level 2. Until September 1998, the provider offered separate NVQs in administration and information technology. From September 1998, a complete national traineeship was offered. The structure includes an NVQ plus key skills and two further units. The key skills training runs concurrently with the NVQ and the two further options include either two units from administration, or from another NVQ, most commonly information technology. Twenty-three trainees started their programme in September 1999, and there are currently 43 on the programme. Most trainees spend four days in the workplace and one day at a training centre. Off-the-job training sessions for the first year consist of a morning session on key skills and related administration theory and the afternoon on information technology key skills. In the second year, trainees use their off-the-job sessions to work on their portfolios. All trainees are placed at county council offices in Gloucestershire. Work placements vary from administrative posts in solicitor's offices, revenue, personnel, planning and information technology. Over half of the trainees in year-two are employed. Achievement rates are high, and retention rates

are around the national average. In 1997, of the 18 trainees who started, 13 achieved an NVQ in administration, while nine out of 10 achieved an NVQ in information technology. In 1998, of 22 trainees starting administration, 21 achieved an NVQ, and of the 10 information technology trainees who started, all achieved an NVQ. For the period 1997-99, on average 90 per cent have achieved a full-time job or have completed the traineeship. In 1996, of the 23 who started, nine (39 per cent) left early, in 1997, 33 per cent left early, and in 1998, of the 32 who started, only five left early (18 per cent). Most of the strengths in the self-assessment report describe no more than normal practice, although inspectors found further strengths. The one weakness identified was validated in part. Inspectors agreed with the grade proposed in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good achievement and progression into full-time employment
- ◆ good inclusion of work-based supervisors, trainers and trainees in action planning
- ◆ innovative and integrated key skills projects
- ◆ effective off-the-job training in information technology

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of long-term target setting
- ◆ no understanding by trainees of NVQ framework
- ◆ off-the-job training in administration lacks creativity

7. None of the trainees are employed when they begin their national traineeship. Forty-five per cent of trainees come to the provider by direct recommendation. Trainees go into a variety of jobs, most of which are in permanent positions within the council, including clerical posts in committee services, payroll, social services, youth and community, environment, exchequer, magistrates and trading standards. Some trainees go on to achieve further qualifications in the legal sector, as legal executives, and in housing. One former trainee is booked to give a series of training sessions to current trainees to start in March 2000. Other trainees have moved to jobs outside the council such as on a garage-front reception, police headquarters and in insurance companies.

8. All work-based supervisors are trained as mentors and attend training sessions which are run by the provider on a six-monthly basis. They are given a training pack with a summary of the NVQ requirements. These are broken down into unit and element level and contain a checklist which is ticked off by the mentor when the trainee achieves the competence. The trainer-assessor can use this checklist to identify gaps in work-based programmes and trainees are moved accordingly. Work-based supervisors are fully involved in trainees' review sessions. Not only are they present at the meetings, they are an integral part of the action planning for the next three months. Some supervisors have developed training plans for their trainees to fit in with the action plans. The supervisors have a good grasp of the qualification and of their trainees' progress. Work placements are of a high quality

and offer a variety of training opportunities. Where there are few opportunities for training, for example in the post room, trainees are rotated on a three-monthly basis. This enables trainees to complete all aspects of their NVQ and provides them with a well-rounded learning experience.

9. All trainees are enthusiastic about the project work they have completed. One project involved setting up a business trip for a manager. The aim was to encourage the use of key skills, but also gave trainees a chance to collect valuable evidence for administration, including looking at timetables, hotel guides, car hire, maps, visas, vaccinations, travel constraints, and time changes. It involved trainees making calculations, composing letters to confirm bookings, researching, following telephone procedures, form filling and booking procedures. The second project concerned trainees making a presentation. Trainees worked in small groups and researched their topic, before typing it up on overheads, faxing copies to each other and then making a formal presentation to a group of visitors who were on a trip from Europe to look at training in the area. The projects include most of the key skills and provide trainees with an interesting piece of work which is different from their usual tasks. It gives them a chance to work in a group as well as to undertake research on their own and gain competence in key skills while collecting evidence towards their NVQs.

10. Off-the-job sessions for information technology are thorough, well planned and well taught. At the start of each session, the previous session is summarised to check trainees' understanding. Trainees are then given an overview of what is to be covered and there is a formal presentation. At this stage, trainees involvement is encouraged and their understanding checked. They then put theory into practice on their workstations. Equipment and resources are excellent. There are 15 workstations for 12 trainees, all of which have modern software and are networked. There are five printers, two of which are colour, and there is access to a flatbed scanner. All trainees enjoy these sessions and are able to show examples of what they have achieved.

11. Although there is action planning for short-term goals, there are no long-term targets set. Portfolios are kept at the centre and trainees cannot plan their qualification. Trainees do not know what will happen to them during the course of their programme, or how their learning will progress. They do not know what will happen when they finish a period in their present department, where they will be in six months time, how much of their qualification they will have covered and what will be left to do. This makes it difficult for trainees to feel secure and comfortable about their training.

12. The NVQ and standards are explained to trainees at the beginning of the course and trainees get a copy of the standards. They keep this in their portfolios which are kept at the centre. After this, no mention is made of the structure of the qualification. Trainees do not know about range statements, or even performance criteria. Trainees who do not understand their qualification are not able to direct their evidence collection, relying instead on trainers and work-based supervisors to do it for them.

13. Trainees attend off-the-job sessions at the centre, covering administration theory and key skills. The day is split into two with the morning taken up with theory, and this contains periods of writing and taking notes in a classroom setting. These sessions lack interest, with little chance for them to participate, apart from writing. There are periods when individual trainees are taken away to talk to the trainer and the rest are left to do a written exercise. When the exercise is finished, they are left sitting around with nothing to do. In this situation, trainees are quickly bored and become de-motivated.

Health, care & public services

Grade 2

14. County Training has 27 trainees in this area. The NVQ in early years care and education programme is delivered over a two-year time span. Trainees start their training as school leavers after GCSEs, with a few exceptions where trainees follow one-year full-time GNVQ programmes in their school sixth form first. Ten trainees began their NVQ course in September 1998 and are on another training for young people programme. Seventeen trainees started in September 1999 on the national traineeship programme, which includes key skills. All are following early years care and education NVQs at level 2. Of the 27 trainees, two are men, one is from a minority ethnic group and one has disabilities. Trainees are not employed but are placed in primary schools, family centres set up by the local education authority to support young children and their families, and playgroups attached to these schools. In the schools, trainees have the opportunity to work with children from five to seven years of age. Those in pre-school placements work with children of three and four. During the two years they spend on the NVQ programme, trainees are able to experience at least two types of placement and work with children in the three- to seven-year age range. They do not have the opportunity to work with babies. Trainees' work activities and duties cover a wide range of tasks, enabling them to develop skills and collect evidence to achieve their NVQ. All trainees have the support of a workplace mentor. In 1996, 18 trainees joined the programme. Four left early: two to transfer to the provider's foundation for work practical care course, one to attend a further education college and one to have a baby. Fourteen achieved their early years care and education NVQ at level 2 in August 1998. In 1997, 15 trainees started the NVQ at level 2. Two left early to go on to further education, 10 achieved their award in August 1999, one in April 1999, and one, who was about to have a baby, was helped to achieve her qualification by February 1999 before her baby was born. One trainee had achieved and was accredited with two units of the qualification. County Training is not able to offer progression to level 3 which limits the job opportunities in childcare in the statutory sector. Thirteen of the 33 trainees found employment in private nurseries and playgroups. Four progressed to the level 3 qualification at a neighbouring college, three of whom were working in local authority schools. Off-the-job training takes place on one day each week at County Training's premises. Assessment is carried out by work-based assessors in 50 per cent of the placements and by County Training's assessors in the rest. In two cases, the work-based assessors were working towards assessor qualifications.

15. Trainees spend four days a week in their placement from 8.30 a.m. until 3.30 or 3.45 p.m. with a one-hour break for lunch. Trainees between 16 and 17 years old receive an allowance as part of their training contract. Trainees who are 18 years old receive more. Some also receive help towards travelling expenses. None of the trainees work unsupervised and there are always at least three qualified members of staff on duty with them. County Training underestimated the strengths in this area. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a higher grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good retention and achievement rates
- ◆ high-quality training programmes
- ◆ good learning opportunities in the workplace
- ◆ excellent links between training centre, workplaces and trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no opportunity for trainees to influence their choice of optional units
- ◆ lack of resources limits units available to trainees

GOOD PRACTICE

At an off-the-job training session covering the element 'Help children to recognise and deal with their feelings', links to workplace tasks and activities were well exploited. Ideas for use when working with children in this sensitive area were suggested and discussed. A trainer showed trainees how using a glove puppet could help them to communicate with withdrawn children.

16. Training is well planned and delivered, and there are good attendance, retention and achievement rates. Trainees receive a timetable at the beginning of the course informing them of the units and theory training to be covered at the weekly sessions. These timetables are also displayed on workplace staff notice boards. Good off-the-job training sessions use a range of learning materials and participative learning styles to support workplace activities and to teach background knowledge. Trainees are given a workbook relating to each element of the NVQ units. These contain checklists for good practice, exercises and questions which trainees complete to provide evidence of their background knowledge. Access to training is not flexible. The programme starts at the beginning of the school and college year in September, although two trainees successfully transferred from the foundation for work practical care course in January 1999. Training sessions coincide with school terms. In the school holidays, work placements are closed and weekly off-the-job training does not take place, although trainees may attend the training centre to see staff and work on their portfolios. A first aid course was held during the October half-term break, giving trainees the opportunity to gain additional qualifications. They also take a basic food hygiene course.

17. The schools, family centres and playgroups where trainees are placed are well staffed and resourced and trainees are able to participate in the full range of activities needed to develop their occupational competence and collect evidence for the units of their NVQs. While in the workplace, all trainees are supported by a mentor whose mentoring skills and knowledge of the NVQ are updated at regular meetings held at the training centre. Communication links between the training centre and the workplace are excellent.

18. The two NVQ trainer-assessors make regular visits to the schools, over and above the contractual review visits, and are quick to respond to telephone queries and requests. Trainees are informed during their induction programme in their first week about key skills and begin to collect evidence for key skills through integrated projects involving, for example, designing a nursery school and creating recipes to cook for children. The two occupationally experienced and qualified NVQ trainer-assessors carry out assessment in half of the workplaces. There are work-based assessors in the rest, although two of the workplace staff who are assessing are working towards but have not yet achieved the assessor awards. Standardisation of assessment, updating and sharing of good practice is achieved through twice-yearly assessor meetings at the training centre.

19. Trainees are not able to influence their choice of optional units. Of the five optional units in the NVQ level 2, two ('feed babies' and 'provide for babies' physical needs'), are not available to County Training's trainees because of the age range of children in the work placements. This means that all the trainees are on the same programme and are not given the opportunity to exercise a choice.

Foundation for work

Grade 1

20. There are 49 trainees on individual programmes specifically designed to meet their individual needs. Wordpower and numberpower are the current qualifications accessible to these trainees, who are assessed either during initial assessment or taking into account their previous experiences. The remainder of the trainees receive individual basic skills training according to their individual requirements. Most trainees attend off-the-job training for one day a week, unless a more concentrated approach is required to improve either behavioural performance or to equip the trainees with adequate numeracy and literacy skills to operate in the workplace. Four further days each week are spent in a work placement chosen specifically to address both their individual preferences and suitability. The achievement rate of trainees pursuing a qualification in number and wordpower is 100 per cent and the average daily attendance of trainees on the programme is 80 per cent. Thirty-three out of 56 (58 per cent) trainees remained on the programme in 1998-99. Of the 50 trainees who have left the programme in the last eight months, 48 per cent went into full-time employment and national traineeships, 6 per cent left owing to pregnancy, 14 per cent owing to poor health and depression, 6 per cent moved out of the area, 4 per cent were dismissed, and 4 per cent were job seeking. Ten per cent of the trainees were untraceable owing to moving their accommodation and a further 8 per cent were referred to other agencies for support. The self-assessment report identified three strengths, all of which were confirmed at inspection. Two further strengths were identified and inspectors did not agree with the single weakness identified. The grade awarded is higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ flexible and realistic training programmes

- ◆ supportive, appropriate and specifically targeted work placements
- ◆ effective resources to support trainees' learning and progress
- ◆ good progression rate to work and other training opportunities
- ◆ excellent attendance and achievement rates

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no significant weaknesses identified

GOOD PRACTICE

One trainee expressed a particular desire to work with disabled adults. However, owing to previous medical problems, the trainee had been deemed as unfit to do so by the medical profession. The training provider contacted the trainee's local doctor asking if reconsideration could be given to this issue, owing to the length of time that had expired between the particular illness and the current situation. The trainee's doctor responded positively to the provider's request and the trainee now has an appointment to attend an interview at a centre for the disabled.

21. All of the training offered to the trainees on the foundation to work programmes is individualised, flexible in content, and suited to individuals' needs. It is offered to encompass all those young people who are not on an NVQ programme. On application to the programme, each trainee receives a comprehensive interview and initial assessment, which can include discussions with social workers, parents, careers personnel and appropriately qualified and experienced members of the provider's staff. The results of the basic skills initial assessment is shared with the trainees and any areas of numeracy and literacy are agreed for development. The attendance and programme content is decided jointly between both the trainee and the provider's advisor and a timetable is drawn up. The options available are not restrictive and any help to achieve the required outcome is given. Some trainees require a less demanding programme in terms of academic level. For one trainee, the aim was to be able to attend somewhere regularly, for another to get there on time, for another to manage their anger outbursts, and for another to be socially acceptable and learn to communicate with other people. All of these trainees are accommodated within the options programme. Other trainees want to achieve their first formal qualification and they do this by pursuing the wordpower and/or numberpower qualification. Trainees only pursue the relevant numeracy or literacy award if they need to improve in the area. They do not automatically do both if one is not deemed as necessary. Some other trainees are not assessed as able to pursue a qualification in basic skills and their needs are addressed on an individual basis with individual support given where needed for dyslexia, reading and writing problems and other barriers to learning. Others enter the programme with numeracy and literacy skills above the level of a basic skills programme, but still with individual learning problems. These trainees spend most of the week in a work placement and the English and maths skills are developed to a higher level during the off-the-job training one day a week. Two of these trainees wish to qualify as care workers. For them, basic skills centres around recording any knowledge element of the NVQ while they attend the appropriate work placement to gain the understanding and experience required. A submission to a new awarding body is currently awaiting accreditation. This contains seven areas of work that are currently offered through the options programme at a level more attainable for some of the foundation trainees. The aim is to accredit trainees with, in some cases, their first formal qualification. The areas covered are childcare, office skills, information technology, customer care, telephone skills, work experience and induction programmes.

22. Group activities are an integral part of the programme in order to build on the social skills and address the unacceptable behaviour of some individuals. Every month the trainees meet and discuss as a group which outside activity they would like to pursue. Trainees make recreational visits to places around Gloucestershire. All the planning, costing, time tabling and organisation of these trips is carried out by the group, managed carefully by the trainer to ensure that all trainees take part and behave in both a socially acceptable and personally rewarding way. This is highly effective in improving trainee's competence and self-esteem.

23. All trainees are placed in supportive, appropriate and specifically targeted work placements. An initial appraisal of their suitability and realistic aspirations form the basis of discussions with the individual trainees. Not all trainees immediately enter the workplace. Some time is given as appropriate to individuals to allow them to develop some pre-determined skills. These skills may be of an academic nature or be lacking from displayed behaviour and previous unsuccessful work-based or training experiences. Most of the work placements used for trainees on NVQ programmes are owned and operated by the county council. Trainees on the foundation for work programmes are, however, placed with a wide variety of privately managed organisations or small businesses. The selection available is both wide ranging and comprehensive in terms of facilities and service as well as the number of opportunities available. Good placements are available in retail work encompassing large supermarkets, fashion shops, chemists, restaurants and charity outlets. Placements are also used for trainees wanting office work. These include community projects, information services, estate agents, theatres (in both front-of-house activities and also behind the stage), insurance companies and a local newspaper group. There are work-placement opportunities within the care sector. These include after-school clubs, primary schools, family centres, nursing homes, social services and holiday schemes with the YMCA. Other work placements are available in furniture recycling schemes, care-taking, gardening, with locksmith and in carpentry. New employers are being found to support trainees. Staff aim to accommodate and match individual trainees' needs and wishes regarding work placements wherever possible.

24. There are effective resources to support trainees' learning and progress. These include appropriately qualified and experienced staff who are dedicated to this area of work. Two of the three members of staff involved in this programme have a qualification and experience in counselling and one is currently working towards an NVQ at level 3 in advice and counselling. The third member of staff has gained a wide variety of teaching qualifications, including basic skills as a specific qualification and a qualification in youth work. There is a wide range of paper-based resources which are developed with the needs of the trainees in mind. Each exercise used for practising basic skills is designed to reflect the trainees' personal interests or work undertaken on work placements. Computer software is used if writing is a difficulty and CD packages are available and used by trainees to elicit information needed for the ongoing tasks. Professionally produced material is also used to support trainees who are working at a level above basic skills but have yet to reach their own potential. Trainees are encouraged to bring their own experiences into the written exercises and, as such, they are not given the same

tasks to complete. A wide range of external agencies is used to help trainees to learn and progress. These agencies include the learning gateway team, social workers, specialist counsellors and, when appropriate, parents, guardians and previous school personnel. Each trainee is well supported in the workplace by a mentor, and each mentor receives training and constant advice on the available support and needs of the trainees. Trainees are visited in the workplace on a regular basis and discussions take place with the trainee, the mentor and the member of staff.

25. There are good progression rates to work and other training opportunities. From those trainees starting in 1998-99, 38 per cent secured employment and a further 10 per cent progressed on to other full-time courses at a local college of further education.

26. Attendance and achievement rates are excellent. The average attendance rate of trainees for both on- and off-the-job training is 80 per cent. In 1998-99, 100 per cent of trainees achieved the desired qualification in either wordpower or numberpower. For those trainees who leave the programme early, unit accreditation is also awarded. All trainees following wordpower or numberpower qualifications who left the programme in 1998-99 achieved a formal qualification.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

27. County Training works within the local authority's equal opportunities policy, implementing procedures which meet the requirements of the TEC contract. The provider has a designated equal opportunities officer whose job description sets out a remit to support the achievement of the county council's equal opportunities objectives. There are separate grievance and harassment procedures. Recruitment and marketing materials state the organisation's commitment to equality in terms of access to training. Trainees are aware of equal opportunities and can remember the activities they participated in at induction. County Training does not monitor the implementation of workplace procedures and action plans, and does not review them to ensure their continuing relevance. There is no evaluation of data on trainees' retention or achievement to ensure continuous improvement through objective target setting and analysis of trends. Inspectors agreed with the grade awarded through self-assessment.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good promotion of equal opportunities in all aspects of training
- ◆ positive images of minority groups
- ◆ regular updates and training on equal opportunities for staff

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring or review of equal opportunities in some work placements
- ◆ no evaluation of equal opportunities data

28. County Training takes effective steps to promote its equal opportunities policies and procedures. As part of the childcare trainees' induction programme, trainees participate in group activities to develop their cultural awareness through exercises and case studies which celebrate diversity and examine how people from different groups vary. Foundation for work trainees compiled an equal opportunities statement during their induction programme in which they put together a list of the ways in which people are discriminated against, drawing on their own experience. This list appears on notice boards throughout the training centre. Posters from the campaign for racial equality and the county council's policy on racial harassment are exhibited on the training centre's notice boards and trainees are informed about the policy as part of their induction programme. However, the wording of the policy is not at an appropriate level for some trainees. As part of their training programme, childcare trainees work with children in their work placements to celebrate the festivals of Diwali, Eid and the Chinese New Year. They have made prayer mats, set up a simulated Chinese restaurant in a corner of the nursery and have made home visits with workplace staff to share in the celebrations with children and their families. Photographs and displays on show at County Training and in work placements include trainees from minority ethnic groups and, in childcare, male trainees. The photographs in the training centre's marketing literature have recently been changed to include images of members of minority groups participating and succeeding in training, and information leaflets used for recruitment state the organisation's commitment to equal access for all young people from 16 to 18 years. There is access for those with disabilities to all on- and off-the-job premises. At the training centre, an information technology training room has been equipped on the ground floor to meet the needs of trainees with disabilities. Minority ethnic representation in training has been consistently above Gloucestershire's figures for the past three years. In 1996, 4.9 per cent of trainees were from minority ethnic groups, in 1997, 11.8 per cent and in 1998, 5.3 per cent, compared with the 1991 census figure for Gloucestershire of 1.8 per cent.

29. County Training's equal opportunities policies and procedures are not customised for work-based training and the provider does not monitor equal opportunities activities in the workplace. All trainees in business administration and childcare are working within the local authority's equal opportunities framework. However, many of the foundation for work trainees are in private sector placements and these are not monitored.

30. Equal opportunities data are collected by gender, ethnic origin and disability but County Training does not use this information to analyse or evaluate trainees' retention or achievement rates. The provider is aware of its shortcomings in this area. It has recently begun to use management information data to benchmark its performance, and the equal opportunities officer is starting an analysis of equal opportunities in training based on the Department for Employment and Education

(DfEE) and TEC national council framework 'equality prompts for self-assessment in equal opportunities training'. The provider's equal opportunities handbook does not include a reference to the *Disability Discrimination Act 1995* (effective from 1 October 1999) which gives those with disabilities the right to the use of services and facilities.

Trainee support

Grade 2

31. Trainees are recruited using a variety of methods. Staff attend careers conventions and school events, a number come via the careers service and many come by recommendation from current trainees. All trainees undergo an initial assessment, which is structured differently for each occupational area, but is designed to ensure that all trainees within each area are asked the same questions. There is a series of initial basic tests, which includes numeracy, literacy, and, for national trainees, a test for key skills. At this stage, any prior learning or achievements are noted. Induction for the occupational areas lasts between two days and a week. There is a 'welcome day' for potential trainees which is normally held in the summer. This includes a chance to meet the staff and other trainees, look around the premises and generally get to know the training centre. Reviews are normally carried out every three months with the trainer, work-based supervisor and trainee all present. The review follows a predetermined format. The self-assessment report identified a number of strengths. Some were agreed on by inspectors, others were no more than normal practice and more were identified. The one weakness identified was validated and additional ones were identified.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ comprehensive and effective initial selection and assessment
- ◆ systematic and flexible ongoing additional learning support
- ◆ memorable and thorough induction process
- ◆ work-based supervisors trained as mentors
- ◆ trainees' successes celebrated throughout the community

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ training plans not individual and not used as working documents
- ◆ some reviews not regular
- ◆ support not systematically record

32. Initial selection is by interview and each occupational area has its own interview criteria which are strictly followed. All trainees are asked the same questions and are given an equal chance. In childcare, staff follow a set job description with criteria for the job, and this sets out the interview format which is followed for each trainee. In business administration, trainees are asked a number of questions about their reasons for wanting to join the programme, their previous experience and their ambitions. In foundation for work, trainees are given an in-

depth interview which covers school experiences, work-placement details and includes a long look at any behavioural problems. Sometimes the careers officers or social workers are present at these interviews. Initial assessment is extremely thorough. It covers not only basic skills assessment but includes a battery of tests which help to determine any gaps in trainees' skills. In business administration, this includes an information technology test, as well as more general testing of knowledge.

33. Support is available for all groups at all times. Careful guidance is given to trainees involved in disciplinary matters which enables them to continue with their training. Trainees who have left the programme are supported until they complete their qualification. A Muslim girl who works for a newspaper publisher was helped when her hours did not fit in with a religious festival. County Training negotiated with the work-placement provider to change the trainee's hours. For those trainees going to look after vulnerable people, the provider pays for the necessary security clearance.

34. Trainees in business administration undergo at least a two-day induction course while care trainees have a week-long induction, covering health and safety, equal opportunities, trainees' rights, an outline of the county council, and the role of trade unions. Trainees are given a large pack of all relevant information. The induction for the foundation programme lasts for one week and covers similar areas but in more depth. Trainees can remember their induction, which gives them a good insight into the nature of the training programme, as well as informing them of their rights and responsibilities.

35. The provider also offers work-based supervisors a chance to gain units towards the training and development qualification, and all work-based supervisors are trained as mentors. Training consists of an introduction to the NVQ standards about which mentors are given a simplified pack, an introduction to the provider, an explanation of attendance sheet reviews, an explanation of assessments with related paperwork and including accident and disciplinary procedures and documents, and sessions on assessments and review. Following their training, mentors attend regular support meetings which include looking at the role of the mentor, assessment opportunities, any information on new standards, policies and procedures and new paperwork, such as review sheets. The level of knowledge shown by work-based supervisors is good. All understand the NVQ process, are fully aware of all procedures and are up to date with trainees' progress. Work-based supervisors provide ongoing support for both trainees and assessors.

36. Once a year, trainees attend a prestigious awards ceremony where their certificates are presented. Apart from the certificates, there are also photograph opportunities. This is followed by an official reception at the County Hall. When collecting their awards, trainees are called out in alphabetical order so that it is impossible to tell the level of qualification they are getting, so less likely to intimidate those receiving basic awards. Attendance at these events includes civic dignitaries, members of the council, the provider's staff and work-based supervisors, social workers, careers officers, counselling groups and local newspapers. Trainees are

asked to bring a guest, and some bring their parents. The event is reported in the council's newsletter which is a free circulation going to all council workers and their families, and it has also been reported in the local press. Spreading the news of successes helps to improve trainees' esteem, enhances the profile of the provider within the local community and raises awareness of work-based training.

37. Individual training plans are not detailed or up to date. Timescales for completion of key skills are typed in at the start of the trainees' programme with the same completion date for all. Review dates are left blank, even when the review sheets are in order and up to date. Because of this, there is no overview of training and no way of planning or recording individual trainees' progress, except in portfolios, which are kept at the centre.

38. Reviews are thorough. However, they are not as frequent as specified in the TEC contract. The provider has already gone some way to addressing this problem and reviews are now more frequent.

39. Counselling support and other help is frequent and ongoing. However, there are occasions when this is not recorded. If the original member of staff who dealt with the matter is absent, then there is no record on file.

Management of training

Grade 3

40. County Training is part of the corporate services department of Gloucestershire County Council. Targets for the organisation are agreed annually by a sub-committee of the council comprising officers of the council and elected members. The centre manager makes an annual presentation to this committee, which sets out the strategy of the organisation to best meet the needs of the local population within budgetary constraints. The centre manager reports to the council's assistant personnel officer. She has a deputy manager and 10 other full- and part-time members of staff who are trainer-assessors in five sections: development, childcare, clerical, administration and practical courses. The trainers are each responsible for approximately 20 trainees. Regular meetings are held throughout the organisation and an away day is held annually. The provider has held the Investors in People Standard since 1996. Inspectors agreed with most of the significant strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report and awarded the same grade.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear policies and staff procedures widely understood
- ◆ well-developed communication links throughout organisation and agencies
- ◆ rigorous appraisal and review for all staff
- ◆ accurate data used to inform management decisions

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ entry to training programmes restricted to start of academic year

- ◆ rigid NVQ timetable
- ◆ inflexible deployment of some staff

41. As part of the county council, County Training benefits from the council's range of staff policies and procedures. These are supplemented by County Training's own mission statement and policies, including guidelines for trainees in a variety of work placements, and an active development plan. A staff handbook has been developed and is at the consultation phase within the organisation. Staff have a good understanding of the mission statement and procedures, and they are widely used. The complaints and appeals procedure is rigorously followed and appropriate actions taken to proper conclusions, while being meticulously recorded.

42. There is frequent, effective and substantial informal communication among the 12 members of staff, who are located in one building. The centre manager, who shares her office with her deputy, has an open style of working and staff feel that they can approach her on any issue. In addition, regular, formal meetings are held every month which have an agenda and minutes are published. All staff receive a copy of these. The three-hour meetings are structured to give one hour for business review, an hour with a free agenda where all can contribute and good practice can be shared, and a final hour dedicated to development to push the provider forward on an issue. Minuted actions are required to be reported at the next meeting and staff are positive about the effect these meetings have had recently. At least annually, an away day is held with an external facilitator to progress development issues. For example, a problem was identified involving initial assessment. A subsequent series of meetings quantified evidence and then trainees were given a two-day professional development day held by an outside trainer. Staff development interviews are regular, and in depth. They are monitored and held twice a year. Staff are given clear targets linked to a comprehensive job description which describes the job purpose and requirements. Training identified goes towards building up the training plan and many staff have benefited over recent years from training courses which are highly relevant to their jobs.

43. County Training makes effective use of management. It has readily available up-to-date figures for achievement and retention across its programmes. Every month, the accountancy department from the council holds a probing meeting with the provider where figures are analysed and trends spotted. These accurate data are used to inform management to enable strategic decisions to be taken as required.

44. All national traineeships begin in September at the start of the academic year. There is no normal route for a trainee to be offered a place at another time of year. NVQ achievement is time-based. Trainees capable of achieving their qualification earlier than planned are unable to do this. There are occasional exceptions where a trainee is fast tracked, but the majority progress at the speed of the fixed timetable.

45. Deployment of staff does not make best use of their qualifications or expertise. For example, a trainer with a higher national diploma (HND), NVQ level 5,

postgraduate certificate, and assessors qualification, who is also working towards an internal verification qualification, has internally verified numberpower; and a member of staff with an initial teaching certificate in basic skills does not teach foundation trainees, but instead instructs NVQs at level 2 in business administration. Another member of staff who is the internal verifier for wordpower and numberpower has no basic skills qualification.

Quality assurance

Grade 3

46. County Training's quality assurance procedure and processes are relatively new, following the appointment of the current manager nine months ago. The self-assessment process was monitored at each stage of its development and individual staff training was given on the importance and meaning of the quality assurance cycle. Action plans were devised with measurable performance indicators and achievable targets. The self-assessment action plan contained identified quality statements that were designated either strengths or weaknesses. The evidence for these decisions was presented and supported by specific actions needed to maintain the strengths and improve the weaknesses. Designated personnel were identified with responsibilities for carrying out the action. Deadlines for completion were set with specific numerical dates. The self-assessment report identified three strengths, two of which were confirmed by inspectors. One further strength was also identified. One weakness was highlighted by the self-assessment process. Inspectors agreed with this weakness and a further one was identified. The grade given by inspectors for this generic area is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough self-assessment process
- ◆ effective systems to evaluate and monitor quality of training
- ◆ clear and focused target setting and action planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ poor internal verification processes
- ◆ some undeveloped quality assurance procedures

47. County Training's self-assessment process is thorough. The process is devolved to all members of the team who also manage and review it in terms of success or completion. Effective guidelines are offered to staff via detailed memoranda outlining the stages required for development. Identified strengths are backed up with evidence and at a designated one-to-one session with a senior manager the evidence is required for review. A memorandum circulated to all staff instructs them to make actions SMART (specific, manageable, achievable, realistic and time related). Managers set tight deadlines for monitoring individual staff's progress. Evidence to substantiate the individual self-assessment reports is required

to specify the standards, objectives and expected outcomes, the content and training methods, learning opportunities for key skills, timescales for training, assessment methods and responsibilities for trainers, work-based supervisors and assessors. Brainstorming sessions are encouraged among the staff to help to address issues around the integration of key skills, improving the initial assessment process and how to become a more efficient organisation. Results of these sessions are used for identifying action to be taken during the continual action-planning process.

48. County Training has effective systems to evaluate and monitor the quality of its training. A complete audit of its evaluation process was undertaken in September 1999 using questionnaires and reports from all the occupational sectors and the information is analysed and summarised into tables for the staff to review. The information is then used to identify strengths and weaknesses. Operational procedures arising from the findings are agreed in order to ensure the quality of the current programmes. This is now used systematically with all trainees, employers and the provider's staff. There is a monthly schedule of meetings that include action planning on weak areas. The monitoring of the quality of assessment by trainees and mentors for training the trainers is also the subject of a meeting. New policies and procedures are introduced for any areas targeted for improvement. The results of TEC audits are addressed through a working party and there is a system of internal audits every six to eight weeks to improve the quality of the provider's paper-based systems.

49. Action plans are consistently devised, operated and appraised for both team and individual members of staff in order to improve the quality of the training. The design of the action plans includes, from the self-assessment process, the initial identification of the strength or weakness. All action plans include the evidence required for action alongside the action to be taken. This action is specific and clearly targeted, and contains a simple numerical breakdown of activity in logical and subsequent order. All action plans clearly identify who needs to address the issues. The identified person is allocated the task after careful thought regarding time needed to complete the task, job suitability and experience, together with their ability to assess any other action that needs to be taken along the way. A realistic set date for completion of each aspect is also indicated on the plan. A section on the action plan is dedicated to naming personnel who will monitor the progress at pre-given dates during the overall set time period. This ensures that action is being taken and an evaluation can be made on progress. If required, further action plans are then produced. All of the action plans contain targets for achievement and numerical data. These data are used together with other non-numerical targets as performance indicators towards success. For each subsequent action plan, the percentage or other measurable target is increased until 100 per cent satisfaction has been achieved in all areas.

50. There are some poor internal verification processes which result in unsatisfactory assessment procedures. The provider has not had centre approval for the training of assessors since its independent operation, but is progressing towards this. However, assessor training is now being carried out and has been for the past year. Two assessors in the workplace are assessing trainees on the

childcare and education programmes without supervision or counter signatures from qualified staff. Both internal and external verification has failed to identify this. One other member of the provider's staff is working towards the internal verifier's qualification. A qualified internal verifier does not countersign this internal verification work. The current qualified internal verifier for the numberpower and wordpower programme has no relevant basic skills qualifications. Neither the provider's internal or external verification process has identified this inappropriate practice. There are no formal internal verifier's meetings and no pre-planned sampling schedules for assessors to ensure consistency and coverage of all aspects of the qualifications being offered. There are no observations of practical assessment or oral questioning either in the workplace or during off-the-job training. The latest documents showing recorded observations are for the childcare programme in 1997. There are no formal assessor meetings to ensure the quality and standardisation of assessment methods and no cross-sector meetings of either internal verifiers or assessors.

51. County Training does not have a policy and procedure for internal verification, monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace or achievement analysis for gender and ethnicity. Nor does it have them for the review process, assessment procedures, meetings procedures for either internal verifiers or assessors, or for the recording of individually given trainee support.